THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

ISAIAH.

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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.

ISAIAH.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

VER. 1. **Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help.**—*The abundance of horses in Egypt* is attested, not only in other parts of Scripture, but by profane writers. Homer describes Thebes as having a hundred gates, out of each of which two hundred warriors went forth with chariots and horses. Diodorus speaks of the whole country between Thebes and Memphis as filled with royal stables. The horses of Solomon are expressly said to have been brought out of Egypt. This kind of military force was more highly valued, in comparison with infantry, by the ancients than the moderns, and especially by those who, like the Hebrews, were almost entirely deprived of it themselves. Hence their reliance upon foreign aid is frequently identified with confidence in horses and contrasted with simple trust in God (Psa. xx. 7). (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Seeking God*:—To "seek Jehovah" is not merely to consult Him, but to seek His aid, resort to Him, implying the strongest confidence. (*Ibid.*) *Looking*:—I want you to remember how much often depends in life on a straight and steady "look." A few weeks ago there was a great rehearsal of Sunday-school choirs. All the children were assembled in a vast building, and away in front of them stood a man holding a little stick in his hand. And he said a few words to them. "To succeed," said he, "you must keep your eyes on me and watch the movements of my hand." Every now and then part of the choir went wrong in the time; they had taken their eyes off the conductor; they were not steadily, earnestly, intelligently looking to him. (*C. Silvester Horne, M.A.*) *Unholy alliances*:—I. THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE which the Jewish people formed with Egypt. God had promised to be their Protector; He had also prohibited alliances with heathen nations (Exod. xxiii. 32; Deut. vii. 2). This alliance with Egypt was a violation of this command. 1. This unholy alliance is an old sin. They could see and feel the horses and chariots of Egypt. They allowed their senses to be their sovereigns, instead of making them their servants. Has not this been the ruin of the race? Fleshly lusts "war against the soul." History is crowded with examples. Eve in Eden; Esau; the Israelites in the wilderness; David. 2. This unholy alliance is marked by peculiar features. (1) It was a wretched choice. "Egypt." What good thing had Egypt ever done for them? Not one. Yet they chose Egypt in preference to God. (2) They were influenced by sensuous motives. They were carried away by the strength of the horses and the beauty of the chariots of Egypt. (3) It led them to reject God. 3. This unholy alliance incurred severe punishment. "Woe," &c. Sin leads to punishment. The safety of a nation does not consist in the strength of her army, nor in the extent of her commerce, but in her loyalty to God (Prov. xiv. 34; Isa. lx. 12). II. This unholy alliance is COMMON IN THE PRESENT DAY. This unholy alliance is formed—1. When relief is looked for from wrong sources in the day of trouble. God is a refuge and helper to all true souls in trouble who trust in Him. Yet how common it is for many in the day of trouble to enter into a league with sin and make a covenant with death! A woe follows such, and sooner or later will overtake them. 2. When happiness is sought in wrong paths. True happiness is obtained when our will is brought into harmony

with God's will. Many look for it in other directions. *E.g.*, the miser, the sensuous, the ambitious, the worldling. 3. When salvation is expected in any other way than through Christ. 4. When unworthy means are employed to spread the Gospel. Conclusion:—True loyalty to God will bring safety, happiness, heaven. Horses may be strong, numerous, and swift; but they shall die and be forgotten. Chariots shall become lighter than dust; but they who do the will of God abide for ever. "Some trust in chariots," &c. (*J. Wileman.*)

Ver. 2. **Yet He also is wise.**—*God works in history*:—You have been clever and successful, but have you forgotten that "God also is wise," that He too has His policy, and acts reasonably and consistently? You think you have been making history; but God also works in history, and surely, to put it on the lowest ground, with as much cleverness and persistence as you do. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Forgetfulness of God*:—The forgetfulness, against which Isaiah directs this shaft of satire, is the besetting sin of very religious people, of very successful people, and of very clever people. (*Ibid.*) *The religion that ignores God*:—It is the temptation of an ordinary Christian, church-going people, like ourselves, with a religion so full of marvellous mercies, and so blessed with regular opportunities of worship, to think of God only in connection with these, and practically to ignore that along the far greater stretches of life He has any interest or purpose regarding us. (*Ibid.*) *Man no match for God*:—After Moscow, Napoleon is reported to have exclaimed, "The Almighty is too strong for me." (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 3. **Men, and not God . . . flesh, and not spirit.**—*Spiritual existences the chief forces of the world*:—It is here evidently implied that a spirit is mightier than a horse. The ancients attached the idea of immense force to a well-trained war-horse. I. SPIRIT IS THE ORIGINAL POWER. We see power everywhere around us. We see it in the inanimate world, as the effect which one element produces upon another, and in the motion which one body, in a certain relation, produces upon another. We see it, also, in the world of life: in the plant that turns to its use, and transmutes into its own essence, the elements that play about it; in the beast that drags along the farmer's harvest-wain, and in the bird that rises on the wing, and chants its victories over that force that binds the earth and links it to the sun. All these powers are manifestly effects, not ultimate causes—are derived, not primal. All true science suggests this, and the Bible declares it. Spirit is the fontal force. It was spirit that gave to the elements the proclivity to act and re-act on each other; and that so poised the masses of the universe that one should gently press its fellow into lines and ratios of motion, and thus conduce to the harmony and well-being of all. And the forces of life too, whether in the fibres of plants or the muscles of flesh, are but the breathings of that Spirit which "reneweth the face of the earth." "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." "By His Spirit He hath garnished the heavens; His hand hath formed the crooked serpent." II. SPIRIT IS THE SUBORDINATING POWER. The horses of the Egyptians were "flesh and not spirit." Implying, probably, the fact, that the Egyptian cavalry lacked that intelligence and skill necessary to render the noble animal of service in the field of battle. The value of the steed in the strife is ever in proportion to the skill of the rider. "Wisdom is better than weapons of war." Reason is mightier than brute force. What force is there on earth that man cannot subordinate to his will? Man can press every element into his service as well as every living creature. Let us rise to a sense of the greatness of the nature with which God has endowed us. We are spirit; emanations of the Infinite Mind, and members of that spiritual system for which matter, in all its functions and forms, was made. Let us assert our supremacy over the material—"use the world as not abusing it." In one sense we can never think too highly of ourselves. "What shall it profit a man?" &c. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Spirituality of the Divine nature*:—In these words we are reminded of an important and infinite disparity between God and man, arising from a great peculiarity in the character of the former, which rendered the Egyptian monarch and his cavalry infinitely inferior to Him in power, and all those other qualities which entitle the possessor of them to confidence and trust. I. The spirituality of the Divine nature is intimately connected with THE POSSESSION OF ALMIGHTY POWER. The vulgar notion which would restrict the exercise of power to what

is corporeal, and deny it to that which is spiritual and immaterial, is a mere prejudice, founded on gross inattention or ignorance. If we inquire after the original seat of power, we shall invariably find it in mind, not in body; in spirit, not in flesh. The changes we are able to effect in the state of the objects around us are produced through the instrumentality of the body, which is always previously put in motion by the mind. As we can move certain parts of our bodies at pleasure, and nothing intervenes betwixt the volition and the corresponding movements, so the great original Spirit impresses on the machine of the universe what movements He pleases, and without the intervention of any other cause. "He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast." II. His spirituality is closely connected with HIS INVISIBILITY. "The King eternal, immortal, invisible," "whom no man hath seen, nor can see." Whatever is the object of sight must be perceived under some determinate shape or figure; it must be, consequently, bounded by an outline, and occupy a determinate portion of space, and no more; attributes utterly incompatible with the conceptions of an infinite being. He was pleased formerly, indeed, to signalise His presence with His worshippers by visible symbols, by an admixture of clouds and fire, of darkness and splendour; but that these were never intended to exhibit His power, but merely to afford a sensible attestation of His special presence, is evident, from the care He took to prevent His worshippers from entertaining degrading conceptions of His character, by the solemn prohibition of attempting to represent Him by an image or picture. III. That God is spirit, and not flesh, is a view of His character closely connected with HIS OMNIPRESENCE. Matter is subjected to a local circumscription; God, as a Spirit, is capable of co-existing with every other order of being. IV. Because God is spirit and not flesh, He is possessed of INFINITE WISDOM AND INTELLIGENCE. Thought and perception are the attributes of mind, not of matter; of spirit, not of flesh; and, for this reason, the original and great Spirit possesses them in an infinite degree. V. The spirituality of the Divine nature lays A FOUNDATION FOR THE MOST INTIMATE RELATION BETWEEN THE INTELLIGENT PART OF THE CREATION AND HIMSELF. He is emphatically "the Father of spirits." VI. The spirituality of the Divine nature FITS HIM FOR BECOMING OUR ETERNAL PORTION AND SUPREME GOOD. (*Robert Hall, M.A.*)

Ver. 4. **Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey.**—*A Homeric passage*:—There is no passage in Isaiah which is so Homeric in ring as this; cf. *Iliad*, xviii. 161 f., xii. 299 ff. (*F. Delitzsch.*) *The lion and the shepherds*:—Is it an unworthy figure of the Divine Claimant for this city, who kept unceasing hold upon her after His own manner, mysterious and lionlike to men, undisturbed by the screams, formulas, and prayers of her mob of politicians and treaty-mongers? For these are the "shepherds" Isaiah means—sham shepherds, the shrieking crew of politicians, with their treaties and military display. God will save and carry Jerusalem His own way, paying no heed to such. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The lionlike mercies of God*:—If it is God who is the lion, then it is for the best. For "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him"; and, after all, it is safer to rely on the mercies of God, lionlike though they be, than on the weak benevolences and officious pities of the best of human advisers. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 5. **As birds flying.**—*Three pictures of one reality*:—I. THE VERY STRIKING AND BEAUTIFUL PICTURES. There are three of them. 1. "As birds flying," &c. The original shows that it is the mother-bird that is thought about. And the picture rises at once of her fluttering over the nest, where the callow chickens are unable to fly and to help themselves. It is a kind of echo of the grand old metaphor in the song that is attributed to Moses, which speaks of the eagle fluttering over her nest, and taking care of her young. Jerusalem was as a nest on which, for long centuries, that infinite Divine love had brooded. It was but a poor brood that had been hatched out, but yet "as birds flying" He had watched over the city. Can you not almost see the mother-bird, made bold by maternal love, swooping down upon the intruder that sought to rob the nest, and spreading her broad pinion over the callow fledglings that lie below? That is what God does with us. It is a poor brood that is hatched out. That does not matter; still the Love bends down and helps. Nobody but a prophet could have ventured on such a metaphor as that, and nobody but Jesus Christ would

have ventured to mend it and say, "As a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," when there are hawks in the sky. So He, in all the past ages, was the One that "as birds flying . . . defended" His people, and would have gathered them under His wings, only they would not. Now, beautiful as this metaphor is, as it stands, it seems to me, like some brilliant piece of colouring, to derive additional beauty from its connection with the background upon which it stands out. For just a verse before the prophet has given another emblem of what God is and does. "Like as a lion," &c. Look at these two pictures side by side; on the one hand the lion, with his paw on his prey, and the angry growl that answers when the shepherds vainly try to drag it away from him. That is God. Ay! but that is only one aspect of God. "As birds flying, so the Lord will defend Jerusalem." We have to take that into account, too. This generation is very fond of talking about God's love; does it believe in God's wrath? Has it pondered that tremendous phrase, "the wrath of the Lamb"? The lion that growls, and the mother-bird that hovers—God is like them both. 2. The second picture is not so obvious to English readers, but it is equally striking. The word that is translated in our text twice "defend" and "defending," means literally "shielding." Thus we have the same general idea as that in the previous metaphor of the mother-bird hovering above the nest. God is like a shield held over us, and so flinging off from the broad and burnished surface of the almighty buckler, all the darts that any foe can launch against us. 3. "Passing over, He will deliver." The word that is there rendered "passing over" is almost a technical word in the Old Testament, because it is that employed in reference to the Passover. And so you see the swiftness of genius with which the prophet changes his whole scene. We are swept back to that night when the Destroying Angel stalked through the land, and "passed over" the doors on which the blood had been sprinkled. II. THE REALITY MEANT BY THESE PICTURES. They mean the absolute promise from God of protection for His people from every evil. III. THE WAY BY WHICH WE CAN MAKE THE REALITY OF THESE PICTURES OURS. All the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament are conditional, and there are many of them that were never fulfilled, and were spoken in order that they might not be fulfilled, because the people took warning. 1. Put thou thy trust in God, and God is to thee the hovering bird, the broad shield, the angel that "passes over." 2. But having thus fled thither, we must continue there, if we would continue under His protection. Such continuance of safety because of continuous faith is possible only by continued communion. 3. Another condition of Divine protection is obedience. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *A twofold representation of God*:—Like a lion descending from the mountains (Psa. lxxvi. 4) to seize its prey, whom the shepherds are impotent to dismay, so Jehovah at the head of the Assyrian battalions, will advance against Jerusalem; the city is already within His grasp—when suddenly the image changes, and the impetuous lion is transformed into a bird protecting and shielding its threatened nest. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *God's care for His people*:—Egyptian horses cannot fly, but "as birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem." The image is clear and impressive. There lies the fair city, more a thought than a thing, a poem in architecture, God's poetry set forth in types and letters of stone, and the Lord Himself is as a thousand birds, curling, circling, watching, protecting His loved Zion. No figure is to be driven to its furthest issues; we are to take out of it that which is substantial in reason and in truth: and from this figure we extract the doctrine that God hovers about His people, cares for them, watches them, sometimes sends a raven, it may be, to help them when they come out of their dream-sleep, wondering in daze and bewilderment what the universe was made for, and what they themselves can do. Any image that brings God nearer to us is an image that the memory should treasure. The Lord knows what the issue of trusting in Egyptian horses will be, and what the end of all idolatry will be. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. **The Lord, whose fire is in Zion.**—*The Lord's furnace*:—This very remarkable designation of God stands here as a kind of seal set upon the preceding prophecy. It is the reason why that shall certainly be fulfilled. And what precedes is mainly a promise of a deliverance for Israel, which was to be a destruction for Israel's enemies. We shall not understand these great words if we regard them as only a revelation of destructive and terrible power. It is the very beauty and completeness of this emblem that it has a double aspect and is

no less rich in joy and blessing than pregnant with warning and terror. I. IN THE CHURCH GOD IS PRESENT AS A GREAT RESERVOIR OF FERVID LOVE. Every language has taken fire as the symbol of love and emotion. He dwells in His Church, a storehouse of blazing love, heated seventy times seven hotter than any creatural love, and pouring out its ardours for the quickening and gladdening of all who walk in the light of that fire and thaw their coldness at its blaze. Then, how comes it that so many Christian Churches are ice-hóuses instead of furnaces? If God's blazing furnace is in Jerusalem, it should send the thermometer up in all the houses of the city. But what a strange contradiction it is for men to be in God's Church, the very focus and centre of His burning love, and themselves to be almost down below zero in their temperature! A fiery furnace with its doors hung with icicles is no greater a contradiction and anomaly than a Christian Church or a single soul which professes to have been touched by the infinite lovingkindness of God, and yet lives as cold and unmoved as we do. There is no religion worth calling so which has not warmth in it. We hear a great deal about the danger of an "emotional Christianity." Agreed, if by that they mean a Christianity which has no foundation for its emotion in principle and intelligence; but not agreed, if they mean to recommend a Christianity which professes to accept truths that might kindle a soul beneath the ribs of death and make the dumb sing, and yet is never moved one hair's-breadth from its quiet phlegmaticism. If there is no fire, what is there? Cold is death. We want no flimsy, transitory, noisy, ignorant, hysterical agitation. Smoke is not fire. If the temperature were higher, and the fire more wisely fed, there would not be any. But we do want a more obvious and powerful effect of our solemn, glorious, and heart-melting beliefs on the affections and emotions of professing Christians, and that they may be more mightily moved by love to heroisms of service and enthusiasms of consecration which shall in some measure answer to the glowing heat of that fire of God which flames in Zion. II. GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF, AND PRESENCE IN HIS CHURCH, ARE AN INSTRUMENT OF CLEANSING. Fire purifies. In our great cities now there are "disinfecting ovens," where infected articles are taken, and exposed to a high temperature which kills the germs of disease, so that tainted things come out sweet and clean. That is what God's furnace in Zion is meant to do for us. The true way of purifying is by fire. To purify by water, as John the Baptist saw and said, is but a poor cold way of getting outward cleanliness. Water cleanses the surface, and becomes dirty in the process. Fire cleanses within and throughout, and is not tainted thereby. The Hebrew captives were flung into the fiery furnace; what did it burn? Only their bonds. They themselves lived, and rejoiced, in the intense heat. So, if we have any real possession of that Divine flame, it will burn off our wrists the bands and chains of our old vices, and we shall stand pure and clear, emancipated by the fire which will burn up only our sins, and be for our true selves as our native home, where we walk at liberty and expatiate in the genial warmth. III. GOD, IN HIS GREAT REVELATION OF HIMSELF BY WHICH HE DWELLS IN HIS CHURCH, IS A POWER OF TRANSFORMATION. Fire turns all which it seizes into fire. And so God, coming to us in His "Spirit of burning," turns us into His own likeness, and makes us possessors of some spark of Himself. IV. This figure teaches that THE SAME DIVINE FIRE MAY BECOME DESTRUCTIVE. The emblem of fire suggests a double operation, and the very felicity of it as an emblem is that it has these two sides, and with equal naturalness may stand for a power which quickens and for one which destroys. The difference in the effects springs not from differences in the cause, but in the objects on which the fire plays. We may make the furnace of God our blessedness and the reservoir of a far more joyful and noble life than ever we could have lived in our coldness; or we may make it terror and destruction. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The fiery ordeal of the Church*:—I. Let us endeavour to understand THE NAMES BY WHICH GOD'S CHURCH IS DESIGNATED, particularly under the Old Testament—"Zion" and "Jerusalem." They are very significant. Some tell us that the word "Zion" simply signifies a monument or heap of stones in memorial. Nothing could be more significant with reference to the Church of God—a chosen monument of grace, constituted of a heap of stones. "Jerusalem." It is very evident from the termination of it—Salem—that it signifies "peace"; and it is conjectured by some to have been the capital of Melchizedec; but one thing is certain, it was the organised city of the great King, the King of peace, and so is the Church of the living God. No city on the face of the earth was ever so warred against

as Jerusalem. And, in this respect, Jerusalem was exactly the picture of the Church of God. What was her paramount glory? Not her extent; she never was a large city. Not the tractableness and teachableness of her sons, for they were very rebellious against even the Lord their God. What then was the glory of her city? The name and presence of her God there. This is our stay, this is our confidence, this is our joy, this is our constant expectation. His presence must be sensibly enjoyed, in order to know that He is here. II. THE ORDEAL THROUGH WHICH THE CHURCH OF GOD MUST PASS. "His fire in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem." The saints of the living God may expect, and whether they expect or no, they are sure to meet a succession of trials, both in a temporal and a spiritual sense. I would take another view of the subject: if there were no "fire in Zion," and no "furnace in Jerusalem," there would be no sacrifice, no burnt-offering, no clouds of incense; and therefore God says, it shall ever be burning. In this sense, it is the emblem of life Divine, the Holy Spirit's work. I would name three things which God is doing with the "furnace." (1) He is melting; (2) He is manifesting; (3) He is making useful. These are the main purposes for which a furnace is used. III. THE TENDENCY AND THE TERMINATION OF THIS PROCESS. The tendency is the exercising of all the graces in personal religion; the termination is to demonstrate Divine love and faithfulness in the deliverance and ultimate glorification of His saints. (*J. Irons.*)

CHAPTER XXXII.

VERS. 1–8. **Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness.** — *Assyria and Judah:*—Such (ch. xxxi. 8, 9) will be the ignominious end of the proud battalions of Assyria. For Judah a happier future immediately begins. There should be no break between the two chapters. The representation which follows (vers. 1–8) is the positive complement to chap. xxxi. 6 f., and is parallel to chap. xxx. 23–26, completing under its ethical and spiritual aspects the picture of which the external material features were there delineated. Society, when the crisis is past, will be regenerated. Kings and nobles will be the devoted guardians of justice, and great men will be what their position demands that they should be—the willing and powerful protectors of the poor. All classes, in other words, will be pervaded by an increased sense of public duty. The spiritual and intellectual blindness (chap. xxix. 10) will have passed away (ver. 3); superficial and precipitate judgments will be replaced by discrimination (ver. 4*a*); hesitancy and vacillation will give way before the prompt and clear assertion of principle (ver. 4*b*). The present confusion of moral distinctions will cease; men and actions will be called by their right names. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *A new era:*—For Judah—sifted, rescued, cleansed—a new era opens. I. JUST GOVERNMENT IN BLESSING TO THE PEOPLE is the first good fruit (vers. 1, 2). II. The second is AN OPEN UNDERSTANDING AFTER THE CURSE OF HARDNESS (vers. 3, 4). III. A third good fruit is CALLING AND TREATING EVERYONE ACCORDING TO HIS TRUE CHARACTER (vers. 5–8). Nobility of birth and riches will give place to nobility of disposition, so that the former will not be found, nor find recognition without the latter. (*F. Delitzsch.*) *A flourishing kingdom:*—It may be taken as a directory both to magistrates and subjects, what both ought to do. It is here promised and prescribed—I. THAT MAGISTRATES SHOULD DO THEIR DUTY IN THEIR PLACES, and the powers answer the great ends for which they were ordained of God (vers. 1, 2). 1. There shall be a king and princes that shall reign and rule; for it cannot go well when there is no king in Israel. 2. They shall use their power according to law, and not against it. 3. Thus they shall be great blessings to the people (ver. 2). "A man"—that man, that king that reigns in righteousness—"shall be as a hiding-place." II. THAT SUBJECTS SHALL DO THEIR DUTY IN THEIR PLACES. 1. They shall be willing to be taught, and to understand things aright (ver. 3). When this blessed work of reformation is set on foot, and men do their part towards it, God will not be wanting to do His. Then "the eyes of them that see"—of the prophets, the seers—"shall not be dim," &c. 2. There shall be a wonderful change wrought in them by that which is taught them (ver. 4). (1) They shall

have a clear head, and be able to discern things that differ, and distinguish concerning them. (2) They shall have a ready utterance. 3. The differences between good and evil, virtue and vice, shall be kept up and no more confounded by those who put darkness for light, and light for darkness (ver. 5). (*Matthew Henry.*) *Reformed society:*—Though Isaiah's words are only perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, it was not concerning Christ that they were spoken. The prophet is speaking of the religious future and social progress of his people. He is presenting a picture of regenerated Judah. He points to the essential elements of all national stability and greatness. He speaks first of the righteousness that shall be exalted, and exemplified in the government of king and rulers; and then he goes on to speak of the moral conditions of real blessedness and progress, as they shall appear among the people. Great characters are the outstanding feature in the reformed society that he anticipates. Through them the progress of the nation is secured; in them the greatness of the nation will consist. But great characters can only exercise their full and proper influence when they move among those who are able to discern their greatness. Hence Isaiah declares that in that glorious time for which he confidently looks the moral blindness of the people, over which he had so often and so deeply mourned, the moral insensibility and dulness, with all the confusion and false judgment it occasioned, shall have ceased (ver. 3). Men shall know true manhood when they see it, and honour the manhood that they see. They shall no longer debase the moral currency, and make false use of terms denoting moral qualities. The great men shall be seen in all their greatness, and shall raise others to a moral elevation like their own. They shall protect the weak, and encourage the faint-hearted; they shall foster the growth of all goodness, and be an unfailing source of noblest inspiration. As they stand there in all their moral grandeur, rooted and grounded in the eternal righteousness, they are indeed—and they are known to be—"as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (*E. A. Lawrence.*) *Isaiah's Utopia:*—The first eight verses of this chapter are like the sudden opening of a window. The hall behind you resounds with the clamour of fierce contentions; the window before you frames in the prospect of a fair country, all bathed in rosy light, a land of corn and wine and oil, a land of plenty and peace. Isaiah is not the only politician who has found relief from the anxieties of a stormy time in a Utopia of his own imagining. The air was full of the noise of change, the Reformation was in full career on the Continent, and the ground-swell of the great movement already trembling on the shores of England, when Sir Thomas More wrote his description of the ideal state. When, as they think, everything is going wrong, men often have brightest visions of what the world would be if everything were going right. Isaiah's Utopia has three grand characteristics: 1. The triumph of righteousness in government. His programme for the ruling power is this: "A king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment." 2. The new state shall be broad-based, not upon the people's will, but upon the people's character. Men shall not be, as they have been, weak and unstable, and ungenerous; but, rock-like and river-like, they shall be strong and bountiful. 3. The ideal Israel, themselves judged justly, shall be just judges of others. They shall be able to discriminate character, and to recognise and honour the truly good. "The quack and the dupe," says Carlyle, "are upper and under side of the same substance." So, in the kingdom of the future, "the vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful." There will be no quacks, because there will be no dupes. Those who are liberal themselves are not likely to err in what constitutes liberality in others. (*W. B. Dalby.*)

Ver. 2. **A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind.**—*A hiding-place from the wind:*—In the East, the following phenomenon is often observed. Where the desert touches a river, valley, or oasis, the sand is in a continual state of drift from the wind, and it is this drift which is the real cause of the barrenness of such portions of the desert, at least, as abut upon the fertile land. For under the rain, or by the infiltration of the river, plants often spring up through the sand, and there is sometimes promise of considerable fertility. It never lasts. Down comes the periodic drift, and life is stunted or choked out. But set down a rock on the sand, and see the difference its presence makes. After

a few showers, to the leeward side of this some blades will spring up; if you have patience, you will see in time a garden. How has the boulder produced this? Simply by arresting the drift. Now that is exactly how great men benefit human life. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The true shelter for the world:*—A Saviour who does not seek first to improve man's condition, but to improve man. (*W. C. E. Newbolt.*) *A man:*—The prophet here has no individual specially in his view, but is rather laying down a general description of the influence of individual character, of which Christ Jesus was the highest instance. Taken in this sense, his famous words present us—I. WITH A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY. Great men are not the whole of life, but they are the condition of all the rest: if it were not for the big men, the little ones could scarcely live. The first requisites of religion and civilisation are outstanding characters. II. But in this philosophy of history there is A GOSPEL. Isaiah's words are not only man's ideal: they are God's promise, and that promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the most conspicuous example—none others are near Him—of this personal influence in which Isaiah places all the shelter and revival of society. This figure of a rock, a rock resisting drift, gives us some idea, not only of the commanding influence of Christ's person, but of that special office from which all the glory of His person and of His name arises: that "He saves His people from their sins." For what is sin? Sin is simply the longest, heaviest drift in human history. "The oldest custom of the race," it is the most powerful habit of the individual. Men have reared against it government, education, philosophy, system after system of religion. But sin overwhelmed them all. Only Christ resisted, and His resistance saves the world. III. In this promise of a man there is A GREAT DUTY AND IDEAL for every one. If this prophecy distinctly reaches forward to Jesus Christ as its only perfect fulfilment, the vagueness of its expression permits of its application to all, and through Him its fulfilment by all becomes a possibility. 1. We can be like Christ the Rock in shutting out from our neighbours the knowledge and infection of sin, in keeping our conversation so unsuggestive and unprovocative of evil, that, though sin drift upon us, it shall never drift through us. 2. We may be like Christ the Rock in shutting out blame from other men; in sheltering them from the east wind of pitiless prejudice, quarrel, or controversy; in stopping the unclean and bitter drifts of scandal and gossip. How many lives have lost their fertility for the want of a little silence and a little shadow! 3. As there are a number of men and women who fall in struggling for virtue simply because they never see it successful in others, and the spectacle of one pure, heroic character would be their salvation, here is a way in which each servant of God may be a rock. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Humanity greater than all distinctions of class:*—In the first and second verses of this chapter we have suggested to us the three great forms of government or social power, in accordance with which society has been constructed, and under which men have lived; namely, the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the democracy. A king shall reign, princes shall rule, and a man shall be as a hiding-place. First, there is a throne, then a palace, and then the common earth. It seems to be a descent from a king to princes, and from princes to a man; but it is also an ascent, for the man is the climax rather than the king. The king and the princes disappear in the man. Humanity or the common nature is greater than all distinctions of class. A king exists for men, rather than men for a king; and the salvation of society consists in the elevation of the common substratum of the race. In this elevation all the three powers may play a part—the power of the throne, the power of the nobles, and the power of the people themselves. All these three forms of government may exist in the same constitution. In the heavenly, or eternal government, there is a King with different orders of subjects. But since, in this heavenly kingdom, He who is King of kings and Lord of lords became a man, and a poor man, that He might serve all, and lift up all to citizenship in His kingdom, and to sit even on His throne, the great moral and spiritual law has been laid down, that every one, from the ruler on the throne to the humblest subject, rises in moral character and dignity just as he stoops to the help of others. If it is by the gentleness of God that we are made great; if He who is over all became servant to all, we cannot hope to become great on a different principle; that is, by seeking to be ministered unto rather than to minister. (*F. Ferguson.*) *Christ the shield of the believer:*—It is probable that the prophecy had some reference to Hezekiah, who, as the successor of the iniquitous Ahaz, restored the worship

of God, and re-established the kingdom of Judah. The very striking deliverance vouchsafed by God to His people, in the reign of this monarch, when the swarming hosts of the Assyrians fell in one night before the destroying angel, may justly be considered as having been alluded to by the prophet in strains which breathe high of the triumphs of redemption. And when "a king" is spoken of as "reigning in righteousness," and there is associated with his dominion all the imagery of prosperity and peace, we may, undoubtedly, find, in the holy and beneficent rule of Hezekiah, much that answers to the glowing predictions. But the destruction of the army of the Assyrians may itself be regarded as a figurative occurrence; and Hezekiah, like his forefather David, as but a type of the Lord our Redeemer. There are to be great and fearful judgments ere Christ shall finally set up His kingdom on earth. We shall consider the text as containing a description—metaphorical, undoubtedly, but not the less comforting and instructive—of what the Redeemer is to the Church. I. The first thing which may justly strike you as remarkable in this description of Christ, is THE EMPHASIS WHICH SEEMS LAID ON THE WORD "MAN." "A man" shall be this or that; and Bishop Lowth renders it "the man," as if he were man by distinction from every other—which is undoubtedly St. Paul's statement when he writes to the Corinthians: "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." It is the human nature of Christ to which our text gives the prominence; it is this human nature to which seems ascribed the suitableness of Christ's office prophetically assigned. What our blessed Saviour undertook was the reconciliation of our offending nature to God; and of this it is perhaps hardly too much to say that it could not have been effected by any nature but itself. II. Let us now proceed to consider WITH WHAT JUSTICE OR PROPRIETY THE SEVERAL ASSERTIONS HERE MADE MAY BE APPLIED TO OUR SAVIOUR. There are four assertions in the text, four similes used to represent to us the office of our Redeemer, or the benefits secured to us through His gracious mediation. These assertions or similes are not, indeed, all different; on the contrary, there is great similarity, or even something like repetition. Thus, "a hiding-place from the wind" does not materially differ from "a covert from the tempest." The idea is the same; there is only that variety in the mode of expression which accords with poetic composition. Neither is "the shadow of a great rock in a weary desert" altogether a different image; the idea is still that which shields—shelter from the heat, if not from the tempest. It may, perhaps, be more correct to say that there are two great ideas embodied in the text, and there are two figures for the illustration of each. The first idea is that of a refuge in circumstances of danger; and this is illustrated by "a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." The second idea is that of refreshment under circumstances of fatigue; and this is illustrated by "rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." There is one thing, according to the three illustrations, which should be separately and carefully considered. The "hiding-place," the "covert," and the "rock," give shelter and relief, through receiving on themselves that against which they defend us. It were a dull imagination, nay, it were a cold heart, which does not instantly recognise the appropriateness of the figure, as taken in illustration of the Lord our Redeemer. These Scriptural figures while under one point of view they represent Christ, under another they represent ourselves. And it is simply because there is so little feeling of our own actual condition that there is so little appreciation of the character under which Christ is described. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Jesus, the hiding-place:*—There is not a want, not a need, but we find Jesus enough for it. I. MAN'S NEED OF A HIDING-PLACE. 1. What a tempest will sharp afflictions sometimes raise, particularly if one follows another in quick succession. 2. There are other storms—national judgments. 3. What a storm can the Eternal Spirit raise in a man's own conscience when the poor Christless sinner catches his first glimpse of God! 4. What a burning wind has oft withered the mere professor when the Eternal Spirit has in a dying hour forced him to the fearful review of the past. II. THE GLORIOUS HIDING-PLACE WHICH THE GOSPEL POINTS OUT. As God-man, who can describe the hiding-place? What a hiding-place is His Person! What a hiding-place is His intercession! What a hiding-place is His deep sympathy! What a hiding-place is His fulness of grace! What a hiding-place, that has all the power, strength, and merit of Deity in it, and all the tenderness, love, and sympathy of humanity in it! The great question is, Have we really entered in? (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

A covert from the tempest:—We cannot easily imagine the fury of whirlwinds in the East. Granite and iron columns are snapped in two; the largest trees are torn up by the roots; houses are tossed about like straws, and at sea whole fleets are cast away. But Eastern storms are most terrible in the desert. There mountains of sand are lifted up and dashed down, sometimes burying whole caravans, and even whole armies. Picture a traveller in such a case. After a strange stillness, he sees a cloud of sand arising in front of him. At once the sky is darkened, and earth and heaven seem confounded. The angel of destruction rides on every blast, and claims the whole desert as his own. The poor man stands appalled, as if the day of doom had come. Oh, for a shelter: it is his one chance for life! Lo! a gigantic rock rears its head; he runs under it. The storm spends its fury upon the sheltering rock, not upon the sheltered pilgrim. (*J. Wells, M.A.*) *Our hiding-place:*—I. IN THE SAVIOUR THERE IS SHELTER FOR OUR SOULS. What are the storms from which the Saviour shields us? The Bible speaks most about two: the storm of God's wrath against sin, and the storm of life's trials. II. IN THE SAVIOUR WE HAVE SAFETY. Shelter and safety are different things, though we may not see the difference at once. About eighteen hundred years ago there was a town in the south of Italy, called Pompeii, which owes its fame to its destruction. It was buried under streams of boiling mud from Vesuvius, and showers of dust and ashes. Most of the people escaped by flight. The priests, having no faith in their idols, seized their treasures and fled. But some poor folks ran to the temples, hoping that their gods would save them. They found shelter, and—a grave. Since many are more anxious about shelter than real safety, Christ is at great pains to warn us against a mistake as common as it is dangerous. You remember Christ's story about the two builders; the one building upon the sand, and the other upon the rock. Very likely the two houses were equally fair to look upon, and both the wise man and the fool found shelter enough in sunny weather. But the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon the fool's house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof. The poor man found shelter and death. Many "refuges of lies"—man-made refuges all—would lure us away from our true safety. III. IN THE SAVIOUR THERE IS SYMPATHY. Shelter and safety are often found without sympathy. The fortress that gave the besieged safety from their foes has often been a hateful prison, in which famine and pestilence slew more than the sword. The dens and caves which were the hiding-places of our martyrs were equally wretched and safe. The Alpine traveller, overtaken by snowstorms, hurries to the nearest shelter, and finds only four bare walls. No cheerful fire, no kind host welcomes and revives him; and often he faints on the threshold, and dies within. But the soul's hiding-place is the soul's banqueting-house. You must lay the stress on the word "man." To the Jews before Christ it was no news to be told that God was a hiding-place. But that a man should be their hiding-place and covert, their overshadowing rock and water of life—that was a very surprising and glorious prophecy. And what a man! The Man of men, the alone perfect Man, of all men the most gracious and tender-hearted—the God-man. And He is a man by His own choice. More, He is a man from love to us. Had He been only God, we sinful, trembling creatures might not have dared to draw near; had He been only man, we should have doubted His power; but being both God and man, we can approach Him with equal confidence and affection. Your safety is not a hard, cold, empty thing. No, it is like the safety of the young eagle, covered with the feathers, and drawn close to the warm, beating side of the parent bird. IV. IN THE SAVIOUR THERE IS SATISFACTION. 'Tis thorough satisfaction, as when the desert-traveller, perishing with thirst, finds "rivers of water in a dry place." Among men, beasts, and birds, how boundless is the delight the thirsty find in fresh water! Every one has a craving for happiness, that never can be conquered, but lives while the soul lives. The Bible is ever declaring these two truths—1. Your soul cannot get true satisfaction away from Christ. 2. You may find it in Him. (*Ibid.*) *The hiding-place:*—I. THE HOLY GHOST DECLARES IT IS "A MAN THAT SHALL BE THE HIDING-PLACE FROM THE WIND." II. IN WHAT RESPECT OUR BLESSED LORD IS THAT "HIDING-PLACE." III. THE MANY ENCOURAGEMENTS THAT ARE GIVEN IN GOD'S SACRED WORD TO THE POOR AND WEARY TEMPEST-BEATEN TRAVELLER TO ENTER INTO THAT "HIDING-PLACE." 1. The commandment of God, on the one side. 2. The freeness of invitation, on the other. 3. The open door. 4. The testimony of all those who are in heaven, and all those who

are on earth, under the teaching of the Eternal Spirit, that never did any go thither and have a negative, but that as many as went were freely welcomed by the Lord of life and glory. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *The value of true manhood:*—Change the emphasis of your policy. You have been busy making alliances; now make a man. That was the teaching of this statesman-prophet. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The variety and urgency of human need:*—What a revelation is here of the wants of men! The very supply indicates the depths and urgency of the need which craves for satisfaction. "Hiding-place!" "Covert!" "Fountains of water!" "The shadow of a great rock!" Each of these beautiful images serves to accentuate the impression of urgent and pitiful need. Lighthouses and harbours are always terribly suggestive. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Human need met in Christ:*—I. WIND. How apt a symbol of our lives is here! Often when all seems fair, suddenly a wild storm envelops us in a furious *mêlée*. A calumnious story is circulated, which is absolutely without foundation; a well-meant act is misconstrued; a love suddenly cools; a dam which had warded off the wild North Sea breaks; a life which had been dearer than our own fails; our whole nature is plunged into a bath of agonising pain; the mind is cast into a tumult of perplexity; the heart is rent. Then we know bitterly the spiritual side of the words, "No small tempest lay upon us." II. STORM. We are exposed not only to great and crushing sorrows, which threaten to suddenly engulf us, as it is said the old seats of human life were engulfed in the midst of the Indian Ocean; but we have to suffer from the accumulations of little stinging irritations, which are like the grit or sand grains of the desert. The rasping temper of some one with whom we have to live; the annoyances and slights which are daily heaped on us; petty innuendoes and insinuations that sting; trifles which we could not put into words, but which hurt us like acid dropped into a sore. III. A DRY PLACE. Our lot is sometimes cast, as David's was, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. There are few helps in our religious life; we are cast into a worldly family; we are obliged to attend an uncongenial ministry; we are too driven with occupation to have quiet times for fellowship with God, and communion with His saints; or we are so lonely that we long unutterably for some kindred soul, some one to love, or to be loved. The eye ranges day after day over the same monotonous landscape. IV. A WEARY LAND. Weary people—there are plenty of them! Weary of life, with its poverty from which there is never a moment's respite; with the love of the life unrequited; with the light of life hidden beneath a bushel; with common-place duties and monotonous routine! The demands are so incessant, the pressure so constant, the heartache so wearing, the pain so cruel! The eyes weary of looking for one who never comes; the ears weary of listening for a step that never greets them; the hearts weary of waiting for a love that never comes forth from the grave, though they call never so loudly. But all these many-sided needs may be met and satisfied in "The Man Christ Jesus." No one man could perfectly meet even one of them; but Jesus perfectly meets them all. (*Ibid.*) *Christ the perfect Man:*—Have you not often wished to take the characteristic qualities from the men in whom they are strongest, and put them all together into one nature, making one complete man out of the many broken bits, one chord of the many single notes, one ray of the many colours? But this that you would wish to do is done in Him—in whom the faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the strength of Daniel, the love of the apostle John, blend in one complete symmetrical whole. (*Ibid.*) *Christ our hiding-place:*—I. THE STORMS. 1. The storm of adversity. 2. Of conviction. 3. Of temptation. 4. There is an eternal storm. II. THE HIDING-PLACE. "A man," &c. 1. What man? The Man Christ Jesus. 2. A suitable refuge. While He feels for you as a man, He helps you as a God. A refuge from—(1) A broken law. (2) A raging devil. (3) A persecuting world. III. DELIGHTFUL REFRESHMENT. "As rivers of water," &c. 1. Refreshing. 2. Purifying. 3. Free. 4. Free to all. IV. NEEDFUL SHELTER. "As the shadow," &c. (*W. Jackson.*) *Offices of Christ:*—I. Christ came to be A HIDING-PLACE FROM THE WIND. This part of our text may be regarded as referring to the lesser evils of human life; to those which chiefly affect our temporal condition. Who does not feel, in his measure, the winds of adversity, which never fail to blow upon this lower world? The widow mourns over her bereavement, and sits alone, as a sparrow upon the housetop. The orphans look in vain for a parent's sympathy and protection. The poor man stands aghast at the prospect of penury. The sick languish under the appoint-

ment of painful days and wearisome nights. The mourners go about the streets, telling the sad tale of their desolation, and refusing to be comforted, under the loss of some endeared object. But let us not imagine that even our most trivial sufferings are beneath the notice of Jehovah. He became a man that He might make Himself acquainted with the afflictions of humanity, and thus be able to afford His sympathy. 1. There is the shelter of His gracious declarations. 2. Of the promises. 3. Of Christ's example. See Him weeping with those that wept. See Him providing for the hungry multitude. See Him ever ready to alleviate human misery, and, during the whole period of His life, going about doing good. Is it possible to study the life of Jesus, and not derive succour from the view of His sympathy and compassion? II. The second clause of our text leads us to the consideration of those greater evils, from which Christ protects His followers. He is spoken of as A COVERT FROM THE TEMPEST. 1. There is the tempest of God's wrath, roused by man's transgression. 2. Of Satan's buffetings. 3. Of indwelling sin. But, amidst all these tempests, Christ is a covert for His people. Consider how it is that He shelters them. It is by bearing Himself the stormy wind and tempest. III. Christ is spoken of as RIVERS OF WATER IN A DRY PLACE. To the renewed mind, what is the whole world but a dry place? IV. Christ is spoken of as THE SHADOW OF A GREAT ROCK IN A WEARY LAND. What are we but pilgrims toiling over the sandy desert of this weary world? We have various burdens to carry, and labours allotted to us; and how are we straitened in our work! With one hand we have to fight continually against our enemies, as we hasten onward to our home: with the other, we have to labour diligently, both for ourselves and others. We have to bear the burden and heat of the day. But shall we faint because of the way? No, we have a grand support. We have the shadow of a great rock in this weary land. (*Carus Wilson.*) *Christ a refuge:*—I. We are reminded here of OUR DANGERS. These are set forth by images which we in our climate can only half understand. Except at sea, we have little to fear from winds and tempests. At the worst, they are inconveniences to us, seldom dangers. But in other countries they are at times the causes of great havoc. Besides these, there are gentler winds sometimes blowing in them, that are almost as fearful. Hot and debilitating, they cannot be breathed without much suffering, and instances, it is said, have been known in which they have been so noxious as to occasion death. Is not this a true picture of our situation? There are storms of outward affliction for us in the world. And there are inward storms also—storms of conscience, storms of temptation; and still worse storms than any of these—the ragings of our own corrupt affections. And yet what are all these? They are all nothing compared with one storm yet to come. There is the wrath of God awaiting us. II. The text tells us of A PROTECTOR FROM OUR DANGERS. And who is He? If we understand what our dangers are, we shall all say He must be the great God. But the text does not say this. It tells us that He is a man. But how, we may ask, can this be? We have tried often enough to get help from men. This man is such as never before was seen or heard of, the everlasting Jehovah manifest in our mortal flesh, God and man united in one Christ. But why is the Lord Jesus called so emphatically a man in this passage? Perhaps for three reasons. 1. To lead the ancient Church to expect His incarnation. 2. To encourage us to approach Him. We naturally are afraid of God. But here, says this text, is God appearing before you in a new character and form. His mere appearance in our world as a man, proclaims Him at once man's Friend and Saviour. 3. To show us the importance of His human nature to our safety. III. THE EXCELLENCE OF THAT PROTECTION WHICH THE LORD JESUS AFFORDS US. Imagine yourselves in such a desert as the prophet has here in his mind. Suppose yourselves asked, what kind of shelter you wished for. 1. You would naturally say, in the first place, it must be a secure one. And Christ is a secure hiding-place. 2. Then you would say, the refuge I want must be a near one. And who so near at hand as the Lord Jesus? 3. But, you may ask, Can I gain admittance into this refuge if I flee to it? The answer is, You can. It is an open refuge, a refuge ever open, and open to all who choose to enter it. 4. He is a well-furnished hiding-place. There is provision and plentiful provision in this stronghold for all who enter it. Conclusion—1. What think ye of this hiding-place? What use have you made of it? Have you fled to it? 2. But there are those who are out of this hiding-place. Oh, brethren, have mercy on yourselves! (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *The suffering world and the relieving Man:*—

I. THE SUFFERING WORLD. The world's trials are here represented by the imagery of—1. A "tempest." Tempests in nature are often most terrible and devastating. Spiritually, the world is in a tempest. It is beaten by the storm of—(1) conflicting thoughts, (2) sinful passions, (3) guilty memories, and (4) terrible foreboding. 2. A drought. "A dry place." The Oriental traveller under a vertical sun, and on scorching sands without water, is the picture here. He has a burning thirst and is in earnest quest for the cooling stream. Is this not a true picture of man spiritually as a traveller to eternity? He thirsts for a good which he fails to get. 3. Exhaustion. "In a weary land." The Oriental traveller has exhausted his strength, and lies down in prostrate hopelessness. Man, spiritually, is "weary and heavy laden," "without strength." Without strength to discharge his moral obligations, to please his Maker, to serve his race, and reach his destiny. II. THE RELIEVING MAN. "A man shall be," &c. Hezekiah did much to relieve Israel in its political troubles, but Christ does infinitely more. He relieves the moral troubles of humanity. 1. He is a shelter from moral storms. What a secure, accessible, capacious refuge is Christ. 2. He is the river in moral droughts. Christ refreshes and satisfies souls by opening rivers of holy thoughts, &c. (*Homilist.*) *The humanity of the way of salvation:*—I. A PICTURE OF THE STATE OF THE WORLD. We may view this picture of the world under four aspects—1. A picture of the natural world. The four elements of nature are brought into view—earth, air, water, and fire; and each in its turn may become a blessing or a curse to man. Man has lost the dominion of nature, and is no longer at home in it. He fights an unequal battle, and is obliged to succumb. 2. A picture of the moral world. Although war, famine, and pestilence are physical evils, their causes are moral. They fall more directly on man than other natural evils. They are the storms of human society. 3. A picture of the spiritual world. This earth is the platform, not merely of a natural and political or moral strife; it is the arena, as well, of a spiritual strife. To realise this, and to know it as the most certain of all facts, the soul must be awakened by the Spirit of God to the true meaning of life. We must feel the battle within ourselves in order to see it around us. 4. Something that reminds us of a condition of existence in the eternal world. All the storms of which we have spoken are but the foreshadowings of the wrath of God. II. A PROPHECY OF THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD. This is represented under the figure of a hiding-place, a covert, rivers of water, and the shadow of a great rock. 1. The blessedness of the prophecy. In proportion as we have realised the world to be what the word here describes it as being, will the announcement of the text appear most acceptable and blessed. 2. The wonderfulness and apparent contradictoriness of the prophecy. It says that a "man" shall be a hiding-place. Man is the creature who is in want of salvation. 3. The prophecy itself, more directly and particularly. We accept the statement as at once referring primarily to Christ Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Only in Him is the prophecy fully realised, and delivered from its apparently contradictory character. Believers look upon Him as the only one who can save from physical, moral, spiritual, and eternal evil. 4. How the man Christ Jesus is such a hiding-place. (*F. Ferguson.*) *The hiding-place:*—I. There underlies this prophecy A VERY SAD, A VERY TRUE CONCEPTION OF HUMAN LIFE. 1. We live a life defenceless and exposed to many a storm and tempest. 2. "Rivers of water in a dry place!" And what is the prose fact of that? That you and I live in the midst of a world which has no correspondence with nor capacity of satisfying our truest and deepest selves—that we bear about with us a whole set of longings and needs and weaknesses and strengths and capacities, all of which, like the climbing tendrils of some creeping plant, go feeling and putting out their green fingers to lay hold of some prop and stay—that man is so made that for his rest and blessedness he needs an external object round which his spirit may cling, on which his desires may fall and rest, by which his heart may be clasped, which shall be authority for his will, peace for his fears, sprinkling and cleansing for his conscience, light for his understanding, shall be in complete correspondence with his inward nature—the water for his thirst, and the bread for his hunger. 3. And then there is the other idea underlying these words also, yet another phase of this sad life of ours—not only danger and drought, but also weariness and languor. II. But another thought suggested by these words is, THE MYSTERIOUS HOPE WHICH SHINES THROUGH THEM—that one of ourselves shall deliver us from all this evil in life. "A man," &c. III. THE SOLUTION OF THE MYSTERY IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST.

(*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Christ a refuge:*—I. In the day of earthly DISAPPOINTMENT. II. In times of AFFLICTION. III. In the day of TRIAL. God tries our faith, our hope, our patience, our principles. IV. In the day of FEAR. V. From the torments of an accusing CONSCIENCE. VI. In the day of FINAL WRATH. (*J. M. Sherwood.*) *The covert of Divine love:*—There are two very distinct methods and aims in the Bible. A very large portion of the Scriptures are in the form of appeals to duty, to service. But there is another part of the Bible that appeals to exactly the opposite sentiment, and is a call to rest, to quiet, to ease, to everything but action—to contemplation, to silence. And there are times in our experience when we need the call to rest as absolutely as at others we need the call to duty. I desire, then, to call your thought to the rest side of religion. I. PRAYER, as revealed to us in Scripture, is beautifully illustrated by the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. II. THE WORDS THAT ARE GIVEN US IN THE SCRIPTURE are offered to us like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land—the Scripture is full of these delightful surprises. "Come unto Me," &c. "Let not your heart be troubled," &c. "Lo! I am with you alway," &c. Such doctrines as Divine Providence; the idea of God giving you work to do; the idea that trouble comes to us as a dispensation from our Father's hand, &c. III. CHRISTIAN HOPE is also like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Rest, in the Word of God, is like rest in nature. The night is very blessed for the weary one, but the morning follows the night, and rest is given that we may be strong to labour. (*A. D. Vail, D.D.*) *The wayworn pilgrim's hiding-place* (with ver. 3):—I. Who THE TRAVELLERS are, on their homeward march, and the dangers and difficulties which beset their path. The way to heaven is often spoken of in Scripture as a journey, and this by no flowery meadow or purling brook, through no over-arching bowers or verdant shade, but through a wilderness. 1. The first peril mentioned is the wind. By "the wind" here, I understand the pestilential wind, sometimes called the simoom, or samiel, which at certain seasons passes over the desert, blasting and withering all it touches, and carrying death in its train. But what is there in the spiritual desert corresponding to this pestilential wind? Sin. 2. The second peril in the wilderness is "the tempest." This we may characterise as the thunderstorm, which differs from the pestilential wind in being from above, not from beneath; violent, not subtle; destroying by lightning, not by poison. And what so aptly corresponds to this as the manifested anger of God against sin? 3. But there is a third peril in the wilderness—one in a measure peculiar to it, and rarely absent from it, "the want of water," for the wondrous man here spoken of is promised to be "as rivers of water in a dry place." The wilderness is especially dry. What an expressive emblem, then, is thirst of the desire of the soul after Christ! 4. The last peril of the wilderness here mentioned is the wearisomeness of the way. What poetry and beauty there are in the expression, "a weary land"! As if the land itself were weary, weary of its own wearisomeness, weary of being such an uncultivated waste, and of wearing out the lives of so many travellers. One main, perhaps the chief, element of the weariness of the desert is the unclouded sun, ever darting his beams down upon it. What does the sun here, then, represent? Temptation. II. THE HIDING-PLACE AND COVERT—the refreshment and shade which the Lord has provided for these travellers in the Son of His love. 1. "A hiding-place from the wind." This wind we have explained as the pestilential breath of sin. A hiding-place is wanted, lest it should destroy body and soul in hell. Where shall we find it? In the Law? That is going out of the wind into the storm. In self? That is the very thing we most want shelter from. Jesus is the hiding-place, the only hiding-place from sin and self. But three things we must know and experience before we can enter into the beauty and blessedness of Jesus as a hiding-place from the wind. (1) We must feel our need of such a shelter. (2) We must be brought to see the hiding-place which God has provided in the Son of His love. (3) Then follows the third step—the entering into the hiding-place. 2. But the same wondrous man is also "a covert from the storm." This we explained as referring to the law. How a shelter is needed from its condemnation and curse! Where is this refuge to be found? In Jesus. He has redeemed us from its curse. 3. From this springs the third character which Jesus sustains to the pilgrim in the wilderness. "As rivers of water in a dry place." How graciously does the blessed Spirit, by this figure, set forth the suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ to travellers in the wilderness. The Lord Jesus is spoken of

as "rivers of water." The very thing in the desert which we need. In the wilderness we do not want strong drink; that would only inflame the thirst, make the blood boil in the veins, and smite the frame with fever. As it toils through the desolate wastes of sand it is water that the fainting spirit wants. It is water—the well of water springing up into everlasting life—that is provided. The fulness of the Lord Jesus is not a rill, but a river; not only a river, but "rivers." 4. But the Lord Jesus is spoken of also as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." He has been tempted in all points like as we are; but as the rock bears uninjured the beams of the hottest sun, and yet, by bearing them, shields in its recesses the wayworn pilgrim, so did Jesus, as man, bear the whole fury of Satanic temptations, and yet was as uninjured by them as the rock in the desert. And having borne them, He shields from their destructive power the tempted child of God who lies at His feet under the shadow of His embrace. III. THE OPENING OF THE EYES TO SEE AND THE UNSTOPPING OF THE EARS TO HEARKEN to the blessings thus promised. 1. "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim." Our text speaks rather of dimness than blindness. There is a difference between the two. The dead in sin are blind; the newly-quickened into life are dim. How true is this of the wilderness pilgrim! The breath of the pestilential wind, the thick clouds of the tempest, the hot and burning sand, and the glare of the mid-day sun, all blear and dim the eye. But the hiding-place from the wind, the covert from the tempest, the rivers of water, and the shady rock heal the dimness. 2. "And the ears of them that hear shall hearken." The persons spoken of in the text are not totally deaf, for they "hear." Yet there is a difference between hearing and hearkening—a difference almost analogous to that between the eyes being dim and seeing. To hearken implies faith and obedience. When the pilgrim in the wilderness reaches the hiding-place from the wind, and the covert from the tempest; when he drinks of the rivers of water, and lies under the shadow of the great rock, he not only hears but hearkens—believes, loves, and obeys. (*J. C. Philpot.*) *Men as hiding-places from the wind:*—The sandstorms of the desert margin have their counterparts in human history and society. Here also the victories of faith and effort are won painfully, and often, after a little time of security, are overswept by some blighting evil influence. Isaiah himself, St. Paul, Luther, Wesley, are examples of the rock-like men of history, who have withstood the storm, and made the good things of life—faith, hope, and charity—possible to others. Isaiah's bold stand against a disposition and a policy which would have made Israel the plaything of the greater nations around, preserved the national existence and made possible the great revival of religion which took place in the reign of Josiah. St. Paul's protest against the Judaisers saved the infant Church of Christ to be a world-wide faith instead of a feeble sect. Luther's great work of reformation broke one of the strongest currents of history—the dead set of things towards superstition and lifeless formalism. And when in England religious indifference and a cold, heartless scepticism lay on the land like a nightmare, it was the work of Wesley and his helpers which gave a new opportunity to Christian enterprise and fervour. The great value of these lives is not only in their own intrinsic nobleness and beauty; they make space for others. Thousands of hearts pining in secret for the opportunities of service, for the inspirations of faith and courage, gather to them, take shelter in their greatness, and are vitalised and transformed by their personal power. (*W. B. Dalby.*) *The rock-like man:*—Who is the rock-like man? 1. He is always a man of great strength of will. A purely natural quality? Yes; but one which is nourished on prayer and striving. 2. Another virtue of the rock-man is moral courage. He dares to do right when right-doing is dangerous, when it carries with it probabilities of loss and suffering. 3. But that which adds the crowning value to the true moral hero is that he is always a man of faith, *i.e.* the unseen is real to him. He has many ways of realising the unseen, differing according to the age in which he lives, the influences which have moulded him, the manner and form in which the Divine revelation has come to him; but this one thing is of the essence of his life, whether he be a Socrates, a Marcus Aurelius, a St. Bernard, a Dante, or a Martin Luther—that he shall have felt and known that "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," that "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (*Ibid.*) *Rock-men:*—It was said of one who even as a boy showed the promise of his later years, "it was easy to be good when he came to the school." A man may be a rock

to his fellows at school, in the office, in the home life, in the world, wherever his influence falls, a fertilising shelter, a healing shade, an opposing barrier—the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. (*W. C. E. Newbolt.*) *Christ's human sympathy:*—Once when addressing children upon this text, I asked what word in it proved the sympathy of the Saviour. A boy, in his eagerness forgetting where he was, started to his feet, and, waving his right hand, made the whole church ring with, "A man, a man." (*J. Wells, M.A.*) *Brotherhood in adversity:*—I was one of five or six who, the other day, under a tree sought shelter from a passing shower. I noticed that, though strangers to one another, we seemed then more friendly than friends usually are. The storm gave us a sense of fellowship as well as of danger. The common deliverance from the common peril, trifling though it was, had power somehow, I thought, to awaken friendly feeling. The least easily suggests the greatest. There is a sad want of love in the world, but brotherly love would reign everywhere, if we only remembered that we are all fellow-travellers through the desert, that the same storms may any moment sweep down upon us, and that we have the same hiding-place in the man Christ Jesus. (*Ibid.*) **As rivers of water in a dry place.**—*Religion a river:*—This chapter is a prophetic photogram of a bright age that awaits this world. The dry places are unregenerated souls—souls scorched with the drought of sin, dusty and leafless, without any vestige of spiritual life or verdure. Without figure—a soul unrenewed by heavenly influence, is, in a moral sense, "a dry place," barren and unfruitful. What is the river that is to run through it, irrigate its barren districts, clothe it with living beauty, and enrich it with fruit? It is Christ's religion. Let the river then stand, not for objective Christianity, but for Christianity in the soul, for experimental godliness; and we have four ideas suggested concerning it. I. VITALITY. So necessarily do we associate life with a river, that the ancients traced the universe to water as the first principle of all things. Life, in all its forms, follows in profusion the meandering course of rivers. Even all the races of men crowd to their banks and settle on their shores. The Euphrates made Babylon; the Tiber made Rome; and the Thames makes London. Water is life. "Everything shall live whither the river cometh." Religion, which, in one word, is supreme love to God in the soul, is life; it quickens, develops, and brings to fruition all the powers of our spiritual nature. II. MOTION. The river is not like the torpid pool or the stagnant lake, resting in the quiet of death. It is active, essentially and perpetually active. So with real godliness in the soul. It is in perpetual flow; it keeps all the powers of the soul in action. Thought is ever at work, gathering elements to feed the fire of devotion, and brighten the lamp of duty. The spirit is always abounding in the work of the Lord. III. EMANANCY. A river is an outflow—it has a fountain-head somewhere. It has no independent existence; there is a force that started it at first and feeds it every hour. A river is an emanation; so is true godliness in the soul. 1. There is a Divine fountain from which it emanates. What is its primal font? The love of God. This fountain lies far back in the awful depths of eternity. 2. There is a Divine channel through which it flows—Christ. 3. There is a Divine agent to let it into the heart. The Spirit of God does this in connection with means. IV. PROGRESS. In a river there is twofold progress. 1. Progress in its volume. As the river meanders on its way, it grows in bulk by the contributory streams that flow into it. At length it gets force enough to sweep everything before it and to give a character to the district. So with godliness in the soul. Holy currents of thought, sympathy, and purpose, deepen their channels and rise in the strength and majesty of their flow, as years and ages pass on. 2. Progress towards its destination. So with the godly soul. Godward it ever moves. (*Homilist.*) *Christ the source of refreshment:*—1. Christ relieves His people from their feelings of dissatisfaction, inspired by the vanity of earthly things. 2. Christ may be described as the source of refreshment to His people, in consequence of the comforts He vouchsafes to them amidst the toils and sorrows of their Christian pilgrimage. (*J. B. Patterson, M.A.*) *Rivers of water in a dry place:*—I. As setting forth the benedictions which come to us through the incarnate God, LET US STUDY THE METAPHOR of rivers of water in a dry place. This means—1. Great excellence of blessing. A river is the fit emblem of very great benefits, for it is of the utmost value to the land through which it flows. 2. Abundance. Jesus is full of grace and truth. 3. Freshness. A pool is the same thing over again, and gradually it becomes a stagnant pond, breeding

corrupt life and pestilential gases. A river is always the same, yet never the same; it is ever in its place, yet always moving on. We call our own beautiful river, "Father Thames," yet he wears no furrows on his brows, but leaps in all the freshness of youth. 4. Freeness. We cannot say this of all the rivers on earth, for men generally manage to claim the banks and shores, and the fisheries and water-powers. Yet rivers can scarcely be parcelled out, they refuse to become private property. See how freely the creatures approach the banks. 5. Constancy. Pools and cisterns dry up, but the river's song is—

Men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

So is it with Jesus. The grace to pardon and the power to heal are not a spasmodic force in Him; they abide in Him evermore. 6. The text speaks of "rivers," which implies both variety and unity. 7. Force. Nothing is stronger than a river; it cuts its own way, and will not be hindered in its course. II. A SPECIAL EXCELLENCE which the text mentions. "Rivers of water in a dry place." In this country we do not value rivers so much because we have springs and wells in all our villages and hamlets; but in the country where Isaiah lived the land is parched and burnt up without rivers. When the man Christ Jesus came hither with blessings from God, He brought rivers into the dry place of our humanity. What a dry place your heart was by nature! Do not many of you find your outward circumstances very dry places? III. THE PRACTICAL LESSON from it all. 1. See the goings out of God's heart to man, and man's way of communing with God. Other rivers rise in small springs, and many tributaries combine to swell them, but the river I have been preaching about rises in full force from the throne of God. It is as great a river at its source as in its after-course. Whenever you stoop down to drink of the mercy which comes to you by Jesus Christ you are having fellowship with God, for what you drink comes direct from God Himself. 2. See what a misery it is that men should be perishing and dying of soul-thirst when there is this river so near. Millions of men know all about this river, and yet do not drink. 3. Let us learn, if we have any straitness, where it must lie. Our cup is small, but the river is not. 4. Is Christ a river? Then drink of Him, all of you. To be carried along on the surface of Christianity, like a man in a boat, is not enough, you must drink or die. 5. And if you have drunk of this stream, live near it. We read of Isaac, that he dwelt by the well. It is good to live hard by an inexhaustible spring. Commune with Christ, and get nearer to Him each day. 6. If Christ be like a river, let us, like the fishes, live in it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Infinite fulness in Christ*:—I always feel very fidgety when theologians begin making calculations about the Lord Jesus. There used to be a very strong contention about particular redemption and general redemption, and though I confess myself to be to the very backbone a believer in Calvinistic doctrine, I never felt at home in such discussions. I can have nothing to do with calculating the value of the atonement of Christ. Appraisers and valuers are out of place here. Sirs, I would like to see you with your slates and pencils calculating the cubical contents of the Amazon: I would be pleased to see you sitting down and estimating the quantity of fluid in the Ganges, the Indus, and the Orinoco; but when you have done so, and summed up all the rivers of this earth, I will tell you that your task was only fit for schoolboys, and that you are not at the beginning of that arithmetic which can sum up the fulness of Christ, for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. His merit, His power, His love, His grace, surpass all knowledge, and consequently all estimate. (*Ibid.*) *Freeness of grace in Christ*:—I took pleasure the other day in seeing the cattle come to the river to drink. The cows sought out a sloping place, and then stood knee deep in the stream and drank and drank again! I thought of Behemoth, who trusted he could snuff up Jordan at a draught, they drank so heartily, and no one said them nay, or measured out the draught. The dog, as he ran along, lapped eagerly, and no tax was demanded of him. The swan was free to plunge her long neck into the flood, and the swallow to touch the surface with its wing. To ox, and fly, and bird, and fish, and man, the river was alike free. So thou ox of a sinner, with thy great thirst, come and drink; and thou dog of a sinner, who thinkest thyself unworthy even of a drop of grace, yet come and drink. I read near one of our public ponds a notice, "Nobody is allowed to wash dogs here." That is right enough for a pond, but it would be quite needless for a river. In a river

the foulest may bathe to his heart's content. The fact of its fulness creates a freeness which none may restrict. (*Ibid.*) *Rivers of water in a dry place:*—Isaiah's moral ideal is not exhausted in a single picture. The scene is changed. The desert is indeed a "dry place"; but so also is every place in Palestine when the hot season is reaching its close. The whole land is thirsting for the coming rain. The harsh, dry air shimmers over the rocks and dusty roads. The heavens are as brass. Every evening when the red sun sinks below the western horizon one can imagine him sullen and weary. The grass is no longer green, but of a dull dead brown. In the vineyard the vine leaves hang sapless and limp, or drift wearily to the ground. The figs, the oranges, and the pomegranates have all been gathered; the last flower has withered upon its stem. The reservoirs are rapidly becoming exhausted; the diminished Jordan wanders sluggishly along its southward course; its tributary streams have long since ceased to run. The land is a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is." But by-and-by the watchers on Carmel see the light clouds rising out of the Great Sea. Soon the heavens are overspread, and the first heavy drops begin to fall. The rain comes at length in sheets, in torrents. The water-courses fill as by magic. Kedron, Cherith, Kishon, and Jabbok are now no longer mere names, but "rivers of water in a dry place." The change wrought in a few days is wonderful. The hot earth drinks in the living stream, and gives it out again in life, abundant, exuberant. Everywhere the grass grows green, the fields are carpeted with flowers. Soon the orange trees mingle the silver of their blossoms with the golden glow of their fruitage, and the dark leaves of the oleanders are relieved by the rich red or snowy white of their flowers. The air is clear and the horizon luminous. It is a land of rejoicing now; the song of the birds is heard around, on high, fitting accompaniment to the sounds of happy labour—labour which will soon result in the abundance of vintage and harvest, when Palestine shall literally be "a land flowing with milk and honey." (*W. B. Dalby.*) *The fertilising power of a gracious character:*—Where is the life that answers to the comparison, "as rivers of water in a dry place"? Any life which is rich in the softer virtues—unselfishness, gentleness, purity, patience, charity. There are some people whose natures overflow in blessing. To have known them is an education in morals and religion. They are strong: they have will, courage—especially the courage which endures; they have a lofty faith. But these are not the things which most impress you in them. Their sphere, it may be, is a narrow one; their gifts of the quiet, homely order. It is not so much what they say or do, it is what they are, that so penetrates you with a sense of sweetness, graciousness, and charm. They are women with no particular idea that they have a "mission." Or they are men of quiet, self-contained nature, very high-principled, though they never tell you so; of sensitive honour, though they never call attention to the fact. When trouble comes, they meet it calmly; loss and sorrow are to them merely experiences which profit to the increase of their hopefulness. If you make demands upon their patience, upon their self-sacrifice, they are ready to endure hardness, to go all lengths to succour any brother human being broken by the world. Their lives are lovely and pleasant in themselves, fruitful in blessing to others. It is said of the late Clerk Maxwell, the great natural philosopher, that "he made faith in goodness easy to other men." You never heard of him as a public advocate of religion or philanthropy. His life was absorbed in what are called "secular studies," yet the character rang the true note of Christian purity and graciousness. "Rivers of water in a dry place": that is a very affluent description of these quiet lives; but not any too much so, for without them the work of the great moral reformer would be in vain. Each type has its place and power; each is needed for the work of God in the world. (*Ibid.*) *Shelter and refreshment in Christ:*—During the Crimean War a bomb-shell was fired from the fortifications of Sebastopol by the Russians, which buried itself in the earth, and burst on the side of the hill on which the British troops were encamped. Strange to say, immediately from the ragged hole which it made in the ground came out a copious stream of clear, cold water. The shell had tapped a hidden fountain in the dry and thirsty land, and broken the rocky cover which hid it. And thus, in a most extraordinary fashion, the British soldiers, who were complaining of thirst, and had great difficulty in getting water, had their want supplied; and the enemy's shot that was meant for their destruction, proved their salvation. And so the wounds inflicted by your sins upon the Rock of Ages, not only produced a place of safety for you, but also opened

up a fountain of refreshment in it. And a Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, is your hiding-place from the wind, and your covert from the tempest—the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and rivers of water in a dry place. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) **As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.**—*Comfort in Christ:*—This is the agreeable truth to be illustrated: that saints may always find comfort in Christ in this wearisome world. I. THIS WORLD IS WEARISOME TO SAINTS. Their treasure is in heaven, and they are only passing through the world to take possession of it. 1. This is a laborious world. "All things are full of labour." Employment was originally enjoined upon man. But since the apostasy servile labour has become a burden. 2. This is a troublesome world. Trouble attends every stage and condition of life. 3. This is a dark world. What is past, what is present, as well as what is to come, lies involved in darkness. Good men are often weary of conjectures, and despond under the darkness of Divine dispensations. 4. This is a sinful world. II. WHEN SAINTS ARE WEARY OF THE WORLD THEY MAY FIND COMFORT IN CHRIST. They are then prepared to receive comfort; and Christ is always ready to bestow comfort upon those who are prepared for it. In particular—1. They may always find compassion in Christ, which is a source of comfort. Christ has gone through the heat and cold, the storms and tempests, the labours and troubles of this world. He knows what it is to be faint and weary. He knows the heart of a pilgrim and stranger. And He has the tenderest compassion for His friends in distress or want. 2. Weary saints may find comfort in the intercession of Christ. 3. When saints are weary of the world, they may always find comfort in the strength of Christ. 4. They may find comfort in the government of Christ. Since Christ has the government of all things in His hands, His people may safely confide in His wisdom, power, and compassion to defend His own cause and repel every weapon formed against it. 5. They may find comfort in the promises of Christ. Improvement—1. May the friends of Christ always find comfort in Him when they are weary of the world? Hence we may see the reason why He forbids them to be conformed to it, or seek to derive their supreme happiness from it. 2. If those who are weary of the world may find comfort in Christ, then the more they become weary of the world, the better they are prepared to enjoy His promised peace and comfort. 3. If Christians who are weary of the world may always find rest and comfort in Christ, then they may enjoy more happiness than sinners do, even in this life. 4. If saints, when weary of the world, find comfort in Christ, then we may readily believe that those who have lived in the darkest times, met with the greatest troubles, and experienced the severest trials, have often arrived at the greatest degrees of holiness and happiness in the present life. 5. Since all real saints who are weary of the world may always find rest in Christ, they have no reason to murmur and complain under any of the troubles and afflictions in which they are involved. 6. Since all true believers may always find rest in Christ, when they are weary of the world, they have no more reason to be anxious about future, than to be impatient under present, troubles and trials. 7. Since saints may find rest in Christ when they are weary of the world, we may easily account for their being sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker than other men in adversity. 8. Since weak and weary saints may always find rest in Christ, they have a much brighter prospect before them than sinners. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Beneficent interposition:*—A traveller, recently returned from Africa, relates that one day, overcome by intense heat, he fell asleep on the baked earth, but on awaking had the sensation of freshness, and found it was caused by the thoughtfulness of his attendants, who were standing around him, receiving upon themselves the fierce glare, and sheltering his recumbent body from the ardent rays of a vertical sun. In truth, the whole world rests in the shadow of Him who stands between us and the consuming fire of outraged law, and in virtue of His interposition a thousand blessings are ours. "A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind," &c. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Jesus the Rock:*—Of Jesus, the believer can truly say that life on this side of Him is very different from life on that. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *An emblem of our gracious God:*—The rock and its shadow. Look at it! It is the mingling of all that is most massive and immovable with all that is gentlest and tenderest. The rock going down to the very depths of the solid world, rooted and grounded, it is the very figure of all that is enduring and abiding. Yet its shadow is a thing almost spiritual; noiseless in its fall, it creeps as if it feared to disturb those whom it has lulled to rest, like a mother who fears to stir lest

she awaken the little one that she has hushed to sleep. The shadow—is it not the perfection of gentleness? The breeze whispers of its coming and grows boisterously playful sometimes; but the shadow will not add a burden to the flower bell. The rock and its shadow—it is power and pity. It is the fit emblem of our God and Father. The great Creator of heaven and earth, from everlasting to everlasting He is God—yet how gracious and pitiful is He, how gentle! (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Weariness in life:*—O! the weariness felt by us all, of plod, plod, plodding across the sand! That fatal monotony into which every man's life stiffens, as far as outward circumstances, outward joys and pleasures go! the depressing influence of custom which takes the edge off all gladness and adds a burden to every duty! the weariness of all that tugging up the hill, of all that collar-work which we have to do! (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *A many-sided Christ:*—Applying the language of the whole verse to the Lord Jesus Christ, the King in Zion, we are struck with the number of the metaphors. He is not merely a hiding-place, and a covert, and a river, but He is a shadow of a great rock. Yes, if we attempt to set forth our Lord's glories by earthly analogies, we shall need a host of them, for no one can set Him forth to perfection, each one has some deficiency, and even altogether they are insufficient to display all His loveliness. It is very pleasant to see that our Beloved is such a many-sided Christ, that from all points of view He is so admirable, and that He is supremely precious in so many different ways, for we have so many and so varied needs, and our circumstances are so continually changing, and the incessant cravings of our spirit are so constantly taking fresh turns. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 3, 4. **The eyes of them that see shall not be dim.**—*Four tests of character:*—The whole of this chapter refers to the state of the world during the time of the millennium. The happiness which shall be the lot of God's children in that period will be only an increase of our present state of happiness and holiness. Therefore this passage may be fairly taken as furnishing tests of our conversion at the present time. I. There are to be hereafter CLEAR VIEWS. If we are converted, we have clearer views than we once had. II. The second test is, THE HEARING EAR. There is a great difference in the manner in which persons listen to the Word of God. III. There will be INCREASED KNOWLEDGE. It forms part of the promise of God that His people shall be taught of Him. And what is it they are taught? They are taught to see the excellence of the person of Christ Jesus their Saviour. IV. There shall be BOLD CONFESSION OF JESUS, for "the tongue of the stammerers," &c. Can you say your character will bear these tests? (*M. Villiers, M.A.*)

Ver. 5. **The vile person shall be no more called liberal.**—*Vile person* (Heb., *nabal*):—Compare 1 Sam. xxv. (*A. B. Davidson, LL.D.*) *The conventional abuse of moral terms:*—"Liberal" and "bountiful" were conventional names. The Hebrew word for "liberal" originally meant exactly that—open-hearted, generous, magnanimous. In the East it is the character which, above all, they call princely. So, like our words "noble" and "nobility," it became a term of rank—"lord" or "prince"—and was often applied to men who were not at all great-hearted, but the very opposite: even to the "vile person." "Vile person" is literally the "faded," or the "exhausted," whether mentally or morally—the last kind of character that would be princely. The other conventional term used by Isaiah refers to wealth, rather than rank. The Hebrew for "bountiful" literally means "abundant"—a man blessed with plenty—and is used in the Old Testament both for the rich and the fortunate. Its nearest English equivalent is, perhaps, "the successful man." To this, Isaiah fitly opposes a name, wrongly rendered in our version "churl," but corrected in the margin to "crafty"—the fraudulent, the knave. When moral discrimination comes, says Isaiah, men will not apply the term "princely" to "worn-out" characters, nor grant them the social respect implied by the term. They will not call the "fraudulent" the "fortunate," nor canonise him as successful who has gotten his wealth by underhand means. "The worthless character shall no more be called princely, nor the knave hailed as the successful." But men's characters shall stand out true in their actions, and by their fruits ye shall know them. In those magic days the heart shall come to the lips, and its effects be unmistakable. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Vers. 6, 7. **For the vile person will speak villany.**—*The outer life according to the inner:*—A vile person and a churl will do mischief; and the more if he be preferred, and have power in his hand. His honours will make him worse, and not better. See the character of these base, ill-conditioned men. 1. They are always plotting some unjust thing or other; designing ill either to particular persons or to the public, and contriving how to bring it about; and so many silly piques they have to gratify, and mean revenges, that there appears not in them the least spark of generosity. Observe, there is the work of the heart, as well as the work of the hands. As thoughts are words to God, so designs are works in His account. See what pains sinners take in sin; they labour it, their hearts are intent upon it, and with a great deal of art and application they work iniquity. They devise wicked devices with all the subtlety of the old serpent. 2. They carry on their plots by trick and dissimulation. When they are meditating iniquity, they practise hypocrisy, feign themselves just men. The most abominable mischiefs shall be disguised with the most plausible pretences of devotion to God, regard to man, and concern for some common good. Those are the vilest of men that intend the worst mischief when they speak fair. 3. They speak villany. When they are in a passion, you will see what they are by the base, ill language they give to those about them, which no way becomes men of rank and honour. Or, in giving verdict or judgment, they villainously put false colours upon things to pervert justice. 4. They affront God, who is a righteous God and loveth righteousness. They utter error against the Lord, and therein they practise profaneness. They give an unjust sentence, and then profanely make use of the name of God for the ratification of it. Nothing can be more impudently done against God than to patronise wickedness with His name. 5. They abuse mankind, those particularly whom they are bound to protect and relieve. 6. These churls and vile persons have always ill instruments about them, that are ready to serve their villainous purposes—"the instruments of the churl are evil." (*M. Henry.*)

Ver. 8. **The liberal deviseth liberal things.**—*Liberality, natural and gracious:*—The liberal man is one who is generous and benevolent in his feelings—a man of large views and public spirit—one far above covetousness and self-seeking—ever desirous to promote the welfare of his country, and the best interests of his fellowmen. 1. There is a certain kind of liberality which may be considered natural and constitutional. Some there are who, from their earliest days, evince a benevolent and generous disposition. The liberality which is natural will be found to operate chiefly, if not exclusively, in promoting the temporal welfare of mankind. And in this department of philanthropy the labours of such are often entitled to highest commendation. But such rarely evince any interest about the precious undying soul, and the eternity towards which we are all so rapidly hastening. 2. The person described in the text, we may well suppose, is indebted to a higher source than himself for a mind so enlightened and a heart so enlarged. As water cannot rise higher than the fountain, so man cannot in himself develop a character higher than he has inherited. There are some feelings of natural amiability which have survived the ruin of the fall. These may, along with certain external causes, form a character in which there is much to admire and love. But just as, to borrow the words of a great writer, "all the complexional varieties of the human countenance, from exquisite beauty to revolting deformity, have the one universal attribute of decay, so, amid all the varieties of human character, from the most lovely to the most hideous, there is a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." There is a constant tendency in the world to overlook the agency of God's Spirit, and to put to the credit of something human—such as good education, or good example, or sound philosophy—what, in reality, is the fruit of the Spirit. (*W. Runciman.*) *The liberal man:*—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE LIBERAL MAN. "He deviseth liberal things." It is not said he doeth liberal things. This is implied. If he has the means, he has the heart and the will to practise large and wide liberality. There is a far greater expenditure both of mind and labour in devising, than in doing liberal things. It is an easy thing for one who has abundant wealth to give largely in aid of any scheme of philanthropy. But to originate and carry forward any plan for the improvement of mankind, requires much wisdom, and energy, and patience, and benevolence. The one is liberal; the other directs and stimulates the liberality of others. The one is as the hand, the other the

mainspring of the watch. Of the multitude who cheerfully give, how few have the capacity to devise! And one intelligent head, conjoined with a benevolent heart, can open the purses of a whole community. II. THE SECURITY OF THE LIBERAL MAN. "By liberal things shall he stand"; or, as rendered in the margin, "shall he be established." This statement does not mean that there is anything about the most enlightened and generous liberality which has anything meritorious, and which in any way is the procuring cause of God's favour. 1. The possession of this beauteous character is a clear indication of possessing God's favour, and an important means of preserving that privilege. 2. A liberal man is, by liberal things, established in the estimation of the wise and good. 3. Devotion to the good of others establishes and secures much happiness to the liberal man. The greater the outgoing of benevolence, the greater the influx of peace. (*Ibid.*) *Liberality:*—The picture drawn has a twofold aspect. I. THE INFLUENCE OF LIBERALITY. 1. The liberal man is he whose mind has been freed and enlarged by the truth of the Gospel. You cannot make a man liberal so long as a violent craving for more sways his heart; neither will a man be liberal, though he may count himself rich, if he disintegrate himself from the great community of which he is a member. We are made free indeed by the Son when we see that all things are ours, and that it is ours also to fulfil our mission as part of that all of which God is the sum and substance. 2. The liberal man is he whose mind premeditates acts of liberality—"he deviseth liberal things." There are instincts of pity and charity in human nature which may be brought into accidental action. There are moments of weakness which make the miser even to relax his hold of his hoardings. Many are terrified by the approach of death to make large bequests. There are others who are naturally tender-hearted, and they give alms most feelingly, but not from thought. There are some seasons of the year, such as Christmas-tide and harvest, when many make a small display of their charity. These are the once-a-year liberal folk. The text refers to a much higher class of liberality than such can possibly be—the liberality of thought. The goodness of God is not fitful or forced, but the outcome of His Fatherly care and providence. Liberality in thought emanates from the Spirit of Christ in us. 3. The liberal man is he whose acts are liberal. The subject is far wider than almsgiving. Our Sunday-school teachers and the leaders of religious and temperance movements; our tract distributors, and those who visit the poor, the afflicted, the dying, and the sinful—are greater benefactors than those who can spare silver and gold. Alexander gave, not according to the merit of the man, but according to the honour and resources of a king. Jesus gave. How much? Time, and energy, and wisdom, and sympathy, and power? Much more. He gave Himself. Let all yours be love-gifts. II. THE REFLEX INFLUENCE OF LIBERALITY. "And by liberal things shall he be established." There is a power in liberality which strengthens our faith and character. Whatever Christian work we engage in, the influence on ourselves is as great as on others. 1. The liberal man, by his liberality, cultivates the Spirit of Christ in himself. 2. The liberal man, by his liberality, increases the store of his wealth (Prov. xi. 24). Many Christians are poor because they are not liberal. 3. The liberal man, by his liberality, obtains the approval of God. That approval we now receive in our consciences, but hereafter the judgment will demonstrate it, when the Judge will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." 4. The liberal man, by his liberality, will conquer the hardness of the human heart. If we look forth to the mission field, liberality has been the vanguard of civilisation and religion. Or if we look nearer home, at the liberal changes which have been made in the punishment of criminals, we have ample proofs that crime has decreased in proportion as we have humanised jurisprudence. The highest note of liberality is this, "For God so loved the world," &c. (*T. Davies, M.A.*) *Liberality and its reflex advantages:*—I. THE SUBJECT, or person spoken of. II. THE PROPERTY ascribed to him. "He deviseth liberal things." 1. The act. "He deviseth"—the bent and inclination of his mind is set this way. The word may denote two things. Either—(1) Serious deliberation about it; or (2) readiness of mind to it. Such an one doth not stay till he be provoked or necessitated by others to such kinds of work. 2. The object. "Liberal things," such as become a person of a large and bountiful heart, redounding to the good of mankind. III. THE BENEFIT or advantage of it. "By liberal things shall he stand." Such persons shall not only be not ruined by their bounty, but shall hereby be confirmed and advanced in all kinds of prosperity. (*Bp. J. Wilkins.*)

The virtue of liberality:—I. THE NATURE OF THIS VIRTUE: what it is and wherein it consists. 1. The several names whereby it is described—generosity, &c. The periphrastical descriptions of it are such as these,—Opening our hands wide (Deut. xv. 8); drawing out our souls (Isa. lviii. 10); dispersing abroad (2 Cor. ix. 9); being enriched in everything to all bountifulness (2 Cor. ix. 11); to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate (1 Tim. vi. 18). 2. The nature of it. Extended to persons in a state of suffering and misery, it is styled mercy or pity. To persons in a condition of want it is styled alms or charity. 3. The qualifications or conditions required to the due exercise of it. (1) It must be done willingly, with spontaneity, with forwardness of mind (2 Cor. ix. 2). Not grudgingly, but cheerfully (ver. 7). "Thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest to thy brother" (Deut. xv. 10). (2) It must be done freely, without expecting reward. "Do good—expecting nothing again; freely you have received, freely give." He that is liberal upon design may be styled mercenary. Such kind of gifts are not benevolence, but a bargain; not a dole, but a bait. That is a remarkable place (Prov. xxii. 16), "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want." (3) It must be done readily, without delay (Prov. iii. 28). (4) Besides these several qualifications for the manner, it must likewise be done freely and liberally for the measure—according to our several abilities. 'Tis for a brother of low degree to give sparingly: they that are rich in this world must be rich in good works also. Goats' hair and badgers' skins may be a suitable gift for the people, and a mite for a poor widow; but the rich are to give purple, and gold, and jewels. And in this sense is that Scripture to be fulfilled, that "to whom much is given, of them much shall be required." 4. The opposites to it, which (as of all other moral virtues) are of two kinds—redundant, and deficient. (1) The exceeding extreme is styled prodigality, profuseness, riotousness, which observes neither the due manner nor measure in keeping or giving. (2) The deficient extreme is churlishness, tenacity, shutting up the bowels of compassion, being greedy of filthy lucre. It hath these particular characters given to it in Scripture; it is a kind of idolatry, inconsistent with religion. "No man can serve God and mammon." He that "loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him." It is the root of all evil, leading men into temptations and snares. It is hateful to men, amongst whom it will render a person vile and contemptible; and it is abominable to God (Psa. x. 3). II. THE NECESSITY OF IT, or the grounds of our obligation to it from Scripture and reason. 1. Scripture proofs. (1) The precepts for it (Deut. xv. 7, 8, 10, 11; Eccles. xi. 1; Matt. v. 42; Luke vi. 33; 1 Tim. vi. 18; Titus iii. 8). (2) The commendations of it. That which we translate "a liberal soul" (Prov. xi. 25) in the Hebrew is "the soul of blessing." As the virtue of charity is frequently celebrated for one of the most excellent amongst all the rest, and set forth by many peculiar commendations as being better than sacrifice; the fulfilling of the law; the bond of perfectness; the great commandment; the royal law: so is bounty one of the top branches of charity. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is both the evidence and the ornament of our religion. It is the chief fruit whereby we are to judge of our sincerity. Men do vainly pretend to faith and religion, without the proof of such good works. Obadiah doth urge this to the prophet as an evidence of his fearing God, that he had been careful to relieve others in distress. And the centurion was for this reason styled a man of worth. "Pure religion and undefiled," is to abound in works of this nature, "to visit the fatherless and the widow" (James i. 27). (3) The promises made to it. (4) The threats and judgments denounced upon the neglect of it. 2. The arguments from reason. (1) From equity. (*a*) In respect of God, who bestows upon us all that we have, and therefore may well expect that we should be ready to lay out some of it for His use, according to His appointment. (*b*) In respect of the poor, who by reason of their relation to us, and their need of us, may reasonably expect assistance from us. (*c*) In respect of ourselves. We can hope for nothing from God but upon the account of bounty. Now, the rules of congruity require that we should be as ready to show mercy to others as to expect it for ourselves. (2) Justice. In God's law, the not doing a kindness when we have a fitting occasion is counted injustice, and He will arraign us for the omission of such occasions. The apostle, having said (Rom. xiii. 7), "Render to all their dues," subjoins in the next verses, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another," implying that, in the Scripture sense, charity is a debt, and the not paying of it an

injustice. It is such a debt as we can never fully discharge, but though we are always paying it, yet we must still be in arrear whilst there shall remain any ability and occasion for our exercising it. (3) Advantage. "By liberal things shall he stand." III. APPLICATION. By way of—1. Doctrinal inference. 2. Practical inference. (*Ibid.*) *The advantages of liberality:*—I. FOR THIS LIFE. It is the most effectual way both to improve and preserve our estates, and to render us honourable and amiable in the esteem of others. 1. For the increasing of our estates, the apostle compares it to sowing, which refers to a harvest. 2. For the preserving them safe. The Jews call alms by the name of salt, for its preserving power. It is laying up treasures in heaven, where rust cannot corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Saith the epigrammatist, "A man can be sure only of that wealth which he hath given away." II. FOR THE FUTURE LIFE. Works of beneficence are called by St. Paul, Θεμέλιον—the foundation of that reward we shall receive in the world to come (1 Tim. vi. 19). (*Ibid.*) *Liberality:*—I. THE LIBERALITY. II. THE DEVISING. III. THE STANDING. (*J. Donne.*) *True liberality:*—I. STATE THE TRUE NOTION OF LIBERALITY. True liberality by no means intends profuseness, or a wasteful, thoughtless scattering of our substance, without judgment or economy. Neither is it consistent with the account the Scriptures give us of liberality, nor indeed with the laws of nature and reason, that a man should abound in acts of generosity to more remote objects, while he neglects those under his special care (Matt. xv. 3-6; 1 Tim. v. 4, 8; Gal. vi. 10). But it is most of all inconsistent with the liberality recommended in the Word of God, that we should give that to others which is not our own; or distribute among the poor that which should pay our just debts. 1. By a liberal man, we are to understand a man of a kind, compassionate, benevolent disposition; one who observes, with admiration and delight, that profusion of bounty with which the great Creator of the world blesses the works of His hands; is truly thankful for the share he enjoys of it; and as he sees his "heavenly Father makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust," so he is charmed with the Divine pattern, and labours, according to his measure, to imitate it. 2. But his benevolence must, according to his ability, be put in practice. 3. His charity is very diffusive; indeed, it can bear no limits but such as are prescribed by Scripture and sound reason. The stranger must partake of it as well as those of his own country and kindred. 4. To finish the character of the truly liberal man, it is necessary that his disposition and practice should be founded in religious principles, and be the blessed fruit of the saving work of the Spirit upon his heart. II. CONSIDER THAT PART OF THE LIBERAL MAN'S CHARACTER WHICH IS, IN A SPECIAL MANNER, RECOMMENDED IN THE TEXT. He "deviseth liberal things." It is commendable to have a readiness of soul to such works as these, when they are proposed and marked out to us by others. It is well to have a mind easily impressed with the condition of the indigent, and willing to submit to the dictates of conscience, the importunity of the necessitous, and the advice of good men. But the charitable character rises much higher when we devise liberal things ourselves. It supposes a heart greatly set on doing good. 1. The liberal man wisely manages his own affairs to this good end. 2. He employs all his wisdom and prudence in order to dispose of his bounty in the best manner and to the most advantageous purposes. He is so far from hiding his face from his brother who is in want, that he searches diligently to find him out. He will lay himself out in the service of every community to which he stands related, and will labour what in him lies to promote the true peace and welfare of the whole world. 3. He will also call in all proper assistance in this good work. He will consult about these things with such of his pious friends as have generous souls and good judgments. 4. The liberal man contrives how he shall diffuse and promote the spirit of liberality. 5. He persists in this course. III. SOME ACCOUNT OF THAT SUITABLE AND GRACIOUS REWARD WHICH SHALL ATTEND THE LIBERAL MAN. "By liberal things shall he stand." 1. In some good degree in this life. (1) In the opinion and regard of mankind. (2) This temper and conduct are the most likely way both to secure and enlarge our estates, as well as give us the truest enjoyment of them. (3) This conduct will certainly afford him a pleasure in his own mind that cannot easily be described. (4) What is still more valuable, he shall be supported, maintained, and established by the liberal things of Divine grace. 2. What will crown all, is the blessedness which shall follow in the life to come. (*Joseph Stennett.*) *Liberality:*—I. THE TRUE SOURCE OF LIBERALITY. II. THE

PRACTICE OF THE LIBERAL. III. THE BLESSEDNESS OF LIBERAL MEN. (*A. Brandram, M.A.*) *The Christian liberal:*—The name liberal comes from the Latin word *liberalis*, meaning free, open-handed, generous-hearted, and well-bred; it implies also a nature which acts according to its own desire, and yet is neither selfish nor narrow, being of pure mind and noble soul. 1. The genuine, Christ-inspired liberal loves freedom in the highest sense of the word. 2. He embraces other interests than his own. 3. He should be unselfish, broad, and catholic in his character. 4. To be liberal-natured after the standard of Christ is not so easy as it seems; it is the work of a life-time. (*W. Birch.*) *Saving and giving:*—He that locks up may be a good jailer, but he that gives out is His steward. The saver may be God's chest, the giver is God's right hand. (*J. Donne.*) *Devising liberal things:*—One of the most liberal and lavish givers to charitable objects said to a friend who spoke of his generosity, "You mistake: I am not generous. I am by nature extremely avaricious: but when I was a young man I had sense enough to see how mean and belittling such a passion was, and I forced myself to give. At first, I declare to you, it was hard for me to part with a penny; but I persisted until the habit of liberality was formed. There is no yoke like that of habit. Now I like to give." (*W. Baxendale.*) *A liberal heart desired:*—Sir Thomas Sutton, the founder of the Charter House, was one of the wealthiest merchants of his day. Fuller tells how he was overheard one day praying in his garden: "Lord, Thou hast given me a large and liberal estate; give me also a heart to make use of it." (*Tinling's Illustrations.*)

Ver. 9. **Rise up, ye women, that are at ease.**—*Female complacency reproved:*—Isaiah turns aside abruptly from his main theme. His eye, we may suppose, was arrested by the spectacle of some women, sitting down perhaps at a little distance from where he stood, and testifying their indifference to his words. In chap. iii. it was their vanity and love of display which called forth the prophet's censure: here it is their complacency and unconcern. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **Be troubled, ye careless ones.**—*Besetting sins may be the defects of virtues:*—The besetting sins of either sex are its virtues prostituted. A man's greatest temptations proceed from his strength; but the glory of the feminine nature is repose, and trust is the strength of the feminine character, in which very things, however, lies all the possibility of woman's degradation. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The careless sinner reproved:*—I. I am to EXPOSTULATE WITH THOSE WHO ARE CARELESS IN THE CONCERNS OF RELIGION AND THEIR SOULS. The following things are submitted to your consideration:—1. The importance of religion, which is neglected by you. 2. The beneficial proofs of the Divine agency which surround you. 3. Your personal obligations to God are neither few nor small. 4. The grand display of the love of God in giving His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, &c. 5. The certainty of judgment and a future state. II. We are now to ADDRESS THESE EXPOSTULATIONS TO THE CONSIDERATION OF YOUTH, MANHOOD, AND AGE. (*A. Shanks.*) *An alarm to the careless:*—To be careless in temporal things is generally regarded as a very serious defect or offence. How much more so when one is careless in spiritual things! Yet this is characteristic of great numbers who hear the Gospel. Is there no cause for alarm? A careless attitude and habit towards God and Christ and salvation are—1. Unreasonable. 2. Hazardous. 3. God-provoking. (*J. M. Sherwood.*)

Vers. 13-19. **Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers.**—*The outpouring of the Spirit:*—As the communication of the Spirit is necessary to produce a reformation, so a large communication or outpouring of the Spirit is necessary to produce a public general reformation; such as may save a country on the brink of ruin, or recover one already laid desolate. Without this remedy, all other applications will be ineffectual; and the distempered body politic will languish more and more, till it is at length dissolved. Until this outpouring of the Spirit, says the prophet, "briers and thorns shall come up upon the land; and the houses of joy, the palaces, and towers, shall be heaps of ruins, dens for wild beasts, and pastures for flocks." Until that blessed time come, no means can effectually repair a broken state, or repeople a desolate country. But when that blessed time comes, then what a glorious revelation—

what a happy alteration follows! (vers. 15–19). (*S. Davies, M.A.*) *The Holy Spirit in prophecy:*—I. THE BLIGHT OF SIN. It is contrasted here with the beauty of holiness; and this contrast makes the deep gloom more apparent than if it were viewed by itself. II. THE DARK OUTLOOK which Isaiah beheld. There is gloom first, and then gladness—confusion first, then comfort—darkness first, then light. Sin brings suffering and sorrow, either in this world or in the world to come. III. THE BLESSING PROMISED. In proportion as the Church prays for, and expects, and receives the more abundant outpouring of the Spirit, the work of the world's conversion will proceed apace. We speak of a Pentecostal effusion; but the Church prays and waits for a yet more abundant outpouring: and, when it comes, the glory of the latter day will be fully realised. IV. THE BRIGHT FUTURE. As the result of the pouring out of the Spirit, "the wilderness shall become a fruitful field." It has been said that this part of the prophecy is "luminous, rather than lucid; full of suffused, rather than distinct meanings." This much, however, is clear, that the good fruits of the Spirit's outpouring will be both material and moral. (*P. Mearns.*)

Vers. 15–17. **Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.**—*Spiritual influences:*—I. THERE IS PROVIDED IN CONNECTION WITH THE CHRISTIAN ECONOMY, THE BESTOWMENT OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES ON MANKIND. 1. In what manner is the Spirit poured from on high? It cannot but be expected that there must be not a little of mystery on such a subject. Yet the information we possess is distinct and important. There was a distinct communication of this influence made to the apostles, which was accompanied by immediate and visible signs. But it was intended that this Spirit should influence the hearts of men in general: an arrangement was made, in the Divine goodness, by which the Gospel should be rendered powerful and effectual to produce great moral results in the hearts and on the lives of men. We speak of this influence as common and permanent. We pretend not to state how this Spirit comes down to influence the minds of men: "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." But we do regard it as an essential principle, that the Spirit of God is poured out upon mankind; and we declare that to reject this doctrine is most perilous to the immortal soul! 2. For what purposes is the Spirit poured from on high? One effect of this influence on the minds of the apostles at first was a great and a public one; it was intended to endow them with those miraculous gifts and graces which were commensurate with the divinity of their claims—the truth of their mission—the importance of their object. But the more ordinary influences of the Spirit are still poured out, and are most important to effect the salvation of the soul. He is the Spirit of repentance—of faith—of power—of knowledge—of "wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ"—of holiness—of comfort—of love—of anticipation. 3. To what extent is the Spirit poured from on high? It is evidently the design of God that there should be a very wide extension of this influence. 4. Under what necessity is the Spirit poured from on high? Excepting it were the case that such an arrangement had been made, in the mercy of God, for changing the state of mankind, there could have been no prospect of happiness on earth, or of everlasting glory hereafter. II. THE FACTS REGARDING THE BESTOWMENT OF SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE UPON MANKIND OUGHT TO PRODUCE ON OUR MINDS THE MOST POWERFUL EFFECTS. 1. We ought carefully to ascertain whether we have the communication of this influence of the Spirit. 2. Pray that there may be an outpouring of this communication. Pray for this gift for yourselves—for your families—for the Church of God—for the world. (*James Parsons.*) *The pouring-out of the Spirit:*—Whoever has paid any serious attention to religion must be convinced of his natural weakness and inability to fulfil even his own wishes and resolutions. It is to meet this undoubted fact of man's natural inability to do the will of God that the Divine influence of the Holy Spirit was arranged and promised. I. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL. The Bible shows us our dependence on God as Creator, Preserver, and Lord. 1. On the first page we find the creation, with all its wonders, recorded. "The earth was without form, and void." But the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, and forthwith light and order proceeded, life appeared, the heavens and the earth, and all was very good. 2. Sin came and devastated the social world. The evil spirit of temptation was at work.

3. During the times of the prophets the limited range of the Spirit was felt and more favoured days proclaimed. 4. These promises were revived in the words of Christ, who more particularly entered into the offices and working of the Holy Ghost and its influence on the future Church as well as on the individual lives of Christians. On Him also the Spirit descended in a bodily form. He gives definite promises of the particular gift—promises which the disciples did not rightly apprehend. 5. In subsequent history all was made plain and clear. On the day of Pentecost was the great promise fully realised. 6. The apostles, in all their writings, enter fully into its power and influence. Do the converts need wisdom? The Father will give the Spirit of wisdom. Or, deliverance from corruption? The Spirit works in them to "will and to do" the good pleasure. The distinguishing marks of a Christian are that he "walks after the Spirit"; is "spiritually minded"; that the Spirit dwells in a man as a Spirit of adoption, confidence, and love; while the apostle glories in tribulation "because of the Holy Ghost," and prays that the disciples may be "filled with hope" by the power of the Holy Ghost. Thus we see the nature and office of the Spirit. II. ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO OURSELVES. All persons are divided into two classes. 1. Those who have no adequate apprehension of the nature or value of divine things. "The natural man receiveth not the things of God, for they are foolishness unto him." They are therefore ignorant for want of spiritual illumination. "But," continues the apostle, "God hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This reveals to us the knowledge of ourselves as ruined and lost. 2. But as there may be light without heat, so there may be knowledge without practice. The Word of God may be received with joy, but it may not take root in the soul. It is the glory of the Gospel that it not only inculcates what is right, but gives strength to perform it: it teaches what is evil, and helps to subdue that evil. All this is wrought by the Holy Ghost. (*Homilist.*) *A national Pentecost:*—I. THE NATIONAL IMPORT OF THESE WORDS. That the thought of Isaiah was national, and not individual, may easily be gathered from his opening words, and from the whole burden of his message. It is of a king he speaks, and of the effects of a righteous rule. The words of our text are especially addressed to women, and reveal the sad state of society as it was when Isaiah addressed it. There is no hope for the nation when its women are "careless daughters," and contemptible of holy things. Woman is the last bulwark of godliness. If women are lost to God, all is lost. Yet though the prophet's heart groans under the lamentable state of the women of his day, he sees a glad day coming, when the Spirit shall be so outpoured, that society will be purified. Upon the outpouring of the Spirit, three things are to take place. 1. There is to be a godly revolution. It may be silent and natural, but is to be very real. The very wilderness is to become a fruitful field. The desert is to blossom as the rose. If we study the prophecy of Joel, we see the signs are revolutionary. And no language employed by Carlyle in his *French Revolution* is more potent, more expressive. "I will show wonders in the heaven and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood." It is the re-creation of the nation that the prophet has in his mind. Ezekiel's valley of dry bones is to be re-animated. The national identity as well as the national life is to be restored. 2. There is to be an outburst of new life. The wilderness is to blossom, the fruitful field is to become a forest. Mazzini must foster a "Young Italy" to-day if he is to create a new Italy to-morrow. The Spirit generates new life. The visions of possibilities in the young, the fresh dreams of the old, all make for a new existence. 3. There is also to be a newly organised government. A king rules in righteousness. And even the wilderness, type of lawless oppression, is to be under a just government. Judgment shall rule in the wilderness. Righteousness is the basis of peace. Pascal says, "Philosophy says, know thyself. Christianity says, know thy God." That is all the difference between the maxims of the world and the new force that Pentecost created in the world. When men fall into right relationship with God, they will soon fall into right relations with one another. II. THE EFFECT OF THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY GHOST. Pentecost was only a promise, a first-fruit, a miniature fulfilment of the prophet's great words. 1. There is in our prophecy a restoration of blessing. Acquainted as Isaiah was with vast reaches of arid desert, he sees it a fruitful field. Out of death life comes, and into barrenness, fruitfulness. 2. There is to be a multiplication of blessing. That vast, dreary

stretch of desert in the East is to be as the Vale of Carmel, luxuriant and beautiful, and Carmel's valley is to be as precious as Lebanon's forest. And righteousness is to sway its sceptre over all. The effect of righteousness is to be quietness and assurance for ever. The Church of apostolic days was a beautiful miniature of still larger things, of richer spiritual results. 3. There is to be a social betterment for all. Wherever Christianity goes it uplifts the races. Unbelief may sneer at Christianity, but it still remains the greatest civilising force in the world. III. THINGS ESSENTIAL TO THE NEW ORDER. The Holy Spirit is to effect regeneration, by convicting men of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. By breathing into them a new life, and by Divine illumination. Three things are essential to a new kingdom. Power to create it, authority to govern it, a cause for its existence. Garibaldi found his cause in the degraded condition of his people. Jesus finds His cause not only in the lost condition of the human race, but also in the Father's eternal love and purpose. Christ is said to be seated at the right hand of power. That word power is the same as that from which we get dynamics. The very strength of power, a mighty force. Christ is at the right hand of Almighty power. There are certain powers in the world which we call forces; such as gravity, steam, hydraulics, liquid air, electricity. These forces operate along definite lines, just as surely as a train of railway carriages runs along the track of its lines of steel. It is said, "Whenever you obey the law of power, the law of power obeys you." Now, in fact, this is just what Peter says. The Holy Ghost is given "to them that obey Him." If the Holy Spirit is to use a man, work through and by a man, he must obey the laws of the Spirit. He must be conformed to God's will. Let me now quote to you some cases where men have been obedient to the Holy Spirit, and as a result have been filled with power from on high. In each case they have obeyed Christ's word—"Tarry ye . . . until ye be endued with power from on high." Jonathan Edwards, a quiet, strong intellect, strongly Calvinistic, whose influence in the world has been most mighty, says, "I found from time to time an inward sweetness that would carry me away in my contemplations. This I know not how to express otherwise than as a calm, sweet abstraction of the soul from all the concerns of the world, and sometimes a kind of vision of being alone on the mountains, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapped and swallowed up in God." Then there is John Flavel, who one day journeying alone, had such concentration of mind, such ravishing tastes of heavenly joys, that he utterly lost sight and sense of this world, and for some hours knew no more where he was than if a deep sleep had fallen upon him in the night. Thus we see that these men wholly consecrated to God, obeying His will, placing themselves in direct communication with the Spirit of God, leaving their whole being open to the Spirit's operations, were filled with a Divine power that is inexpressible. And may we not thus lie open to His gracious incoming, and wait daily upon God "until the Spirit be poured out upon us from on high"? IV. THE NATURE OF THE SPIRIT'S MANIFESTATIONS. The Holy Spirit's presence is seen in His conviction of the sinner. When He is among us, men realise their sinfulness, and cry unto God. (*F. James.*) *Judgment and mercy:*—Some time ago, amid a very heavy thunderstorm, I heard, between two of the heaviest peals, the carolling of a lark! It was a strange and welcome contrast. All around us the thunder was growling and roaring, but in one of the brief interludes there came this burst of bird-song. And all about this chapter one hears the growl of the threatening thunder. There is a gathering storm of judgment. The future is full of menace. And yet, in the midst of all the approaching terror, there sounds out this sweet little pæan about fruitful fields, and righteous relationships, and peaceful homes, and happy, restful days. It was ever the way of this great prophet. The hard note of judgment was alternated with the softer note of mercy. The lark's song is frequently heard amid the thunder. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The Spirit poured out:*—I. Here is A GREAT PROPHET FORESEEING THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD. That in itself would be interesting, but it is rendered doubly so by the fact that—II. HE PROCEEDS TO NAME THE RESULTS WHICH WOULD FOLLOW THE OUTPOURING (vers. 15–17). (*Ibid.*) *Results of the outpouring of the Spirit:*—Here is the problem: If the Spirit of God were to be poured out upon a nation, what would happen? 1. The unfolding of creation in accordance with the fullest design of God. "The wilderness a fruitful field," &c. Is that to be taken literally or only figuratively? Shall we interpret it as only meaning that the wilderness of meanness and niggardliness

and greed shall break into the fruitful field of benevolence and philanthropy, or shall we interpret it according to its literal meaning that nature itself shall pass into larger bounteousness and perfection? I think the literal interpretation is the right one. I think Isaiah means just what he says, that the beautifying of humanity will elicit higher beauty in the world about us. Throughout the whole book you will find this doctrine taught, that the perfection of nature is involved in the redemption of men. Nature cannot put on all the fulness of her beautiful garments until man puts on the beauty of holiness. The unfolding of one awaits the evolution of the other. Scripture affirms that nature is held in bondage. She is fettered, and unable to realise the full glory of her design, and this because of the moral and spiritual bondage of man. This is not the teaching only of the prophet Isaiah. It is apostolic teaching. Have you ever paused at that profound word of the Apostle Paul, where he says that, "the earnest expectation of creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God"? English translation does not in any degree express the extraordinary force of the figure which the apostle employs. What is the figure? It is this. Paul represents nature standing bound, "with uplifted head, scanning with longing eyes the horizon from which she looks for help, her hands stretched out to grasp and welcome the redemption into freedom and perfection which she yearns for and confidently expects." That is the figure: creation, bound and imperfect, yearning and waiting for her redemption and perfection, which is to come through redeemed man. 2. Judgment and righteousness shall dwell among them as abiding guests. Righteousness shall "dwell" there! It shall not be an occasional visitor, a spasmodic impulse, an inconstant and irregular desire. It shall dwell there as a permanent disposition. It shall not be a weak emotion. It shall be a mighty passion. When the Spirit of God is poured out upon a people, that people shall hunger for righteousness. You know how it is with mountain air. Down in the sultry valley we are sluggish and languid. We are indifferent about our food. We come to it as a custom; we take it as a task. But if we get up into the pure, strong air of the higher moorlands, our languor drops from us, and our appetite awakes, and we turn to our food with hunger, and take it with relish. 3. The creation of social peace. Put things right, and peace will come. Maladjustments always produce unrest in the physical and moral life. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 17. **And the work of righteousness shall be peace.**—*The true work of life*:—I. THE NATURE OF TRUE LIFE WORK—the work of righteousness. What is righteous work? 1. Working by right law. God has established a law to regulate all action and motion throughout His empire. What is the law by which mind is to be regulated? The will of God, not expediency. Of expediency, we are no safe, no correct judges. (1) This will is revealed in nature. But the revelation is difficult to interpret. (2) It is revealed in Christ. There it can be clearly read and easily appreciated. He embodied the great moral code. 2. Working by a right law from a right motive. A mere conformity to the letter of the law, if it could be obtained, is not righteousness. We must keep the law not from the fear of hell, or the hope of heaven, but from a predominant affection for the Lawgiver. It is noteworthy that the work of righteousness is not a work to be limited to any department of action. Righteousness must run through all personal and social relationships. II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF TRUE LIFE WORK. "Peace." This is true—1. Of individuals. 2. Of families. 3. Of churches. 4. Of nations. Conclusion—Learn the transcendent worth of the Gospel. The great object of Christ's mission was to promote righteousness. His life was a revelation of righteousness, His death a demonstration of righteousness, His whole history one great motive to righteousness. This is the supreme want of humanity. Legislation, philosophy, poets, priesthoods, civilisations, have tried to supply it and have failed. Christ alone can establish righteousness. (*Homilist.*) *Righteousness and peace*:—Peace is not a root, but a fruit. It is not the beginning of a process, but its end. It is not the summary creation of an imperial fiat; it is the matured product of the spiritual order. We cannot command peace; we can only grow it. If we would have the reapings we must attend to certain sowings. To obtain peace we must plant righteousness. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The spiritual order*:—The first bugle-peal proclaims not the advent of peace but the enthronement of right! The herald withholds the word "peace" until "righteousness" is established. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness!" That is the voice of the first trumpet, and it is only when certain great redemptions have been wrought, certain

perversities corrected, certain degraded monarchies restored, certain pure and muscular dispositions recovered, that we hear the sound of the second trumpet, "And the work of righteousness shall be peace," &c. That is the expression of the spiritual order as contained in the teaching of the Divine Word. (*Ibid.*) *Peace* is the general glow of health resulting from the inter-related life of many members, each of whom occupies his appointed place in the spiritual order, and is possessed by the spirit of equity and truth. Peace is the spirit of communion, the genius of co-operation, the cohesion of many members into one pure and indissoluble whole. Now there can be no cohesion among the unclean. Dirt is always divisive. (*Ibid.*) *Righteousness and peace*:—Before iniquity intruded King Arthur's court was whole, and the angel of peace abode in the temple. But when the iniquitous stole into the court, the rare communion was broken, and the angel of peace flew away into distant exile. (*Ibid.*) *Maladjustments* always produce unrest whether it be in the physical or the moral life. You say, "I cannot rest at night." How is that? "I have a great deal of pain." Where? "In this hand." How are you treating it? "Oh, I bathe it very frequently, and I use a little ointment." But your finger is out of joint! There is a mal-adjustment. Your finger is not where God intended it to be. Your finger will have to be set right. Physical righteousness, physical rightness must be the first step to physical rest. The truth is analogous in the moral sphere. There are mal-adjustments there, disjointings there. (*Ibid.*) *Goodness and joy*:—"Why are you singing?" a lady asked a little girl. "Oh, I don't know, unless it is because I have tried to be good to-day," was the answer.

Vers. 18, 19. **My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation.**—*The safety of believers in time of judgment*:—I. CONTEMPLATE THE COMING JUDGMENTS OF THE LORD. II. CONSIDER THE BLESSED PROMISES MADE TO HIS SEEKING PEOPLE. III. THE PERIOD WHEN THESE PROMISES SHALL HAVE THEIR FULFILMENT. Read the first verse of this chapter, and what is there stated is enough to answer all inquiries upon this head. "Behold, a king, &c." I expect this when the King of righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ, reigns. The personal improvement of this subject consists—1. In directing you to the safety of believers. 2. In considering the conduct becoming those who have so high a destiny. Watch and pray. Pray for yourselves, pray for your country. Be valiant for the truth, continue in persevering faith. (*J. Wilcox, M.A.*) *The peaceable habitation*:—I. I believe I shall not be doing justice to the prospective design of all Old Testament truth, if I do not represent to you all peace—all true moral peace—as founded in and on, not only THE ATONEMENT MADE BY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, but on the nature of that atonement. "The peaceable habitation," in which only we have "a sure dwelling," and "a quiet resting-place," is made of the wood of the Cross. II. Having said this, I must say, that no doubt "the peaceable habitation" is found in MORAL DISPOSITIONS CREATED WITHIN BY DIVINE GRACE. There is, first, the chamber of holiness. Oh, the sweet tranquillity of a holy life! This is the deep centre of peace. There is a hallowed chamber in the same palace of holy dispositions—a "quiet habitation"—resignation to the Divine will. From these chambers we climb the stairs and rise higher. Trust in God's providence—this is the observatory; and like all observatories, it is high and clear. Other observatories boast that from them you may see the stars in the day-time; but from this, you may see the sun in the night-time! A quiet habitation indeed! Scripture speaks of a "peace which passeth all understanding." The grave is a hallowed cavern, a blessed hiding-place. (*Parton Hood.*) *A quiet life*:—George Herbert, thinking of his former ambitions in the court of James I., in contrast with his quiet life of prayer and song, could write: "I now look back upon my aspiring thoughts and think myself more happy than if I had attained what I then so ambitiously thirsted for." **Quiet resting-places.**—*The Christian in temporary retirement from business*:—To speak of cessation from business, to urge retirement, will sound very strange and, perhaps, very ridiculous to some. "What," they exclaim, "sacrifice opportunities of getting money? To get what we can, and keep what we get, is our motto." But, has it ever occurred to you that you may so pursue business as to destroy the power of doing it? Besides, if thou be getting the chief good, is getting all? Is there to be no enjoyment of it? And no use of it? But, the gain on which thou hast set thine heart, and which thou thinkest it a great mistake and weakness to forego in any measure, will not last long. Does it accord with reason to let thy nature be neglected for the sake of temporary

possessions? I. LET US CONSIDER THOSE RETIREMENTS WHICH ARE INCUMBENT ON THE CHRISTIAN IN THE MIDST OF SECULAR LIFE. 1. I shall omit the compulsory, and confine myself to the voluntary; and shall treat of these in relation rather to their ends than to their seasons. (1) The first end is health. This I put on the ground of duty. If a man kill himself, or if he deprive himself of some bodily organ, we pronounce him a grave offender. Why? Because he has no right to do it. He is not his own proprietor. A man may kill himself by excessive toil and care, just as well as by poison or the knife. And if he who maims his body is a sinner, is not he who destroys the vigour and elasticity of his powers, physical or mental? There is no law more clear and indubitable than that rest is necessary to health. And if this ordinance be violated, it will tell somewhere. (2) Enjoyment is another end. We were made for happiness, for various kinds of pleasurable sensations and emotion. Benevolence must contemplate that end. Now, he who gives himself to unremitting toil cannot enjoy the gifts of providence, as it is meant he should. He may have much pleasure in the very exercise of his faculties; but there is a pleasure in the calm contemplation of the Divine bounty, in the unbending and relaxation of the soul, and in the gratification of its varied tastes by the means afforded by success, which is impossible to him. He feasts at God's table, but it is a hurried and an unquiet meal; he rests on God's pillow, but it is a dreamy and disturbed slumber. He lives wholly without, and not within. He is like one who labours only in the sun, and never seeks the calm cool shade. The bow is kept bent till its spring is lost. He obtains a portion, but does not "rejoice in it." He holds property, but does not possess it. He builds a house, but does not inhabit it. He has gorgeous apparel, but does not wear it. His connection with his lot is that of title and outward law, not of fresh and joyous interest. (3) The general cultivation of faculty is an end. Business requires and sharpens some faculties; and, in connection with other things, it may exercise a sanitary and invigorating influence upon many faculties. But when it is pursued, as it must be by him who does nothing else, it has but a limited influence for good, and a powerful influence for evil. It is well known, that the powers necessary to the greatest secular success are none of the highest, and that they may have but a small range. His only reading may be the "city article"; his only meditation, the state of the market; his only estimate, profit; his only aspiration, gain. He may have, in high perfection, the activity, the cunning, the quickness, the perseverance, which belong to many portions of the animal world, and be almost entirely destitute of the distinguishing endowments of a rational and moral being. Now, retirement from business should be sought in order that the mind be furnished and expanded with knowledge; that it be refined and elevated by literature; that noble affections be nourished by the study and contemplation of noble natures; that social sympathies be developed by intercourse; and that principles more lofty and disinterested than those which rule the world of commerce may be fed and fostered by thought and service. (4) Religion is an end of retirement. Devotional engagements have the same relation to active life that food has to exercise. The world is the place in which to exercise and apply spiritual principles, rather than the place in which to get or increase them. If exercise does strengthen, it cannot do so without truth and grace, to be obtained elsewhere. It is by the study of the book of life, by deep meditation on spiritual things, by intercourse with Christ, by earnest prayer, by severe self-examination, that we must minister to the principles and habits of holiness, that we must "exercise ourselves unto godliness." (5) Benevolent activity is an end of retirement. We may not stop at personal religion. Can it be doubted that the salvation of men would be largely promoted, if those Christians who give themselves wholly to secular life were to devote a portion of their time to good works, to intercourse with the sinful, to earnest endeavours to teach and warn them? Need I specify the family? By incessant work how is that defrauded! Need I mention the school; the neighbourhood; the Church, whose wants and spheres are neglected by the over-busy saint? 2. I must say a few words on the relations of retirement from business to business. (1) In retiring from business, do not take business with you. (2) Do not bring the spirit of business into your retirements. (3) Look at business from those points of view which are accessible only in retirement. We cannot properly estimate our pursuits, when actively engaged in them. It is often necessary to withdraw from an object in order to get a proper view of it; and we must come out of the world to see it clearly and fully. (4) Use your retirement, at least in part, with a view to your return to it. I do not mean that you should make your retirement a mere means of more

effectually prosecuting worldly pursuits. I mean that you should seek for a counteracting influence to business. It may be that you have failed in the exercise of some moral virtue, that you have wronged some brother, that some particular sensibility is in danger of being injured, that some care is becoming engrossing and benumbing; then, let your retirement be, in part, directed to this matter. II. I did intend to speak on another point, THAT RETIREMENT FROM BUSINESS WHICH CONSISTS IN A FINAL ABANDONMENT OF IT, IN A COMPLETE RESIGNATION OF ITS CONCERNS; not that which takes place at death, but that which takes place, though a voluntary act, in consequence of the obtainment of competency, on the growth of infirmities, or the influence of other circumstances. 1. This retirement may be a duty. It may be a duty in order that you may give place to others. It is a selfish thing for a man to go on getting as much as he can, simply because he can. But the duty becomes still plainer when considered in relation to a man's own well-being. If God has prospered secular diligence so that there is enough and to spare, it is a loud call to modes of activity and service that are impossible, to any great extent, in the heat and absorption of worldly pursuits. 2. When a Christian has retired from business, he should form some settled plan of life. (*A. J. Morris.*) "*Nothing to do!*"—I know that many find retirement a burden and a snare, and that many have returned to business after having left it, because they were oppressed by having nothing to do. But what a condemnation is this of their past life; what a rebuke of their treatment of the immortal mind! Nothing to do; and yet living in a world of mysteries! Nothing to do; and yet surrounded with the images and works of God! Nothing to do; and yet belonging to a race which has seen six thousand years, and to a system of redemption which has been a Divine gift and power for nearly two! Nothing to do; and yet the works of countless mighty dead extant, and full of glorious things and thoughts! Nothing to do; and yet possessing a nature which is the reflection of Deity, and the heir of immortality! Nothing to do; and yet the world in its sin and suffering calling for the utmost tenderness of human compassion, and the utmost activity of human energy. He who pleads that he has nothing to do after business is abandoned, what has he been doing in the long years devoted to its pursuits? (*Ibid.*) *Quiet resting-places*:—It is impossible to doubt that the prophet, now and again, in describing those nearer scenes obtains and reveals glimpses of a higher glory, and refreshes his readers and himself with anticipations of Messiah's times. The closing verses of the chapter are full of the Gospel, penetrated with the very spirit of evangelical peace. "My people" seems to make the promise general, and to hold it out to us sealed with the "yea and amen" which is attached to every promise of God. "Shall dwell" seems to import some settled order of Divine procedure. If Solomon said in his day, "all things are full of labour," what would he say in ours? How fierce and keen are the conflicts of life! Where shall rest be found? Only in some of those quiet resting-places which God makes and keeps for His pilgrim people. They have soul-quietness for city strife. I. THE EVENING. A sacred time even in Eden was "the cool of the day." Isaac went out into the field to meditate "at eventide." Jesus often left His disciples about sundown, and wandered up among the Syrian hills to find some sequestered spot where He might feel himself alone in the full presence of God. The breeze that fanned the leaves of Paradise will touch our cheek, and make coolness at the close of our day, if we will but cease from care and sin. We read in the Scriptures that day and night are the "ordinances" of God. Can anyone suppose that He has established them for only material ends? Surely a higher end is found in the trial, nurture, and purification of souls. To a devout soul the evening is like "the secret place of the Most High." It is "the shadow of the Almighty." It is a closet of which God builds the walls and shuts to the door. Think, then, as the evening comes round—for thought is the soul's rest—of the day that is gone with gratitude, for every hour of it has been overflowing with the goodness of God; with penitence, for you will easily discover that it has been a day of shortcomings and sins; with wisdom, aiming to understand it better than when you lived it; with tenderness and holy fear, as feeling how good and how grand a thing it is to be permitted to live on, and to hope to live better. Think of to-morrow which will come so soon, with its unknown and yet probable events—of the task that will await you then; of the persons who will be around you, of their words, their looks, their influence; of the peril you will have to brave; of the weakness you will feel; of the strength you will need; of the failure you fear, that by your thought and prayer it may be the less likely to come; and of the goodness which will certainly enrich and crown to-morrow

as it has filled and now closes to-day. Think of the evening of life itself. Think any such thoughts with prayer and faith, and your soul must be lifted at least somewhat above the dust and drudgery of this vexing and down-dragging world. II. THE SABBATH. In the beginning God rested from His work, and blessed and hallowed the day for all time, and never has there been a Sabbath on earth in which men have not been entering into the very rest of God. III. THE PROVIDENTIAL CHANGE may be of such a character as to lead us at once into a "quiet resting-place." It may be a change of locality, or of occupation, or of condition. Any considerable providential change has something of the same character. An infant is born, and in his first sleep sheds through the house something of the solemnity of being. A child is "recovered of his sickness," in which the little pilgrim seemed to be wandering away from all your care and love. A son has gone out to a foreign land. A daughter has been married. Anything that breaks the continuity, that alters the relationships, that makes a pause in life—an open space in the forest of its toils and cares—anything of that kind is God's voice, saying, "Here is relief for you. Enter this quiet resting-place which My hand has made." Or, let the change be from health to sickness, then the "quiet resting-place" is made in the retirement of the chamber, or the "stillness" of the bed. IV. THE GRAVE. "There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master. There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest." It is not our mere human fancy that invests the burial-place of the Christian dead with such a sacred charm, that wraps it as in the peace and silence of God. It is Christ who thus hallows the grave. He has been a sleeper there; He has taken the harshness, the disquietude, the terror away. V. HEAVEN is the quietest resting-place of all. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *God's thoughtful loving-kindness:*—In eastern countries, where the habit of hospitality is stronger than with us, the traveller is sometimes surprised and regaled by much-needed but unexpected wayside comforts. Yonder husbandman who is now a-field at his work was here in the early morning to leave by the wayside that pitcher of water that the passing traveller might drink. This clump of trees which makes a thick and welcome "shadow from the heat," was planted by one who expected neither fame nor money for his toil, and who now lies in a nameless grave. Hands now mouldering in dust scooped out this cool seat in the rock. Some "Father Jacob gave us this well after drinking thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle." Travellers from the west are much affected by such instances of pure humanity and unselfish kindness. And yet these are but feeble types, mere dim shadows of Divine thoughtfulness and care. The heavenly benefactor comes down in preventing loving-kindness upon the earthly pathway of His people. (*Ibid.*) *True rest in persons; specially in God:*—We need one great complemental truth—we do not find our true rest in places at all, but only in persons. The living soul must have a living portion. What were the fairest prospect if a man were condemned to behold it for ever alone? What even the higher things of this human life, the duties, and the interests, and the struggles, if there were not intermingled with them all a sense of the nearness of other human beings, and if there were not the continual reciprocal action of those affections and sympathies which make life so sacred and dear? But no human being, no assemblage of human beings, can meet the wants and fulfil the longings of even one human soul. Your heart is waiting, and aching while it waits, for an infinite sympathy, for an everlasting strength, for a grace that will cancel sin and restore purity, in one word, for the love of God; for the love of God in Christ. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 20. **Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.**—*Times of peace should be improved:*—The war is now over; Asher has been crushed like a serpent, and this sweet voice is heard when the enemy has been driven out of the land. Understand that times of peace are to be times of cultivation. We are not to be great only in war. (*Jos. Parker, D.D.*) *Moral cultivation:*—The allusion in this verse is supposed by some to be to pasturage, by others to tillage. Lowth follows Chardin in applying the words to the practice of treading the ground by the feet of cattle before planting rice; Henderson to the act of setting them at liberty from the rope with which they were tied by the foot. Knobel understands the verse as contrasting the condition of those who lived at liberty, on the seaside or by rivers, with theirs who were pent up and besieged in cities. Hitzig supposes a particular allusion to the case of those who had escaped with

their possessions from Jerusalem. Hendewerk applies the verse to the happy external condition of the people in the days of the Messiah. Henderson says it beautifully exhibits the free and unrestrained exertions of the apostles and other missionaries in sowing the seed of the kingdom in every part of the world. Ewald explains it exclusively of moral cultivation, as implying that none can expect to reap good without diligently sowing it. Of all these explanations the last may be considered as approaching nearest to the truth, because it requires least to be supplied by the imagination. Taking the whole connection into view, the meaning of this last verse seems to be, that as great revolutions are to be expected, arising wholly or in part from moral causes, they alone are safe, for the present and the future, who with patient assiduity perform what is required; and provide, by the discharge of actual duty, for contingencies which can neither be escaped, nor provided for in any other manner. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Missionary operations in the Christian dispensation:*—It has been granted to Isaiah to look into the future, and he foresaw the call of the Gentiles and the Christian dispensation. There he beheld the messengers of the Lord receiving their commission, "Go ye and teach all nations"; and he pronounced them to be blessed as compared with himself, sent to a single people, rebellious and gainsaying. This he expresses in metaphorical language, and by reference to a process of husbandry, or to the manner of sowing grain, particularly rice, which still prevails in Eastern countries, and with which the Israelites were familiar. The mode of proceeding is thus described:—The sowers cast their seed upon the waters, when, by the swelling of the river, the waters cover the land. Beasts of burden are employed to tread down the mud or slime, to render it capable of receiving the seed as it sinks. (*W. F. Hook, D.D.*) *Sowing beside all waters:*—There is spiritual seed to be sown. It is to be sown by the side of all waters. It is, however, sown in vain, unless the moral soil be cultivated in which it is designed to take root. I. THE NATURE OF THE SEED WE HAVE TO SOW. Our Lord and Master, when explaining the parable of the Sower and the seed to His disciples, saith, "the seed is the Word of God." 1. The ministers of Christ are the sowers of the seed. 2. But they are not so exclusively. To sow the seed is in some measure the duty of all who name the name of Christ; of the parent especially to his child, and of every Christian in his daily conversation and walk. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF WATCHING THE TIMES, AND OF AVAILING OURSELVES OF THE OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDENTIALLY OPENED TO US, FOR SOWING THE SEED. In every nation, and in every clime, it is indeed as much the farmer's duty to watch the seasons as it is to sow the seed. And in spiritual husbandry, this it is that distinguishes the sober-minded Christian from the mere fanatic. But this is not the only lesson that we are to deduce from our text. We are to sow beside all waters. III. THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE SOWING OF IT RESULTS IN A MORAL, SPIRITUAL, AND HEAVENLY HARVEST. God requires the spiritual seed to be sown; He requires the spiritual seed to take root in the heart, before the harvest of grace can be realised, or the fruit be produced. It is by meditation that we tread down the seed into the heart and soul. (*Ibid.*) *The blessedness of communicating the privileges of the Gospel to others:*—I. Blessed are they in this work; for in acting thus THEY ARE INSTRUMENTS OF GOD'S MERCY TO MEN. II. Blessed are they, IN REFERENCE TO THE STATE OF RELIGION WITHIN THEMSELVES. III. May we not add, as another ground of blessedness, THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO ARE BROUGHT TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SAVIOUR BY MISSIONARY EFFORTS? (*H. Raikes, M.A.*) *The work of the evangel:*—I. It is a SOWING WORK. Of all mere human works, this is—1. The most Divine. The seed, the soil, are all of God. 2. The most righteous. Statesmen, merchants, warriors, may question the rectitude of their work, but the agriculturist has no reason to doubt. 3. The most useful. The farmer feeds the world. 4. The most believing. The man who commits the precious grain to the earth has strong faith in the laws of nature. II. It is a BLESSED WORK. "Blessed is he." 1. He is blessed by the gratitude of society. All are indebted to his services. 2. He is blessed with the approval of his own conscience. He feels that in sowing he is doing his duty. 3. He is blessed by the smiles of his God. III. It is an UNRESTRICTED WORK. "All waters." The meaning is, all well-watered places. The word "beside" would be better translated "upon." Scatter seed upon all suitable spots. The evangel has unlimited scope for his operations. His field of labour is the world, and he is commanded to be instant in season and out of season. (*Homilist.*) *The blessedness of sowing beside all waters;*—

I. They who wish to be useful should never forget the many favourable opportunities for sowing good seed on THE CLEAR AND UNRUFFLED WATERS OF CHILDHOOD. II. Another opportunity for scattering precious seed is on THE TROUBLED WATERS OF STRIFE. III. Another opportunity is upon THE STAGNANT AND MUDDY WATERS OF DOUBT AND UNBELIEF. IV. If we are really anxious to do good in our day and generation, there will be times when WORDS OF COMFORT MAY BE SPOKEN TO BEWILDERED SOULS ABOUT TO EMBARK UPON "THE NARROW SEA" WHICH DIVIDES THIS WORLD FROM THE NEXT. (*J. N. Norton.*) *Sowing beside all waters*:—1. Here is an assertion of that universal law that operates in the whole domain of human life—the law of consequent following precedent, of effect being the child of cause, of our sowing determining our reaping, of our character and conduct evolving our destiny. 2. "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters." Why? Not because the sowing is itself an absolute benediction. Oftentimes it is attended with a great deal of pain, and labour, and anxiety, and sacrifice. It is the casting away of that which is in itself of great value. The sowing is blessed because it is a prophecy of the increase of that which we sow, the promise of the reward of our labour and our sacrifice. 3. We are very apt to say, "I shall attain this and that, acquire this and that by the goodness of God." We do well to say this. But we must not forget that the mercy and goodness of God alone will do nothing for us. It is God's mercy and goodness, *plus* our own will, energy, and conduct, that will determine our destiny, and evolve our circumstances, and ripen our harvests. 4. The skill of the farmer lies in his knowledge of the relation of his seed to the soil, to the season, and the atmosphere, and the conditions of the growth and development of the seed. The highest wisdom of life is the knowledge of the relation of conduct to character, and of character to destiny: the perception of the conditions under which life's highest elements are perfected and its fruit-bearing qualities ripened. That is the mystic meaning of the benediction of my text: there is the secret of the blessedness of every sower. 5. Do we know what God's purpose in our life is? Along what lines would He have us develop? What does He wish human life to be? I would answer these questions first, and then show how the working of the human with the Divine fulfils the purposes and plans of God. I do not think that He wants us to go hungry or poorly clad in the biting cold; I do not think that we are fulfilling His purpose when we sigh over accidents that are traceable to human causes. It is anything but piety to sit down in poverty, rags, and dirt, and say, "The will of the Lord be done." His will is our well-being—body, soul, and spirit. I want to point out what lines of conduct will contribute to the forming of such a character and the developing of such circumstances as God approves. I. I would speak of ACTIVITY as fruit-bearing seed that ripens into a harvest of blessedness. I do not mean busyness in any realm of life that may present itself. What I mean is activity in righteous pursuits, in holy ambitions, in legitimate callings; activity in things that pertain to human improvement, human comfort and well-being; things that belong to the many phases of life's wondrous economy; things that tend to the uplifting of human lives, to the amelioration of human woes, to the lightening of human burdens, to the redeeming of human souls from tyranny, falsehood, and wrong. II. The next fruit-bearing quality of which I would speak is LEARNING. There is a trite old saying, "Never too late to learn," which in most lives has little or no practical application. Do not let learning end at the schoolroom. Set yourself some task to learn that shall explain some of the mysteries of life to you. Go apart from the "madding crowd's ignoble strife," and there open the windows of your mind, till that "light which never was on sea or land" shall flood it and make it luminous as with the sunshine of God. Every task you set yourself to learn, and learn it; every mystery that you make plain to yourself by processes of reasoning and study; every new fact that you gain by search and research in the domain of knowledge will not only make you wiser, but better; and, perhaps, after much pain and labour, you shall find the task ripening into a harvest that shall make the autumn of life golden. III. I would mention also THE PRESERVATION OF HEALTH as that which will bear abundant fruitage in our happiness and well-being. "A sound mind in a sound body" is doubtless God's will concerning us. And towards attaining that we can do more for ourselves than all the physicians in the world can do for us. Blessed is every man that sows his life's seeds in fertile places; he is promoting the Divine economy, he is carrying out the purposes of God on earth. (*W. J. Hocking.*)

Sowing beside all waters :—I. THE CHARACTERS HERE DESCRIBED. Sowers. A sower implies seed. There is only one granary in which the living seed of the kingdom is treasured, namely, the Bible. 1. The true spiritual sower, having first of all received himself the seed, will manifest a real love for the work. He will go forth willingly, conscientiously, and lovingly, to scatter broadcast the precious treasure, not merely on well-cultivated patches of human soil, but "beside all waters," finding very often his chiefest joy in sowing the unlikeliest patches. 2. The true, spiritual sower will also have faith in his work. 3. He will not only have faith in the seed, but also in the soil. The farmer who does not believe the soil capable of producing fruit will certainly not waste time in its cultivation. If we did not believe that between every human heart and the Gospel seed there was such affinity that it could not help taking root therein, we should most certainly give up our toil. 4. The true, spiritual sower will often encounter difficulties in his work. 5. The spiritual sower is earth's truest philanthropist. II. OUR SPHERE OF OPERATION. "Beside all waters." Wherever there is a solitary spot capable of receiving the good and living seed—whether at home or abroad, in dens of squalor or palaces of luxury and ease, in the crowded city or the rural village—we are commanded to go and plant it there. III. THE BENEDICTION HERE PRONOUNCED. "Blessed are they that sow beside all waters." 1. The work itself is its own reward. 2. The spiritual sower enjoys the benediction of others. 3. He has the smile and benediction of Him in whose service he is engaged. (*J. W. Atkinson.*) *Sowing beside all waters* :—Isaiah ever had an eye to the golden age. In view of the successful issue of the coming struggle, he intimates the wisdom of going on with seed sowing. They are blessed who are not hindered by fear. May we not learn the wisdom of hopefulness? The man who believes in Divine faithfulness has every reason to be an optimist. This subject is capable of application in various ways. The optimism of Isaiah, Christ, Paul, and John needs cultivation. 1. Those who give any thought to the social problems of the age are met by many difficulties and discouragements. So much want to be relieved, so many wrongs to be righted. Pessimism says, "Society is going to the dogs; let it go." Optimism says, "I'll save it if I can." Present social inequalities and woes should not make us hopeless. Jehovah was more mighty than Sennacherib. He is more mighty than all the forces arrayed against true liberty. Having faith in God we may sow the seeds of social reform. 2. In evangelistic and missionary work a spirit of optimism is essential. With Divine promises of power and blessing we may hopefully sow. Concerning foreign missions, Pessimism says, "It is a waste of life, money, energy"; but the man whose faith in God is strong, points to the golden age when all shall know the Lord. 3. Considering our own life and experience this same hopefulness is essential. Is life worth living? Yes, if for no other reason because in it we may sow for a golden harvest. (*T. S. Williams, M.A.*) *Selfishness in service* :—Some one tells of a physician, who, at the beginning of his career, made a resolution that he would undertake no cases but those with which he was certain he could succeed. While this would mean the loss of a good deal of money, he shrewdly calculated on getting it back a hundredfold in the reputation of skill which such a course would bring him. The idea is wholly selfish. He preferred to let men, whom he might possibly have saved, die, rather than run the risk of having the brightness of his reputation dimmed. (*Christian Endeavour.*) *Usefulness!*—Is there a word in our language which expresses more than that? What images of the good, the devoted, and the self-sacrificing does it not bring up vividly before us! We see Thomas Cranfield, the tailor, labouring among the bricklayers in the cause of Sunday schools; John Pounds, the cobbler, who founded ragged schools; Sarah Martin, the dressmaker of Yarmouth, the devoted visitor to the workhouse and the jail; and Thomas Dakin, the Greenwich pensioner and distributor of tracts. Among these, in the higher walks of life, we recognise Howard, the philanthropist, over whose grave, in Russia, was engraved the motto which kings might envy, "He lived for others"; Clarkson, Wilberforce, and a host of honoured statesmen; the Thorntons, and a multitude of other merchant princes; Washington and Wellington, and Havelock and Scott, who, while they were leaders in the armies of this world, were proud to be humble privates in the armies of the Lord of hosts. (*J. N. Norton.*) *Where shall we sow?*—"Beside all waters." Some waters are clear and sparkling, and the murmur of their ripple gladdens the ear, sow there, of course. But there are turbid, angry waters, fouled and polluted, sow beside them also. Into

the bright, sunny, prattling lives of the little ones cast the precious seed, but also, all the more lovingly and skilfully, when the swollen torrents of sin rush past. God is able to make it grow and take root there; and also beside the stagnant pools of stolid atheism. "Thou canst not tell whether shall prosper, either this or that." (*O. Soltau.*) *The catechism* :—Many striking incidents are related of good "Father Nash," one of the early heralds of the Cross in the more destitute and neglected regions of the "Diocese of New York," who has been made to figure with such effect in Fenimore Cooper's famous romance, *The Pioneers*. On a certain occasion, when a number of clergymen were assembled for some purpose, and conversation began to flag, one of them, who was almost too diligent a farmer for the good of the Church, entertained the company with an account of his agricultural operations, and, among other things, of his successful management of sheep. Father Nash, whose whole heart was devoted to his Heavenly Master's work, felt little interest in all this, and when the enthusiastic farmer-pastor turned to him and asked, "What do you feed your lambs with?" the worthy missionary could not resist the temptation of administering a mild rebuke, and answered—"With Catechism!" (*J. N. Norton.*) *Tact in seed-sowing* :—A young friend was invited to spend the evening with Dr. and Mrs. Horace Bushnell. She was a girl of fine intelligence and character, but not at that time religious. When, therefore, she was invited to tea by Mrs. Bushnell, she accepted with considerable misgiving, lest the evening should be made the occasion of such exhortations as were then too commonly the only subject of ministerial intercourse with the unconverted. To her great relief, however, the time was spent in the pleasantest social intercourse, free from all remarks of a personal nature. Dr. B., of course, saw her safely home when the evening was over, and as the night was one of brilliant starlight, the talk on the way was naturally of astronomy, and of the law-abiding order of the universe. He spoke eloquently of the great harmony of the spheres, and of the perfect manner in which each little star fulfilled its destiny, and swung in the Divine order of its orbit. "Sarah," he said, turning to her with a winning smile, "I want to see you in your place." No other word turned the suggestion into a homily, and her quick intelligence was thrilled and won by a thought which seemed in that quiet hour to have dropped upon her from the skies. He had simply let the occasion speak its own thought. (*Dr. Bushnell's Life.*)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VER. 1. **Woe to thee that spoilest.**—*Isaiah xxxiii.* :—The most beautiful of Isaiah's discourse [in which] the long conflict of Israel's sin with Jehovah's righteousness is left behind, and the dark colours of present and past distress serve only as a foil to the assured felicity that is ready to dawn on Jehovah's land. (*W. Robertson Smith, D.D.*) *Treacherous Assyria* :—The course of Assyria was that of a treacherous dealer—no confidence whatever could be reposed in this people. They were born to spoil, and the moment they ceased spoiling they would be spoiled in turn. (*B. Blake, B.D.*) *Aggravated sin* :—The less provocation we have from men to do an ill thing, the more provocation we give to God by it. (*M. Henry.*)

VER. 2. **O Lord, be gracious unto us.**—*An appropriate prayer* :—They pray—1. For those that were employed in military services for them. "Be Thou their arm every morning." In our spiritual warfare our own hands are not sufficient for us, nor can we bring anything to pass unless God not only strengthen our arms (Gen. xlix. 24), but be Himself our arm. If God leave us to ourselves any morning we are undone; we must, therefore, every morning commit ourselves to Him, and go forth in His strength to do the work of the day in its day. 2. For the body of the people. "Be Thou our salvation," &c.,—ours that sit still, and do not venture into the high places of the field. (*M. Henry.*)

VER. 6. **Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times.**—*The advantages of Sunday Schools* :—I. THE VALUABLE INSTRUCTION IN THE ART OF

READING WHICH THEY HAVE IMPARTED TO MANY WHO COULD NOT OTHERWISE HAVE ATTAINED IT. II. THEY HAVE BEEN EMINENTLY USEFUL IN PROMOTING THE CIVILISATION OF THE INFERIOR ORDERS, AND IN PROVIDING A POWERFUL AND EFFECTUAL ANTIDOTE TO PAUPERISM AND MENDICITY. III. THEY HAVE BEEN EXCEEDINGLY BENEFICIAL IN PRESERVING THE YOUNG FROM MANY CRIMES WHICH ARE DESTRUCTIVE OF THE PEACE AND ORDER OF SOCIETY. IV. The higher and more important effects which have resulted from these schools, IN PROMOTING A SPIRIT OF PIETY AND VIRTUE AMONG THEIR YOUTHFUL PUPILS. (*J. Brown, D.D.*) *Christianity promotive of knowledge and of social well-being* :—The general principle is, that wisdom or practical religion and knowledge are the best elements of the stability of any people,—the best defence of any nation,—and that irrespective of the difference between a nation under the ordinary providence of God, and one enjoying a theocracy. I. CHRISTIANITY PROMOTES WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE. That Christianity promotes wisdom and knowledge we might conclude from facts which lie on the face of it, even before ascertaining the connection between the cause and the effect. We may assume Jesus Christ to be the living type of His own system, and He is the very impersonation of wisdom and knowledge. Then, wisdom and knowledge may be regarded as synonymous with practical Christianity. They are at least essential to its existence. We shall take them separately, and ascertain—1. How the Gospel of Christ promotes wisdom, or that practical religion of which the fear and love of God are the principles. The God whom the Bible reveals is the fit object of reverence and love. The mere manifestation of the Divine character, however, invested with every possible perfection, is not enough to rekindle the flame of piety in a fallen world. It is otherwise with holy beings. But in our case the revelation is made to a race of apostates, partially acquainted with God, but estranged from Him in heart and will. Christianity provides, in the great facts through which it conveys the knowledge of God, the means of reducing men to contrition and restoring them to love. The Gospel is adapted to convert the soul. Any scheme whereby you would regenerate must contain a provision of mercy. And thus far the Gospel is adapted to produce practical piety. But this is not enough. The Gospel reveals a most glorious expedient for the vindication of the law, for the manifestation of the Divine righteousness, and of the demerit of sin, while it offers a free and eternal pardon. It opens the door of hope to the guiltiest criminal, but by the mode of doing it, it impresses his mind with a sense of his sinfulness, it moves him to repentance, and inspires him with all the zeal to obey that can arise from his conscious obligation to Divine grace. 2. Christianity promotes knowledge. Christianity contains the only true system of Divine knowledge. But further, Christianity promotes general knowledge. It is itself a system of truth and not of error, a system of knowledge and not of ignorance, a system of intelligence and not a mere bodily ceremonial or a dark superstition. The very commission it has received from heaven is, "Go and teach all nations." Revealing God, it makes known the highest truths; and promotes and facilitates inquiry into every other. From this conviction we deduce principles which seem to possess all the simplicity of axioms. There cannot be any real contrariety between the doctrines of Christianity and the truths of reason or the facts of science. II. BY PROMOTING WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE, CHRISTIANITY ESTABLISHES A PEOPLE. In support of the proposition before us, we might reason *a fortiori*. Christianity, by promoting wisdom and knowledge, purifies and elevates society,—how much more will it establish or give the elements of perpetuity to society. Take society in any of its lowest states, and you will find Christianity an adequate power to raise it. For example, it is an acknowledged fact, that the Gospel makes men unfit for a state of slavery. If Christianity thus elevates, how much more will it establish! But what are the means of the stability of a nation—what the elements of perpetuity? Religion, virtue, freedom, and good order. (*J. Kennedy.*) *National security and peace* :—I. TRUE PRACTICAL RELIGION PROHIBITS WHAT WOULD ENDANGER NATIONAL SECURITY AND PEACE. II. WHILE RELIGION DISCOUNTENANCES WHAT WOULD BE PERNICIOUS IN PUBLIC LIFE, IT PROVIDES ALSO WHAT, IN OTHER RESPECTS, IS NECESSARY AND SALUTARY. III. It is drawn from OBSERVATION AND EXPERIENCE. No argument is more valid or conclusive in confirmation of a fact. A single well-conducted experiment in philosophy may demonstrate the truth of a general principle; and, similarly, in morals and religion, the experience of a single nation, or the uniform experience of the ages, may attest the inutility or value of any

particular theory or scheme. (*T. S. Cartwright.*) *Christian knowledge the source of other excellent knowledge*:—As Christianity introduced religious light, so did that light become the parent of every other kind of useful and excellent knowledge. When once the powers of the human mind are brought into acquaintance with evangelical truth, they acquire vigour, a strength and expansion in their exercise before unknown. And hence it is that the knowledge which the revealed truth of God communicates will be found in all ages to produce that discipline of mind which ministers so much to its strength, and places it in the most favourable circumstances for the discovery and acquisition of truth generally. So little opposition, in fact, is there between Christianity and true science, that all the most important discoveries of a scientific nature, all the knowledge whence nations derive power and refinement, have occurred in Christian nations, and Christian nations only. (*R. Watson.*) *The importance of religious knowledge*:—There appears no real connection between mere scientific knowledge and moral influence; the opinion that such a connection exists is false in its foundations and injurious in practice. No moral influence is exerted, except by the truths revealed to us in the Scriptures. I. I AM TO MAKE AN APPEAL TO THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE, in support of the proposition that we have no right to expect any moral improvement from the influence of any kind of knowledge except that of Divine truth. It ought to be stated, that this sacred Book is altogether in favour of the cultivation of all useful knowledge, and its general circulation through society. 1. We turn to the Old Testament. We are there expressly required to view religion as wisdom. "Wisdom," we are told, "is the principal thing"; and it is urged upon us that we "get wisdom," yea, that "with all our getting, we get understanding." When the attainment of wisdom is thus inculcated and enjoined, we may well inquire, "What kind of wisdom is it to which so many moral effects are ascribed?" It is not to scientific wisdom, but to moral wisdom: to the knowledge of God and His will; to the knowledge of our own obligations and duties; to the knowledge which applies to man as an accountable creature, destined to a future judgment; to the knowledge of the way in which man, as a sinner, may find pardon, and peace, and holiness from God, whom he has offended. All this is included in the scriptural idea of wisdom; and it is to this only that moral results are ascribed. 2. We find the same sentiment in the New Testament. Jesus Christ never drops a word from which it might be gathered that mere knowledge, knowledge of any and every kind, is sufficient to exert a moral influence on the mind and character. On the contrary, there are passages in which He represents it as operating to the hindrance of salvation. So that solemn declaration in Matthew: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." So in the writings of the Apostles. The Gospel, which gives moral knowledge, they declare to be "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth"; while of the wisdom of the world, so long tried among the heathen, they only declare, that "the world by wisdom knew not God." When St. Paul points to the injurious effects of "philosophy and vain deceit," he tells us that he means that which is "after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of this world, and not after Christ." Such philosophy could not be depended upon to conquer a single vice, or implant a single principle of virtue, and therefore he pronounces it to be but vain deceit, empty and powerless. II. Let us now consider THE MANNER BY WHICH RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE OPERATES TO PRODUCE THESE MORAL RESULTS. That such results are produced will appear—1. From the truths which it presents to the mind; God, &c. 2. The law of God presents a standard of duty, binding on the conscience; for there can be no authoritative standard of right and wrong except by revelation from God Himself, the supreme Lawgiver. 3. We have appealed to the Scriptures. Now, these assure us that, along with the truth of God, there goes an accompanying influence; the words that are spoken to you are "spirit and life." This is because the illuminations of the Holy Ghost go along with them. III. BY NO OTHER SPECIES OF KNOWLEDGE THAN THAT WHICH WE HAVE BEEN CONSIDERING CAN THIS MORAL INFLUENCE BE EXERTED. 1. Though many seem to take for granted that, if we circulate knowledge, we improve society, it is nevertheless true that there are many kinds of knowledge which do not contribute to the improvement of morals. 2. All experience is against the supposition I am combating. 3. But let us even suppose that morals are taught. What then? I am aware that there are often some moral instructions added to systems of education; some moral precepts in which

all will agree are, perhaps, even selected from the Book of God; still, if this Book be true, even such teaching must fail. This Book has its doctrines and promises, as well as its moral precepts; and its morals are connected most intimately both with its doctrines and promises. Man must be taught not only what is right, but why it is right; and he must be shown that he is bound to do it. The term "duty" refers not merely to the action which is to be done, but to the obligation to do it. Take, then, the morality of the Bible away from that with which God has connected it, and you make it powerless. (*Ibid.*) *The education of the poor* :—We seem to have here something like a prophetic sanction for the propagation of knowledge Isaiah, in speaking of the future prosperity of the Jewish empire, rests the stability of its fortunes, not upon wealth, nor extensive dominion, but directly upon knowledge. 1. The most common objection to the education of the lower orders of the community is, that the poor, proud of the distinction of learning, will not submit to the performance of those lower offices of life which are necessary to the well-being of a State. Our poorer brethren do not toil because they are ignorant; neither would they cease to toil because they were instructed; the fabric of human happiness God has placed upon much stronger foundations; they labour, because they cannot live without labour; this has ever been sufficient to stimulate, and to continue the energy of man, and will, and must ever stimulate it, and secure its continuance, while heaven and earth remain. 2. The next objection urged against the education of the poor is, that the most ignorant poor, in country villages, are the best; and that the poor of large towns, as they gain in intelligence, lose in character, and become corrupt as they become knowing; but the country poor, it should be remembered, are the fewest in number; they are not exposed to all those innumerable temptations which corrupt the populace of large towns; this, and not their ignorance, is the cause of their superior decency in morals and religion. 3. In considering the effects of educating the poor, we must not merely dwell upon the power, but upon the tendency which we have created to use that power aright; not merely ask if it is a good thing for the poor to read, but to read such books as are full of wise and useful advice. A mere instrument for acquiring knowledge may be used with equal success, either for a good or a bad purpose; but education never gives the instrument without teaching the proper method of using it, and without inspiring a strong desire to use it in that manner. 4. Education may easily be made to supply, hereafter, the most innocent source of amusement, and to lessen those vices which proceed from want of interesting occupation; it subdues ferocity, by raising up an admiration for something besides brutal strength, and brutal courage. 5. We must remember, in this question, that all experience is in our favour. 6. There are many methods in which a community is considerably benefited by the education of its poor; a human being who is educated is, for many purposes of commerce, a much more useful and convenient instrument; and the advantage to be derived from the universal diffusion of this power is not to be overlooked in a discussion of this nature. 7. I would ask those who place such confidence in the benefits of ignorance, how far they would choose to carry these benefits? for, if the safety of a State depends upon its ignorance, then, the more ignorance the more safety. (*S. Smith, M.A.*) *Education* is the chief defence of nations. (*Edmund Burke.*) *Education* :—The schoolmaster is abroad! I trust more to him, armed with his primer, than I do to the soldier in full military array, for the upholding and extending the liberties of his country. (*Lord Brougham.*) *Education contributes to the welfare of the State* :—The ravages of the Danes had totally extinguished any small sparks of learning, by the dispersion of the monks, and the burning their monasteries and libraries. To repair these misfortunes, Alfred (the Great), like Charlemagne, invited learned men from all quarters of Europe to reside in his dominions. He established schools, and enjoined every freeholder possessed of two ploughs to send his children there for instruction. He is said to have founded, or, at least, to have liberally endowed the illustrious seminary afterward known as the University of Oxford. (*Tytler's History.*) **The fear of the Lord is his treasure.**—*The fear of the Lord* :—There is a servile fear of God which wicked men possess, but that which distinguishes the believer is filial and reverential. He fears, not because he has sinned, but that he may not sin; and dreads not so much the punishment of sin as the commission of it. He fears God as a friend, and not as an enemy; as a father, and not as a judge. The Scripture speaks of a natural and constitutional fear, arising from pusillanimity and want of courage, whereby persons are alarmed at the least appearance of danger, and sink under

the slightest affliction. They fear where no fear is, and flee when no one pursueth. There is also a superstitious fear, which is forbidden as inconsistent with the fear of God. There is likewise a fear which tends to desperation, and sometimes ends in it; a fear which hath torment, and is attended with a spirit of bondage. In distinction from this, there is a fear arising from distrust, the fruit of unbelief, which good men too frequently betray in this imperfect state, but which the Scripture justly condemns. The fear of the Lord is a gracious principle wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, and consists in a reverential regard for the Divine authority and glory. I. Enquire WHEREIN THE FEAR OF THE LORD CONSISTS. God is the immediate object of it; and it consists in a mixture of admiration and love, arising from an apprehension of His incomparable excellences and infinite superiority, joined with a humble hope of interest in His favour and regard. 1. The greatness and majesty of God may well excite our fear, and fill us with the deepest reverence and awe. 2. His omnipresence and allseeing eye are a sufficient ground of fear to sinful and erring creatures. 3. The justice and holiness of God are adapted to excite our fear. 4. There is something awful even in the Divine goodness (Psa. cxxx. 4). II. THE ADVANTAGES ARISING FROM THIS HOLY PRINCIPLE. "The fear of the Lord is his treasure." 1. It is in its own nature exceedingly precious, and all the things of this world are base and mean in comparison of it. 2. It answers the most valuable purposes. 3. Its advantages are permanent. 4. It is called a treasure in order to teach us the following things—(1) The necessity of seeking after it that we may fully possess it. (2) That we may be taught highly to value and esteem it. (3) That we may be careful to cultivate and preserve it. (4) We are hereby taught to impart this inestimable treasure to others, and to enrich the world with it, by endeavouring to inspire them also with the fear of God. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *The great value of the fear of the Lord*:—It keeps the conscience tender, and the mind spiritual, and is the enemy of arrogance and pride. Hence the apostle joins these two together: Be not high-minded, but fear (Rom. xi. 20). If we fear the Lord, we shall dread all formality and hypocrisy, and shall serve Him in sincerity and truth (Josh. xxiv. 14). It will also inspire us with courage and fortitude, and enable us to say as Nehemiah did in the face of the greatest danger, Should such a man as I flee? All lesser fears are swallowed up of this great fear, the fear of God. A heart fully impressed with it can neither sink into stupidity, or indulge in any unbecoming levity; will neither be too much elated with prosperity, or depressed by adversity. The fear of the Lord will also guard us against evil compliances, and criminal indulgences. It stands as a sentinel over the soul, warns it of approaching dangers, and suppresses the first risings of corruption, before they break forth into actual sins. I will do you no hurt, says Joseph to his brethren, for I fear God. Though at the utmost distance from presumption, it produces a holy confidence in God (Psa. cxlvii. 11). The same Divine excellences which are incitements to fear are also attractives to love; so that these kindred graces are not only planted but flourish together, and the same promises are made to both. The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also preserveth all them that love Him. (Psa. cxlv. 19, 20). A servile fear contracts the mind; but an ingenuous fear of God enlarges the heart in His service. The one diverts us from the path of duty, the other disposes us to walk in it; the one is slothful and indolent, the other active and persevering. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments (Psa. cxii. 1). And when David himself prayed to be taught God's ways, so as to walk in the truth, he added, Unite my heart to fear Thy name (Psa. lxxxvi. 11). The fear of the Lord is indeed a universal good; it affords peace of conscience, support under affliction, and comfort in the view of death. The fear of the Lord tendeth to life, a long life, a comfortable life, and life everlasting. As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him; like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. Oh how great is His goodness, which He has laid up for them that fear Him; which He has wrought for them that trust in Him, before the sons of men (Psa. xxxi. 19, ciii. 11-13). (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 7. **The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly.** — *The weeping ambassadors:*—Tell me not of the removal of statesmen, the falling of generals or admirals in warfare, the removal of princes or monarchs from palaces and thrones—all these may take place and leave, comparatively, no chasm in society, when contrasted with the removal of an ambassador for Jesus. I. WHAT ARE

WE TO UNDERSTAND BY AMBASSADORS OF PEACE? An ambassador of peace must come under a threefold description of character. 1. He is a minister sent of God. 2. He is instructed in the terms of peace. 3. He has to negotiate with sinners who are at war with God. II. THE LAMENTATION PREDICTED CONCERNING THESE AMBASSADORS. They "shall weep bitterly." Not the departed one, but the surviving ones. 1. Because of the impression which they have of the loss of their brother. 2. For sympathy with the Church. III. THE LIMITATION OF THEIR SORROW. We are not to sorrow as those who are without hope. 1. The election of grace is sure. 2. The redemption of the Church by Christ Jesus is complete. 3. The succession of the ambassadors of peace remains unbroken. (*J. Irons.*) *Ministers weeping over non-success:*—The ambassadors of Hezekiah wept bitterly because their embassy was rejected, and because they were sent back by the haughty and imposing invader without accomplishing their object of peace. And very few form any ideas of the deep anxieties, the soul-travail, the spiritual concern, of God's ambassadors when they see not, as the result of their embassy, the message they have delivered received by precious souls. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 14, 15. **The sinners in Zion are afraid.**—"*The sinners in Zion*":—What a contradiction in terms! what a shock to the fancy! Zion! fair Zion, a dewdrop, a glittering star, a garden of beauty, a sweet flower, porcelain without a flaw, honey without wax—Zion! Then, "sinners in Zion"—sinners out of place; they spoil the situation; they are an evil blot in the fair landscape. Sinners in the wilderness, sinners in polluted cities, sinners in hell—there you have a kind of music that has an accord and consonance of its own; but sinners in Zion! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The devouring fire:*—I. THE CHARACTERS REFERRED TO. "Sinners in Zion," and "the hypocrites." Those who are in Zion by a mere profession of religion. The self-righteous. Proud formalists. II. THEIR PRESENT STATE. "Afraid," &c. If temporal judgments, like those which God wrought upon the Assyrian army, had such an effect upon the sinners in Zion, what will be the terror of transgressors in prospect of the everlasting judgments of God? III. THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS. "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?" &c. (*J. E. Starey.*) *Security in testing times:*—It is certain that no man shall find his profession to be of use to him in testing times but he that is true in it, he that is thorough in it, he that is neither a sinner nor a hypocrite in the sense in which those words are here used. Safety in Zion belongs to those born in her by regeneration, reared in her by sanctification, enfranchised in her by faith in the Son of God, settled in her by fixed principles, confirmed in her by obedience to her laws, and bound to her by intense love of her King and her citizens. Such "shall dwell on high" secure from danger, and only such: the aliens and foreigners within her gates shall ere long be driven forth with shame. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The hypocrite:*—The man that stole the livery of heaven to serve the devil in. (*Robert Pollok.*) *Hypocrisy detected:*—A large price was demanded for a picture as being the work of an old master. It was on a panel, and some one looking behind it saw that the panel was mahogany. The picture was at once seen to be a fraud, for mahogany was not known in Europe until long after the death of the artist who was said to have painted it. A man by craft and hypocrisy may make himself look beautiful to his fellow-men, and be honoured for saintliness of character, but God looks behind the goodly show and detects the imposture at a glance. Only what is real will bear His inspection. (*Gates of Imagery.*) **Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?**—*How to dwell in the fire of God* (with 1 John iv. 16: "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God"):—These two passages, striking as is the contrast, refer to the same subject, and substantially preach the same truth. A hasty reader, who is more influenced by sound than by sense, is apt to suppose that the solemn expressions in my first text—"the devouring fire" and the "everlasting burnings"—mean hell. They mean God, as is quite obvious from the context. The man who is to "dwell in the devouring fire" is the good man; he that is able to abide the "everlasting burnings" is "the man that walks righteously and speaks uprightly," that "despises the gain of oppression, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil." So that, plainly, here the fire is the destructive side of that Divine nature which, in its flashing brightness of holiness, cannot but burn up and consume evil. And the question of my text is in effect

equivalent to this question: "Who among us can abide peacefully, joyfully, fed and brightened, not consumed and annihilated, by that flashing brightness and purity?" The prophet's answer is the answer of common sense. Like draws to like. If the fire of God be the holiness of God in its lustrous brilliance, then a holy God must have holy companions. But that is not all. The fire of God is the fire of love as well as the fire of purity; a fire that blesses and quickens, as well as a fire that destroys and consumes. So the Apostle John comes with his answer, not contradicting the other one, but deepening it, expanding it, letting us see the foundations of it, and proclaiming that as a holy God must be surrounded by holy hearts, which will open themselves to the flame as flowers to the sunshine, so a loving God must be clustered about by loving hearts, who alone can enter into deep and true fellowship with Him. The two answers, then, are one at bottom; and when Isaiah asks, "Who shall dwell with the everlasting fire?"—the perpetual fire, burning and unconsumed, of that Divine righteousness—the deepest answer, which is no stern requirement but a merciful promise, is John's answer, "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The fire of God:*—I. THE WORLD'S QUESTION. Frequently in the Old Testament the emblem of fire is employed to express the Divine nature. In many places, though by no means in all, the prominent idea in the emblem is that of the purity of the Divine nature, which flashes and flames as against all which is evil and sinful. So we read in one grand passage in this very book, "the Light of Israel shall become a fire." And we read, too, in the description of the symbolical manifestation of the Divine nature which accompanied the giving of the law on Sinai, that "the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mountain," and yet into that blaze and brightness the Lawgiver went and moved in it. There is in the Divine nature a side of antagonism and opposition to evil, which fights against it, and flames against it, and labours to consume it. But then, on the other side, the fire is also the fire of perfect love that quickens and blesses. And these two are one. God's wrath is a form of God's love; God hates because He loves. Well, that being so, the question rises to every mind of ordinary thoughtfulness: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" A God fighting against evil; can you and I hope to hold familiar fellowship with Him? To "dwell with everlasting burnings" means two things—first, to hold familiar intercourse and communion with God. What sort of a man will do that? Can you? Is it likely that you should? The second of the things that it means is to face and bear the action of the fire, the judicial action, the judgment of the present and of the future. II. THE PROPHET'S ANSWER. He says if a man is to hold fellowship with, or to face the judgment of the pure and righteous God, the plainest dictate of reason and common sense is that he himself must be pure and righteous to match. And the details into which his answer to the question runs out are all very homely, prosaic, pedestrian kind of virtues, nothing at all out of the way, nothing that people would call splendid or heroic. If you will turn to the Psalms xv. and xxiv. you will find there two other variations of the same questions, and the same answer, both of which were obviously in our prophet's mind when he spoke. The requirements of the most moderate conscience are such as none of us is able to comply with. And what then? Am I to be shut up to despair? am I to say, then, nobody can dwell with that bright flame? III. THE APOSTLE'S ANSWER. "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." Now, to begin with, let us distinctly understand that the New Testament answer, represented by John's great words, entirely endorses Isaiah's; and the difference between the two is not that the Old Testament, as represented by Psalmist and Prophet, said: "You must be righteous in order to dwell with God," and that the New Testament says: "You need not be!" Not at all! John is just as vehement in saying that nothing but purity can bind a man in thoroughly friendly and familiar conjunction with God as David or Isaiah was. What, then, is the difference between them? It is this, for one thing. Isaiah tells us we must be righteous; John tells us how we may be. And now you have got to the very bottom of the matter. That is the first step of the ladder—faith: the second step is love, and the third is righteousness. (*Ibid.*) *God's anger:*—If you will only remove from that word "anger" the mere human associations which cleave to it, of passion on the one hand, and of a wish to hurt its object on the other, then you cannot, I think, deny to the Divine nature the possession of that passionless and unmalignant wrath without striking a fatal

blow at the perfect purity of God. A God that does not hate evil, that does not flame out against it, using all the energies of His being to destroy it, is a God to whose character there cleaves the fatal suspicion of indifference to good, of moral apathy. If I have not a God to trust in that hates evil because He loveth righteousness, then "the pillared firmament itself were rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble"; nor were there any hope that this damnable thing that is killing and sucking the life-blood out of our spirits should ever be destroyed and cast aside. It is short-sighted wisdom, and it is cruel kindness, to tamper with the thought of the wrath of God, the "everlasting burnings" of that eternally pure nature wherewith it wages war against all sin! (*Ibid.*) *God's justice in human life:*—To Isaiah, life was so penetrated by the active justice of God, that he described it as bathed in fire, as blown through with fire. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Vers. 15. 16. **He that walketh righteously.**—*The citizens of God's kingdom:*—I. THE CHARACTER of the true citizens of God's kingdom is expressed in general terms. "Walketh righteously"; "speaketh uprightly." II. The DETAILS are given in which the character is revealed. "Despiseth the gain," &c. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *The good man:*—I. THE GOOD MAN'S CHARACTER, which he preserves even in times of common iniquity. II. THE GOOD MAN'S COMFORT, which he may preserve even in times of common calamity (ver. 16). (*M. Henry.*) *The rocky fortress and its inhabitant:*—We are going to look at the favoured people. I. Let us NOTE THEIR CHARACTER. They are described in part in the words of our text, but I am obliged to go a little farther afield for one essential part of their character. 1. The true people of God who in the time of danger will be preserved are a people who display a humble, patient, present faith in God. They reveal their character in verse 2, when they pray, "O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for Thee," &c. They are a praying people, who make their appeal to God under a sense of need: they are not fatalists, neither are they self-sufficient. They beseech the Lord to bless them not according to their own merit, but according to His grace. They are not a people who think that God will be gracious necessarily, for they are found crying to Him in earnest prayer. They are a trustful people. Furthermore, they are a waiting people: "We have waited for Thee." If the Lord does not seem to hear their prayer at once, they nevertheless expect that He will do so. They are a people who have a present faith, which they exercise every day, saying, "Be Thou their arm every morning!" Every step they are depending, every morning they are looking up to the hills whence cometh their help. The description in our actual text is the portrait of their outer life; but a living faith is the secret basis and foundation of it all. 2. This being understood, our text gives a description of these people, setting out their various features. (1) It first describes their feet, or how they walk: "He that walketh righteously." When a man believes, his faith affects every part of him; it operates upon his actions, thoughts, wishes, and designs; and it affects both his private and public life. One of the first evidences of a true belief in God is that a man walks righteously. He tries to act rightly towards his God and towards his fellow-men. The rule of right is the rule for him; not policy, nor the hope of gain, nor the desire to please, much less the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. (2) The next feature that is described is his tongue—"he speaketh uprightly." A man whose words are arrogant and boastful, cruel and slanderous, unreliable and deceptive, unchaste and impure, is no child of God. The grace of God very speedily sweetens a man's tongue. The doctor says, "Put out your tongue," and he judges the symptoms of health or disease thereby; assuredly there is no better test of the inward character than the condition of the tongue. "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee" is a fair decision. (3) The next feature is the heart—"he that despiseth the gain of oppressions." Not only does he not oppress any man, nor wish to gain anything by extortion; but he thinks such gain as might be made in that fashion to be utterly contemptible—he despises it. It little matters what our outward life may be, or even what our speech may be, if our heart is not affected by our religion. If grace only lies skin deep in thee, it has only saved thy skin, but not thy soul. Until grace touches the mainspring, it has done nothing to purpose: the heart must despise evil, as well as the lips denounce it. Until the well-head is sweetened, the streams are foul. Not only must I do right, but love right; not only must I avoid wrong, but hate

wrong. (4) The portrait does not omit the hands—those prominent actors both for good and evil. In Isaiah's day bribery was connected with every government office high and low; but the good man "shaketh his hands from holding of bribes." If money was slipped into his hand before he was aware of it, he shook it off with indignation. (5) Now comes the ear—"that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood." Men who delighted in war in olden time were apt to regale one another with their cruel deeds—whom they slew, and how they slew them. In Hezekiah's times, I warrant, tales were told blood-red with horror that would have made our ears to tingle, and these were greedily listened to by those of a coarse spirit; but the good man in Jerusalem would not hear them. Now it is not the hearing of blood alone that you and I must avoid, but the hearing of anything that is tainted, prurient, sceptical, depraving. The Christian wisely shuts the gate, lets down the portcullis, and pulls up the drawbridge, so that no filthy communication may come in by Ear-gate. The same sacred prudence prevents our reading books which are corrupt, or false. The righteous man knows that an ill tale cannot injure him if he never hears it, and therefore he denies his curiosity that he may preserve his memory undefiled. He is deaf to news about which a good man would be dumb. He has the blood upon his ear, to signify that his Lord has bought him with a price in that member, as well as in every other; yea, his ear is bored to the doorpost of truth, that he may hear it, and it only, with full intent of heart. (6) The picture is complete when the eyes are mentioned—"he shutteth his eyes from seeing evil." He cannot help seeing it as he goes along his pilgrimage through life; but he seeks not such a sight, and as much as he can he avoids it. Shortly, the text means just this, that a true believer is a man who has himself well in hand, having mastery over his whole manhood. He has a bit in the mouth of all the steeds which draw the chariot of life, and he holds them under due control. The true Christian is a man who keeps himself clear of the common sins of the age, the popular vices which flourish uncondemned. The sins mentioned in the text were those current in Jerusalem. The child of God was out of the fashion. II. We OBSERVE THEIR SECURITY. 1. As it is pictorially described. The times are those of war: the battle rages in the plain, but "he shall dwell on high"; aloft upon the craggy rocks shall be his citadel. In times of invasion men resorted to the highest mountains and rocks, that there they might be sheltered among the lofty fastnesses. While others flee, this man shall dwell at ease, in permanent peace; and that dwelling shall be on the heights, far beyond the reach of the invader. Is not this glorious? The bands of robbers ravage all around, but they cannot plunder him; he looks down upon them, and defies their power. A believer dwells on the heights, his life is hid with Christ in God, he cannot be reached by the darts of the adversary. "Yet," saith one, "though he dwell on high, the enemy may reach him by scaling ladders, or by some other means of assault." By no means shall they smite him, for he shall have a "place of defence." "Yet," crieth one, "these walls may be dashed down, or may fall into decay." Not so, for "his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks." Immutable strength shall gird him around both by day and by night for ever and ever. "Yet," saith one, "the enemy may starve a man out of his citadel: rock cities have been captured at last because the inhabitants have been pinched with hunger." But this also is provided for—"His bread shall be given him." As the Lord's chosen cannot be driven out, so they shall not be starved out. "Ah, well," saith one, "but even if bread could be conveyed into the fortress, yet these elevated positions cannot be readily supplied with water, and by thirst they may be forced to yield." The promise has thought of that also, for it is written, "his waters shall be sure." It is a poetical description, but it is true in every jot and tittle, and so I ask you to accompany me while—2. We consider this thing as it may be actually experienced. The man who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lives as a Christian should live, dwells on the heights. His mind is lifted up above the common cares, and worries, and vexations of life. You have also found that you have had a place of defence in time of trouble. Though often assailed you have never been really injured. The poetic utterance, "Thy bread shall be given thee," is also literally true. You may frequently reach the end of your provision, but you can never exhaust your Provider. The meal may come by handfuls, and the oil may only drip out drop by drop, but what matters? "His bread shall be given him," refers also to heavenly bread. As for the waters, the living waters of grace and of the Holy Spirit, these shall

always flow: in summer and winter shall the still waters be found at your side; yea, they shall be within you, "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." III. SEEK THEIR FELICITY. 1. Shall I need to say, "Do not try to obtain it by hypocrisy"? Since they are so happy whom God favours, do not think that by getting your name into their church-book you will necessarily be favoured too. 2. Do not hope to win the bliss of the righteous by self-righteousness. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Shutteth his eyes from seeing evil.**—*Shutting the eyes to evil:*—"And shutteth his eyes from seeing evil"—a wonderful expression in the original: so shutting his eyes as not even to wink, that is, not to open the lids for one transient moment that he may see where evil is, or know what evil is like, or what evil is doing, but shuts his eyes fast, and will not look at the devil's image: he shall be calm in the storm. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Bad literature:*—1. It is not essential that a man should know all things; some knowledge is hurtful. 2. Thought moulds character: As a man thinketh, so is he. 3. The press should enlarge upon helpful knowledge, and give the least space to reports of depravity. 4. Hope, faith, visions of beauty and of virtue, are powerful educators. (*Homiletic Review.*)

Vers. 16, 17. **He shall dwell on high.**—*The life of surrender and trust:*—I. A LIFE OF EXALTATION. "Shall dwell on high." Those who are kept safe, are kept rejoicing, and that constantly; it is not an intermittent experience. "He shall dwell." The same thought is given in Psa. xci. 1, and in John xv. 11. It is always constant because it does not depend on circumstances, but on God. The surrendered man has learned to live in God, and in His presence is fulness of joy. II. A LIFE OF SAFETY. "His place shall be the munition of rocks." Because of the safety there is perfect peace. III. A LIFE OF CONTINUAL SATISFACTION. "His bread shall be given him." There is no leanness in the surrendered life; it is fed with the very Bread of Life. One of the greatest blessings of this life is the deeper communion, the greater reality of spiritual things, as the soul learns to feed on Christ. "His waters shall be sure." IV. A LIFE OF BEAUTY AND OF REFRESHMENT. Jeremiah speaks of the same life under the figure of a tree planted by the river, whose leaf is aways green. Continual freshness and perennial beauty. The "beauty of the Lord our God upon us," and the "fruit of the Spirit" manifest. V. A LIFE OF VISION. The unmistakable sign of the fulness of the Holy Ghost is the power to look into the glorified face of Jesus Christ (John xvii. 24). VI. A LIFE OF UNLIMITED OUTLOOK. "Shall behold the land of far distances." As we stand and look down the vistas of eternity we learn a little of what this life means. (*G. H. C. Macgregor, M.A.*) *Dwelling on high:*—In the ascent of a mountain, the objects which we leave beneath us become insignificant as we ascend, until the things we at first passed become as mere specks in the distance, and we get into pure, clear air, and see the extent of land around us, of which we had never dreamed. So in the spiritual life, as we "dwell on high" with the holy God, the things of earth are of less importance to us, even earthly friendships becoming insignificant as we "behold the King in His beauty," and all around us is the "far-stretching land" of His full, unlimited salvation. (*J. G. Govan.*) *Rest in God:*—A man in some high hill-fortress looks down upon the open where the enemy's ranks are crawling like insects across the grass, and he scarcely hears the noise of the tumult, and no arrow can reach his lofty hold. So up in God we may dwell at rest, whate'er betide. Strange that we should prefer to live down amongst the unwalled villages, which every spoiler can harry and burn, when we might climb, and by the might and the magic of trust in the Lord, bring round about ourselves a wall of fire which shall consume the poison out of the evil, even whilst it permits the sorrow to do its beneficent work upon us. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Safe in the rock:*—Two birds went out to build their nests. One found a tree by the river's edge, and made her nest among its branches. The river murmured below, and the sunshine played among the leaves. But one night there was a storm, and the tree was torn out, and carried away in the floods—nest and nestlings and all. The other bird found a crag in a mountain, and built its home in a cleft of the rock. The storm swept over it, and the floods rushed through the valley, but the nest with its nestlings was safe in the rock. (*Westminster Teacher.*) *Hidden in the rock:*—In the Pitti Palace at Florence hangs a picture which represents a stormy sea, with wild waves and black clouds and fierce lightnings flashing across the sky. Wrecks float on the angry waters, and here and there a human

face is seen. Out of the midst of the waves a rock rises, against which the waters dash in vain. It towers high above the crest of the waves. In a cleft of the rock are some tufts of grass and green herbage, with sweet flowers blooming, and amid these a dove is seen, sitting on her nest, quiet and undisturbed by the wild fury of the storm, or the mad dashing of the waves below her. The picture fitly represents the peace of the Christian amid the storms and trials of the world. He is hidden in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, and nestles securely in the bosom of God's unchanging love. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*) *The Christian should be joyful:*—I have been so long away from England that I do not know where our Queen is residing just now; but if I had the wings of a dove, and could mount into the upper air, I would soon find out. I should look for the Royal Standard. I should see it floating over Windsor or Osborne, and by this token I should espy the royal abode. Fling out the banner to the breeze when the King is within. Is the King at home with you, dear brother? Do not forget to display the standard of holy joy. Hoist it, and keep it flying. The Prince of Peace is enthroned in our hearts! The Lord is exalted, for He dwelleth on high (ver. 5), and we dwell on high with Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 17. **Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.**—*The King in His beauty* :—Jerusalem was surrounded by the army of Sennacherib. The relief gained when Hezekiah paid over the three hundred talents of silver and the thirty talents of gold, emptying thereby the royal treasury and stripping the gold from the doors and pillars of the Temple, had not lasted long. Rabshakeh, the chief envoy of Assyria, had been sent with another army to demand the unconditional surrender of the city. A great change, however, had taken place in the spirit and faith of the people. No further mention was made of an alliance with Egypt. The prophet Isaiah, instead of being ridiculed and despised, was at once appealed to by the king, and his counsel followed. Hope and confidence in Jehovah had been restored, and this second attack of the treacherous Assyrian, instead of plunging the nation into despair, seemed rather to rouse them to defiance. It was God's forgiveness which had wrought the change. The departure of the Assyrian, at a time when Jerusalem was absolutely in his power, was a manifest proof of God's forgiving mercy and a striking confirmation of Isaiah's words. So, though the enemy returned, the prophet's encouraging and reassuring messages did not fall upon deaf ears. The chapter opens with a plain forecast of the speedy destruction that should overtake the treacherous spoiler of God's people. Then follows a graphic picture of the disappointment of the ambassadors of peace, and the deserted and downtrodden state of the country districts that had resulted from Sennacherib's breach of the covenant of peace. But from verse 10 to the end the sufficiency of the championship of Jehovah is unfolded, and the chapter closes with promises of victory and pardon, "the lame shall take the prey," "the people shall be forgiven their iniquity." Yes, the presence and leadership of Jehovah would change everything. The glorious Lord would be unto them a place of broad rivers and streams. But as we read these Scriptures, "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty"; "thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation," we feel that their primary application by no means exhausts their full meaning. A greater than Hezekiah is here. The King in His beauty is for us the very Prince of Peace Himself. Once for our sakes He was covered with shame, mocked and buffeted and handcuffed. Now by faith we see Him crowned with glory and honour, and one day our eyes shall see Him as He is in His beauty. As yet the new Jerusalem is hemmed in by foes. Enemies far more treacherous and destructive than the Assyrians are seeking to enslave and despoil the people of God. But our eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle so peaceful and steadfast that not one of the stakes thereof shall be removed nor any of its cords broken. Yes, the story of the siege of Jerusalem is only a parable of the life of God in the soul of man. "God's forgiveness is much more than a clean slate." It brings His people into the joy and strength of a living union with Himself. It gave new national life to Judah. It gives new spiritual life to the pardoned sinner. Once the Divine forgiveness is realised the whole man is born again. But this does not make us free from temptation. The Assyrians will surely return and menace the city. But the Lord is our sure defence. 1. The beauty of the King passes all man's understanding. There is the beauty of His personal character. It is unfolded to us in the Gospel story. There we see His goodness and truth. His purity is so strong and incandescent

with the fire of love that it cannot be marred by the defilements of earth. His sympathy and compassion are so tender and real that the most needy and outcast are attracted to Him. Christ has no beauty in the eyes of the carnal and worldly. He pours contempt on the wisdom of the flesh, the wisdom of this world. Have ye eyes to see the beauty in Jesus? There is the beauty, too, of His perfect sacrifice. This was set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures in the passover lamb, in the brazen serpent, and in all the sacrifices connected with the old covenant. The Lamb without spot or blemish was slain that His atoning blood might cover our sins. The beauty and perfection of the personal character secures the beauty and perfection of the precious sacrifice. Is that blood-stained Cross the most beautiful sight in the world to you? Have you seen the love of God triumphing there over the sin of man, and the Son of God reconciling God and man by the sacrifice of Himself, and laying a righteous foundation for the exercise towards guilty sinners of God's sovereign mercy and grace? But, again, there is the beauty of His perpetual intercession and His abiding presence in our hearts. Christ is no longer on the Cross—He is on the Throne, seated at the right hand of God. From that vantage ground of infinite power and resource He watches all that transpires here below. And He not only watches from a distance, He is with us to save and succour and defend. Have you seen the King in His beauty as He walks with us along life's highway? Or are your eyes still holden? 2. To see the King in His beauty is the essence of all true religion. The world cannot understand the things of God. It cannot receive the Comforter because it seeth Him not. The veil of sense shuts out the glories of the unseen world. Have you seen the Son and believed on Him? Or is there still some veil or prejudice or disobedience upon your heart? Is personal religion still a mystery to you? Does conversion seem to you a strange and doubtful experience? Does the earnestness of some Christians seem altogether extravagant and fanatical? When you have truly seen the King you will find it impossible to exaggerate His beauty, and you will find it equally impossible to set a limit to your obedience. The King must have all. Loyalty cannot measure out its service. It delights in sacrifice. As the veil of sense is penetrated by the vision of faith the victory of life begins. This is the object of all the means of grace. They are to help us to see the King. All life becomes worth living when the humblest duty performed aright may be rewarded with a sight of Him whom you love. This gives new zest to worship. For this we pray and study our Bibles, for this we come to church and join in the Lord's Supper, that we may see the King. This helps us to live a detached and separate life. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*) *The heavenly King and the privileges of His subjects* :—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE KING. 1. The situation of a king is most respectable; he is the head of his people. God is Head of all things; King of kings, and Lord of lords. 2. Kings ought to be wise men, to rule in wisdom. God is all-wise, omniscient. 3. Kings ought to possess power, to be ready to oppose any foe of their people. God is Almighty. 4. Kings should be good men, kind and benevolent. God is good and kind; He feeds, clothes, &c., He is the Fountain of goodness. 5. Kings should be just men, to enforce the laws and punish offenders. God is just, and will not suffer His laws to be infringed, but will punish the guilty. II. THE EXTENT OF HIS DOMINION. 1. Heaven is His throne; here He manifests His glorious presence; angels, &c., are His servants. 2. Earth is His foot-stool; things animate and inanimate are subject to His control. 3. Hell is His prison, where He confines His foes, and here He is enthroned in vengeance. 4. He has a kingdom among men; this is His universal Church, all who fear God, and work righteousness. 5. He has a kingdom in men; every true believer is a little kingdom in himself, the heart is His throne, and the passions and affections are the subjects. 6. He reigns that He may conquer all, save all. III. THE PERSONS THIS DECLARATION MAY BE APPLIED TO. "THEY." 1. Those who have an experimental knowledge of the King's favour. 2. Such as feel a profound reverence towards Him. 3. Who love Him, from a sense of His love to them. 4. And obey Him from this principle of love. IV. WHAT IS IMPLIED BY THE DECLARATION, "They shall see the King." 1. Not with their bodily eye. God is a Spirit. 2. If we could see Him as a Spirit with our bodily eye, yet we could not as God. He is immensity. 3. They shall see Him by the eye of faith—in creation, providence and grace. (*John Overton.*) *The blessedness of heaven* :—These words may more immediately refer to the restoration of Hezekiah to his former splendour and dignity, by the destruction of Sennacherib's army, which would establish peace in the land of Judea, and

enable the exiles to return home, without fear or danger. But the Holy Spirit in this passage seems also to refer to the initial happiness of all true believers in this world, and their complete felicity in the world to come. I. THE SOURCES OF HAPPINESS PROVIDED FOR TRUE BELIEVERS. These in general are two—1. The King in His beauty. All that is to be seen of God with joy and satisfaction, is visible only in the Mediator. 2. The land that is very far off. In the present life our chief happiness arises from hope; hereafter it will consist in vision, and in full fruition. The heavenly glory is here compared to the land of promise, which abounded in population, and yet was so fruitful as to be well able to support all its inhabitants. (1) It is a land that is very far off from the earth, and farther still from hell. (2) The views which good people have of the Land of Promise are at present very distant and imperfect. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE SAINTS SHALL ENJOY THE BLISS THAT IS PREPARED FOR THEM. "They shall see and behold it." 1. This may either refer to the partial view which Christians have of future glory upon earth, or to the beatific vision of heaven. We see something of God in the works of creation and providence, and especially in the great work of human redemption. We have also seen the power and glory of God in the sanctuary, in the Word and ordinances, and have sometimes been filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But these views, however refreshing, are not only transient, but very narrow and contracted, in comparison of what they will be hereafter. Then the powers of perception will be raised to the highest pitch, our contracted minds will be enlarged and rendered more retentive, and we shall be able to "gaze in thought on what all thought transcends." 2. The sight which believers have of spiritual objects is essentially different from that of the unregenerate, either in this world or that which is to come. 3. There is an intuitive certainty in the knowledge which Christians have of invisible realities, and which is peculiar to themselves only. 4. A sight of the King in His beauty will be attended with a clearness and a comprehension far surpassing all that we have experienced in the present life. 5. The celestial vision will be ardent and intense. 6. Views of heaven will take place immediately after death, and more fully after the resurrection. 7. There will also be a possessive intuition, or such a sight as includes converse and enjoyment. 8. The vision will be perpetual and without end. There is an entrance into heaven, but no exit out of it. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *Christ's life a poem*:—There are human lives which are poems, as there are lives which are prose. They give pleasure, as poetry gives it, by the expression of the beautiful. Such a life, at its very highest range, was the life of Christ. We seek its poetry to-day, and we weave our thoughts of it round that profound phrase of Milton's, that poetry must be simple, sensuous, and passionate. I. That which is SIMPLICITY in art is purity in a perfect character. The beauty of Christ's purity was in this—1. That those who saw it saw in it the glory of moral victory. 2. From this purity, so tried and so victorious, arose two other elements of moral beauty—perfect justice and perfect mercy. II. The word "SENSUOUSNESS," in Milton's sense of it, was entirely noble in meaning. As the poet produces beautiful work out of the multitudinous world of images and things which he has received, so the exquisiteness of the parables and of the words of Christ, both in form and expression, was the direct result of the knowledge He had gained from the quality of sensibility. III. The third element of great poetry is PASSION. We may transfer it directly to a character as an element of beauty. It is best defined as the power of intense feeling capable of perfect expression. It was intense feeling of the weakness and sin of man, and intense joy in His Father's power to redeem, which produced the story of the "Prodigal Son," where every word is on fire with tender passion. See how it comes home, even now, to men; see how its profound humanity has made it universal! "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." How that goes home to the deepest want of the race; how deep the passion which generalised that want into a single sentence; how intense, yet how pathetic, the expression of it; how noble the temperance which stayed at the single sentence and felt that it was enough! (*Stopford A. Brooke, D.D.*) *The beautiful God*:—The blessed God who infinitely possesses every amiable excellency, and from whom proceeds all that is lovely in the universe, must Himself be adorned with the most exquisite beauty. In Him is concentred the sweetest assemblage of every Divine perfection. In Him, they all shine forth with the brightest lustre, without any superfluity or deficiency. He is consummately righteous, yet full of compassion; He is perfectly holy, yet rich in mercy; He

is supreme in majesty, yet infinitely gracious; wisdom, power, and faithfulness, with every glorious attribute that can excite admiration and love, are united in the supreme Lord of heaven and earth. In the various important characters He sustains, He acts with the most endearing condescension and approved fidelity, assiduously performing every office and duty that love can dictate. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Is beauty ascribed to Jehovah?*—"Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty." Cheyne asserts that this king cannot be Jehovah, for beauty is never ascribed to Him. This is a shallow argument. Can an epithet never be given to God once, but must every epithet be repeated in order to be true? But if one sees Jehovah in Jesus there will be no trouble in finding beauty ascribed to the Messiah, and so to Jehovah Jesus is Jehovah, and we find in the Messiah every form of beauty ascribed to Him in the Canticles, which the Church has always cherished as the song of Christ's love and loveliness to His redeemed people. Again in the forty-fifth Psalm we find the King Messiah described as "fairer than the children of men"; and there is no great difference between assigning beauty to holiness (Psa. xxix. 2 and xcvi. 9) and assigning beauty to the holy God. Moreover, in Zech. ix. 17 we find Jehovah thus referred to by the prophet, "How great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty." Here the identical word is used (*yephi*) that is found in our Isaiah text. In this last passage to refer the singular pronoun to God's people when they are spoken of with plural pronouns and verbs in the whole context is hardly a fair way to prove the proposition that beauty is never ascribed to Jehovah. But even if beauty is never ascribed to Jehovah anywhere else, is that a substantial reason why it cannot be here so ascribed? (*H. Crosby, D.D.*) *The beautiful Christ*:—I cannot but regard it as a great misfortune that in all ages the art, the literature, and the worship of the Churches should not only have fallen so far short of the true ideal of our blessed Lord and Master, but should even have gone so far astray in their conceptions of Him. They have represented Him as a partial Christ, whereas He is the universal Christ; as an ecclesiastical Christ, whereas He is a spiritual Christ; as a Christ of gloom and anguish, whereas He is a Christ of love, and joy, and peace in believing; as a dead Christ, whereas He is the risen, the living, the ascended Saviour; as a distant Christ, a Christ who has gone far away into the dim realms of space, whereas He is a present Christ, with us now, with us always, with us individually, with us as a perpetual comforter, a very present help in trouble, with us even to the end of the world; as a Christ of wrath, and vengeance, and dreadfulness, whereas He is loving, tender, and of infinite compassion. (*F. W. Farrar, D.D.*) *The King in His beauty*:—The "King" is probably the Messiah. "They shall behold a far-stretching land"—Messiah's kingdom is from sea to sea. (*Prof. A. B. Davidson, LL.D.*) *The Jews' deliverance from the Assyrian invasion*:—When the Assyrians had invaded Judea with an immense army, and were about to attack Jerusalem, Rabshakeh was sent with a railing message to the king and his people. When Hezekiah heard of the blasphemies of the proud Assyrian, he rent his clothes and put on sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord, and sent the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth to consult with Isaiah the prophet. The people of Jerusalem, therefore, had seen their king in most mournful array, wearing the garments of sorrow, and the weeds of mourning; they were, however, cheered by the promise that there should be so complete a defeat to Sennacherib, that the king should again adorn himself with the robes of state, and appear with a smiling countenance in all the beauty of joy. Moreover, through the invasion of Sennacherib, the people had not been able to travel; they had been cooped up within the walls of Jerusalem like prisoners. No journeys had been made, either in the direction of Dan or Beersheba, even the nearest villages could not be reached; but the promise is given, that so completely should the country be rid of the enemy, that wayfarers should be able to see the whole of their territory, even that part of the land which was very far off; it should be safe for them to make the longest voyages; they should no longer be afraid of the oppressor, but should find the highways, which once lay waste, to be again open and safe for traffic. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Christ victorious: His people free*:—We have seen our well-beloved Monarch, in the days of His flesh, humiliated and sore vexed; for He was "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He whose brightness is as the morning, wore the sackcloth of sorrow as His daily dress; shame was His mantle, and reproach was His vesture. None more afflicted and sorrowful than He. Yet now, inasmuch as He has triumphed over all the powers of darkness upon the bloody tree,

our faith beholds our King in His beauty, returning with dyed garments from Edom, robed in the splendour of victory. We also, His joyful subjects who were once shut up and could not come forth, are now possessed of boundless Gospel liberty. Now that we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour, we freely possess to its utmost bounds the covenant blessings which He has given to us; and we rejoice that if the land of happiness should sometimes seem to be very far off, it is nevertheless our own, and we shall stand in our lot in the end of the days. (*Ibid.*) *The King in His beauty* :—I. WE HAIL THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS OUR KING. 1. His right to royalty lies in His exalted nature as the Son of God. 2. Jesus has a right to reign because He is the Creator. 3. The Preserver of all men. 4. He governs by virtue of His Headship of the mediatorial kingdom. 5. He has the rights of Divine designation, for God has made Him King. 6. Certain princes have delighted to call themselves kings by the popular will, and certainly our Lord Jesus Christ is such in His Church. Now it behoves us, since we thus verbally acknowledge Him to be King, distinctly to understand what this involves. (1) We look upon the Lord Jesus as being to us the fountain of all spiritual legislation. He is a King in His own right—no limited monarch—but an autocrat in the midst of His Church, and in the Church all laws proceed from Christ and Christ only. (2) He alone gives authority to that legislation. (3) He is the Captain in all our warfare. II. WE DELIGHT TO KNOW THAT OUR KING POSSESSES SUPERLATIVE BEAUTY. III. THERE ARE SEASONS WHEN WE SEE THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY. 1. We saw Him in that day when He pardoned all our sins. 2. Jesus Christ was in His beauty seen by us more fully, when, after being pardoned, we found how much He had done for us. 3. There are times when, in our contemplations, we see His beauty. 4. It is very probable that we shall have such a sight of our glorious King as we never had before, when we come to die. IV. THE EXCEEDING GLORY OF THIS SIGHT. V. THIS SIGHT OF CHRIST EMINENTLY AFFORDS LIBERTY TO THE SOUL. (*Ibid.*) *Seeing the King in His beauty* :—These words plainly promise to every follower of Christ, if he shall persevere unto the end, that in the resurrection he shall see the Lord Jesus Christ in His beauty, and in the glory of His kingdom. What, then, is this beauty which shall be revealed to all who attain that world and the resurrection of the holy dead? I. It would seem to be THE BEAUTY OF HIS HEAVENLY COURT. About Him and before Him are the companies of heaven, the hosts and hierarchies of the blessed, and the saintly multitude of God's new creation. Armies of martyrs, companies of prophets, the majesty of patriarchs, the glory of apostles, each one in the full transfigured beauty of his own perfect spirit, and all revealing the warfare of faith, the triumph of the Church, the power of the Cross, the election of God—these are the degrees and ascents leading upward to the throne of bliss. II. But if such be the beauty of the King's court, what is THE BEAUTY OF THE KING HIMSELF? We shall not be dangerously out of the way if we believe that He who is the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His person, did take unto Himself our manhood as His revealed presence for ever, in its most perfect image and likeness; that in Him two natures were united, and both were perfect, both were beautiful. There is a beauty we know Him to possess in fulness—the beauty of perfect love. In His face will be revealed all the love of His holy incarnation, of His life of sorrow, of His agony and passion, of His cross and death. The wounds of His hands and feet and of His pierced side are eternal seals and countersigns of the love which has redeemed us for Himself. 1. The King whose beauty is the bliss of heaven is ever drawing and preparing us for His presence by all the mysteries of His Church. 2. By a special and particular discipline, varied and measured for the necessities of every faithful soul, He is making us ready for the vision of His presence. (*H. E. Manning, D.D.*) *The beautiful King and the far-off land* :—I. THE SUPREME OBJECT OF VISION. "The King in His beauty." II. THE ULTIMATE POSSESSION. "The land that is very far off." (*F. Ferguson, D.D.*) *The King in His beauty* :—It is astonishing how much comfort can be packed up in a few words. If one were asked to put into a single sentence the entire body of Scriptural prophecy, of Old and New Testament prophecy combined, he could not easily find a more complete condensation of the whole than in the text. There are two points of view from which we may look at the text. I. THE OBJECTIVE ASPECT, or the vision as it is set before us; the moral and spiritual ideal yet to be realised. 1. The text is a prediction as to a glorious Person and a far-off land, both of them entirely beyond the calculations of men. "The King in His beauty" is Jesus Christ.

The words are striking. It is not exactly the King in His majesty, or grandeur, or glory, or power, but "the King in His beauty." We speak of the good and the beautiful and the true. And there is a singular accordance between those three super-excellent realities. We think of them in connection with the Persons in the Godhead. While it is true that all glory and power of the one aspect of the Divine Being belongs to the other, still we are permitted to make a distinction in our thoughts, and we think of the Father as that One in whom we see pre-eminently the good; and the Son as that One in whom we see specifically the beautiful; and the Spirit as that One in whom we see pre-eminently the true. 2. When we turn our thoughts to the beautiful alone, we are met by this conception—that the beautiful is but another word for the becoming. A beautiful action is an action which it becomes one to do. A beautiful character is one, all the elements of which are in sweet accordance; when part is adapted to part, as the colours of the rainbow blend together; when one line of the form gracefully runs into another; when one sound is the harmonious concomitant and perfect sequel of another—there you have beauty, the beauty as a spirit breathing through the whole and informing all its parts—such a whole that one part may become the other, and pass and repass into the other. The beauty is translucent, elastic, perfect. Now apply this conception to Jesus Christ, and you will see with what amazing propriety the beautiful in Him is the same as the becoming. Consider the harmony of the Divine Being as the eternal source of all the beauty we can ever know. Consider the essential beauty of our human nature as made in the image and after the likeness of God; consider, further, the absolutely harmonious combination and indissoluble union of those two natures in Christ with the amazing self-sacrifice of the Son of God for our redemption, and the adaptation of His work to all the wants of our case, and you have such a conception of the becoming—of all that it becomes both God and man to do—as explains to us the emphasis and the propriety with which Christ is spoken of as "the King in His beauty." No one can be beautiful apart from Him. 3. Society is at present a hideous discord, at least to a very large extent. We cannot say that it is beautiful. But it is not more certain that Jesus Christ is King; it is not more certain that He is the centre of heaven's harmony, than it is certain that the far-off land will yet be brought nigh and made visible upon the earth; and that God's will shall be done upon the earth, even as it is done in heaven. II. THE SUBJECTIVE ASPECT, or what is implied in seeing the vision, in realising the ideal. The time is coming when every human being shall actually look upon Jesus Christ. But to look is not always to see all that can be seen. To see the King in His beauty implies a deeper seeing than that of merely looking upon Him. It implies a being made like Him. In order to see the kingdom of God, or to enter into it, we must actually be born again. We must ourselves (in other words) be a part of that which we truly see. We shall see Him at last because we shall have been made like Him. It is the pure in heart who see God. This seeing of God is our heaven in its highest and most complete form; and it is by faith in Christ that we are brought to this perception. As faith grows and develops, as it passes into the life, it turns the abstract ideal into the concrete reality. On the other hand, the result is certain from the Divine side. It is secured by the fact that the King in His beauty is there. The heavenly Bridegroom is waiting for the perfection of His Bride. And as He waits He works. He rules over all things for the accomplishment of the Divine purpose. Make, then, the goal of your life quite clear, and lay down all your lines of thought and action directly for that goal. Let us thank God that such is the Christianity of Jesus Christ. (*Ibid.*) *Reverence, a belief in God's presence*:—1. Though Moses was not permitted to enter the land of promise, he was vouchsafed a sight of it from a distance. We too, though as yet we are not admitted to heavenly glory, yet are given to see much, in preparation for seeing more. Christ dwells among us in His Church really though invisibly, and through its Ordinances fulfils towards us, in a true and sufficient sense, the promise of the text. We are even now permitted to "see the King in His beauty," to "behold the land that is very far off." The words of the Prophet relate to our present state as well as to the state of saints hereafter. Of the future glory it is said by St. John, "They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." And of the present, Isaiah himself speaks in passages which may be taken in explanation of the text: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"; and again, "They shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God." 2. Such a view is strange to most men;

they do not realise the presence of Christ, nor admit the duty of realising it. Even those who are not without habits of seriousness, have almost or quite forgotten the duty. This is plain at once: for, unless they had, they would not be so very deficient in reverence as they are. There are two classes of men who are deficient in awe and fear, and, lamentable to say, taken together, they go far to make up the religious portion of the community. It is not wonderful that sinners should live without the fear of God; but what shall we say of an age or country in which even the more serious classes maintain, or at least act as if they maintained, that "the spirit of God's holy fear" is no part of religion? (1) Those who think that they never were greatly under God's displeasure. (2) Those who think that, though they once were, they are not at all now, for all sin has been forgiven them;—those on the one hand who consider that sin is no great evil in itself, those on the other who consider that it is no great evil in them, because their persons are accepted in Christ for their faith's sake. (*J. H. Newman, B.D.*) **The land that is very far off.**—"*The land that is very far off*":—"A far-stretching land," *i.e.*, a land no longer "diminished" (to use Sennacherib's own expression) by spoliation or hemmed in by foes. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *The distant land*:—As it is in the margin, "the land of far distances." A land cleared of enemies as far as the eye can reach and the foot carry. I. THIS WILL APPLY TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, WHICH THE REDEEMED SOUL SHALL POSSESS IN HEAVEN. Here we know but little of the great Father of our spirits. But in heaven we shall know God more fully. Know Him not in His essence, but in the glorified human nature of Christ; in His relation to ourselves and the universe. II. THIS WILL APPLY TO THE VIEWS WHICH HEAVEN WILL GIVE US OF THE REDEEMING WORK OF CHRIST. At present there are many questions which the devout soul proposes in relation to this mighty work, but no response is given. What disclosures will heaven make on these points! III. THIS WILL APPLY TO THE EXPLANATIONS WHICH HEAVEN WILL AFFORD OF THE SECRETS OF NATURE. Nature, like the fabled traveller, has given the casket to the highwayman, but kept the jewels. She has given us names, but kept the power. IV. THIS WILL APPLY TO THE SOLUTION WHICH HEAVEN WILL GIVE OF THE MYSTERIES OF PROVIDENCE. V. THIS WILL APPLY TO OUR EXPERIENCE OF DIVINE GOODNESS. Here the vessel is narrowed by its conditions. It cannot receive much, it cannot bear much. Here we sip of the river of God, there we shall drink of its fulness. 1. Learn the limitations of this life. We know in part. It doth not yet appear what we shall be. 2. The boundless wisdom and goodness of God. The best things are yet in store. 3. See here the encouragements to a life of faith. (*J. Hoyle.*) *Glances at the future*:—Do you ask what are the waving outlines of this "land of far distances" that begins directly a man begins to live a Christly life, and that stretches away after death into the Infinite? I answer—I. UNENDING EXISTENCE. II. UNDECAYING ACTIVITY. Our work here is bounded by many things. 1. There is the finishing of the enterprise. 2. There is the failure of our powers. 3. There is the ceasing of inclination. Sometimes fuel has not been added to fire of flickering motive; sometimes fellow-workers have been cold, unwelcome, or harshly discouraging; sometimes repeated failure and mocking disappointments have driven a man back from seeking his own higher education or the world's welfare, and "desire ceases," and there is an end of work. But in contrast with all this that is of the earth earthy, the true worker for himself and for others, yearns after and will inherit "a land of far distances." There the work will never be completed, for a universe is the sphere of labour, eternity is the period, and the infinite the problem. Labour —the putting forth of power: sacrificial labour—the putting forth of power in the spirit of the Lamb, who is the central life of the heavenly world; this is the far-reaching hope of every Christly soul. And this without the decay of powers, for then will be fulfilled the promise of perpetual morning dew, immortal youth, a world without pain, and never needing a night. Nor will want of inclination bring these occupations to an end, for there is realised the full power of the quenchless inspiration of love to the Lamb who was slain. So, for our highest, noblest labours, there is a limitless hope. III. UNFETTERED THOUGHT. For the inquirer this human life is not "a land of far distances." Thinkers often weep in their sense of mental poverty. But we are to believe in the lifting of veil after veil as we go on through the ages, till the fair face of Truth shall be seen in Divinest beauty. IV. UNBOUNDED AFFECTIONS. (*U. R. Thomas, B.A.*) *The King in His beauty*:—I. Our first concern is with THE HISTORICAL SETTING of this verse. II. THE SPIRITUAL PARALLEL. To see the King,—Jesus, I mean,—

is one of the best blessings of His people. There is a further promise, "Thine eyes shall behold the land that is very far off," *i.e.*, "a far-stretching tract of country." We must abide by the metaphor; this stands, I think, for the great multitude of exceeding great and precious privileges which God has given us in Jesus Christ. III. THE FINAL FULFILMENT OF THIS PROMISE. All the things God's people know on earth are but feeble foretastes of the joys of heaven. (*Thos. Spurgeon.*) *Heaven anticipated* :—It is recorded of the celebrated John Howe, that in his latter days he greatly desired to attain such a knowledge of Christ, and feel such a sense of His love, as might be a foretaste of the joys of heaven. After his death, a paper was found in his Bible recording how God had answered his prayer. One morning (and he noted the day) he awoke, with his eyes swimming with tears, overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness in shedding down His grace into the hearts of men. He never could forget the joy of these moments: they made him long still more ardently for that heaven which, from his youth, he had panted to behold. (*Light in the Dwelling.*) *Samuel Rutherford's dying utterances* :—Some days before he died, he said: "I shall shine, I shall see Him as He is, I shall see Him reign, and all His fair company with Him; and I shall have my large share, my eyes shall see my Redeemer, these very eyes of mine, and no other for me: this may seem a wide word, but it is no fancy or delusion; it is true, it is true; let my Lord's name be exalted, and if He will, let my name be grinded to pieces, that He may be all in all. If He should slay me ten thousand times ten thousand times, I'll trust." One of his friends, Mr. Robert Blair, who stood by his bed, said to him: "What think ye now of Christ?" To this he replied: "I shall live and adore Him; glory, glory, to my Creator, and to my Redeemer for ever; glory shines in Immanuel's land." In the afternoon of the same day he said: "Oh, that all my brethren in the public may know what a Master I have served, and what peace I have this day; I shall sleep in Christ, and when I awake I shall be satisfied with His likeness. This night shall close the door, and put my anchor within the veil, and I shall go away in a sleep by five of the clock in the morning." Words which received their exact fulfilment. His soul was filled with rapture as he lay dying, and he cried, "Oh, for arms to embrace Him! Oh, for a well-tuned harp!" So he passed away, declaring as he went that in the love and presence of his Lord he had found heaven before he entered within the gates. (*King's Highway.*) *"Not all over"* :—When a medical man visited a young woman who was on her death-bed, he uttered the common thought of the world when he said to her weeping mother as he grasped her hand, "It will soon be all over with your daughter." She who was about to depart heard the announcement, and, raising herself on her arm, drew aside the curtain, and looking into the face of the doctor with that peculiar look that characterises those who are being loosened from the hither side of existence said, "All over, sir! all over—no, mother, believe him not. When I die, it will not be all over with your daughter, it will only be all beginning. For this present span of existence is not worthy of being compared with the life which shall thrill my whole being in the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and the Lamb." (*W. Adamson, D.D.*) *Death a means of vision* :—One Sunday morning a friend—a deacon of my church—came to me and said, speaking of his father, a dear old minister and a blind man, "My father can see this morning." "I congratulate you!" I exclaimed; "I am glad and surprised to hear it." "Ah," he replied, "you misunderstand me. My father is dead." (*R. J. Campbell, M.A.*) *The beautiful God* :—"How beautiful it is to be with God!" Miss Willard whispered as she died. *Miss Havergal's experience* :—A most interesting chapter in the biography describes her visit to Switzerland. On her return home she had typhoid fever, and was laid aside for a long time. This is how she talked of her experience during her illness: *F.* "Sometimes I could not quite see His face; yet there was His promise, 'I will never leave thee.' I knew He said it, and that He was there." *M.* "Had you any fear at all to die?" *F.* "Oh no, not a shadow. It was on the first day of this illness I dictated to Constance, 'Just as Thou wilt, O Master, call!'" *M.* "Then was it delightful to think you were going home, dear Fan?" *F.* "No, it was not the idea of going home, but that He was coming for me, and that I should see my King. I never thought of death as going through the dark valley or down to the river; it often seemed to me a going up to the golden gates and lying there in the brightness, just waiting for the gate to open for me." She was brought back, in answer to many prayers, from the gates of the grave.

(*King's Highway.*) *The Delectable Mountains* :—Then they went on till they came to the Delectable Mountains, which belong to the Lord of the country towards which they were journeying. So they went up the mountains to behold the gardens and orchards, the vineyards and fountains of water. Now there were on the top of these mountains shepherds feeding their flocks. The pilgrims, therefore, went to them and asked: "Whose Delectable Mountains are these? and whose sheep be they that feed on them?" And the shepherds answered "These mountains are Emmanuel's Land: and they are within sight of His city, the sheep are His. 'He laid down His life for them.'" Then said the shepherds one to another, "Let us show the pilgrims the gates to the celestial city, if they have skill to look through our perspective-glass." Then the pilgrims lovingly accepted the motion; so they led them to the top of a hill called Clear, and gave them the glass to look through. Then they tried to look; but the remembrance of the last things that the shepherds had showed them made their hands shake; by means of which impediment they could not look steadily through the glass: yet they thought they saw something like the gate, and also some of the glory of the place. (*Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.*)

Vers. 20-24. **Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities.**—*Isaiah's imagery:*—Among the images which crowd the concluding verses of this chapter, we may perhaps, without fancifulness, distinguish an under-current of thoughts suggested by the circumstances of the times at which this prophecy was delivered; the promised "quiet" seems to point to the existing commotion; the "tabernacle which shall not be taken down," reminds us not only of the fast-founded Temple which had replaced the tabernacle, and become the fixed centre of their "solemnities," but also of the tents of Sennacherib's hosts, then, as now, made of black camels' or goats' hair, now blackening the valleys round Jerusalem, but soon to be swept away "like the thistle-down before the whirlwind"; the broad "rivers and streams" suggest the thought that though Hezekiah's precautions would have secured the absolutely necessary supply of water for the beleaguered city, they felt the want of that abundance of it which is still more grateful in an Eastern climate than in our own; while the promise that "the inhabitants should no longer say, I am sick," favours the conjecture that the illness of Hezekiah may have been one instance of the disease which usually attends on the confinement and discomforts of a city shut-up against an enemy in the field. (*Sir E. Strachey, Bart.*) *The privileges and stability of the Church* :—Jerusalem, after this period, was never long preserved from hostile invasions, therefore our attention is turned from it to that glorious city against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. Let us—I. TAKE THOSE VIEWS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST WHICH OUR TEXT RECOMMENDS. 1. As a solemn city. "The city of our solemnities." The Church of the Lord on earth is called "the holy people"; "the redeemed of the Lord"; "sought out, a city not forsaken." It is "that great city, the holy Jerusalem." It is "Mount Zion, the city of the living God." It is "the holy city, which is the mother of us all." The orders and laws necessary for the city of Zion are contained in these lively oracles, which may also be considered as the charter of the privileges of its happy and active citizens. Peace is within its walls, and prosperity within its palaces; and everything is conducted well, being managed by Him who is the God of order, and not of confusion. Its great King ever dwells in the midst of it, and its walls are continually before Him. The immunities, for which its inhabitants are distinguished, are numerous and inestimable; including deliverance from the bondage of corruption and sin, together with a full enjoyment of a right to the tree of life, and to all the blessings they can need. Its "walls are called salvation, and its gates praise"; its streets are all pleasant, and its towers may well strike the eye with admiration. It is well called "the city of our solemnities." This name may be applied to Jerusalem on account of the most solemn feasts that were there made; the solemn assemblies that were there held; and the solemn sacrifices which were there offered. Nor is the term at all inapplicable to the Church of God, which consists of serious believers, who enter into the most solemn engagements with Jehovah; who are employed in the most solemn exercises of mind that can possibly be imagined; and whose minds are peculiarly affected with the solemnities of death and judgment. Real religion is altogether a solemn thing. 2. As a quiet habitation. It is "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." God Himself is the householder, for He hath chosen Zion, and desired it for His habitation; and here, too, dwell all the faithful. There is something very consolatory

in the idea, that all the worthies now in glory, that ever trusted in Christ, were all members of that Church which is one; and that all real believers are considered by Jehovah as forming a part of it. This dwelling-place of the just is remarkable for the security which is there enjoyed, and the peace which pervades the whole. It is "a quiet habitation"; here the Prince of Peace takes up His residence, and reigns: here "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever"; and God's people dwell here in a peaceable habitation. 3. An immovable tabernacle. "A tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken." The Church militant is but a tabernacle when contrasted with the inconceivable excellencies of the paradise of God. Divine glory is manifested to us, and known by us here, but in part; but there "we shall know even as we are known." The Church of God may often change its place. This is shown us by the state of those cities in which once the cause of our Redeemer prospered, but where now His name is never heard. The Jerusalem Church, though it might verify the promise in the text, by experiencing a long space of peace, and season of rest from war, together with the restoration and continuance of their sacred privileges, has now lost all its excellence, and Ichabod (the glory is departed) may evidently be seen inscribed upon it. The true Church typified by it, shall never be taken down whilst the world itself remains. II. ENFORCE THAT ATTENTION TO THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH THE TEXT DEMANDS. "Look upon Zion." 1. Look upon it, angels, with complacency and delight! 2. Look upon it, sinners, with astonishment and desire! 3. Look upon it, Christians, with wonder, love, and praise! (*T. Spencer.*) *God's promises to His Church*:—To our Zion, to the Church of Christ, are promised explicitly such gifts as those of the text—unity, truth, success. Of which of them, it may be asked, can we make our boast? I. THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH WAS TO BE ONE CHIEF NOTE OF ITS DIVINE ORIGIN. What is our state? Visible unity seems to be no more a mark of the Church of Christ. Of those whose faces are all turned one way, to the place where Jesus the crucified sits on the right hand of God, the east and west have been rent asunder, so that none can re-knit the torn garment of the Lord. And west and east are again divided, each within itself; and we, that are but a section of the Western Church, are torn and torn again. God's promise cannot have been in vain. Man must have hindered it; God hath not forgotten it. II. But if unity has been lost, TRUTH HAS BEEN PRESERVED TO US. And this is our consolation. If the Church be not the great ocean—vast, bright, fresh, a counterpart of the blue heaven above it—still she is like the hundred lakes that nestle among the sheltering hills; they know not each other, but every one of them reflects, and truly, the firmament above. So far as salvation by Christ is brought home to men by the teaching of the churches, so long there is an underlying bond of agreement which outward misunderstanding cannot cancel. III. Humiliating to us are those PROMISES OF GREAT SUCCESS which are a part of our charter. The power of the truth we teach, the presence of the Holy Ghost, to turn the outward word into an inward life, seem to assure us of great success in gathering in souls to Christ. There is much love amongst us, even with our strife; there is a warm and growing zeal in works of good. Without the presence of the Spirit these things could not be. (*Archbishop Thomson.*) *Jerusalem imperilled yet secure* (vers. 20-23):—As the existence of Jerusalem was imperilled, the first promise of Isaiah was that Jerusalem should still exist—"Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation," and so on; but, further, inasmuch as during the siege many unbelieving persons had found fault with the position of Jerusalem, because it was not surrounded by a river, the promise is given that she shall have a glorious position—"There the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams"; nay, more than this, as a climax of blessing, she is promised perpetual triumph over all her enemies, since in her streams "shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby"; or, if they come they shall prove a wreck—"Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Church of God*:—I. The first promise made to the Church of God in our text is one SECURING TO HER AN EVERLASTING EXISTENCE. The Church is not a temporary institution; it shall never be removed. 1. The Jerusalem of God shall exist as she is. What was she in those days? "The city of solemnities"; the place where prayer and praise were wont to be made. So is she to continue throughout all generations. 2. As a quiet habitation, which we would desire it to be. (1) The Church of God is always a quiet habitation, even when her enemies

surround her. Some of you may have seen in the Exhibition a Belgian picture representing the reading of the statute of the Duke of Alva in the Flemish towns, establishing the Inquisition. Godly merchants are listening in deep solemnity of sorrow; the young maiden weeps upon her sister's bosom; the aged woman turns her streaming eyes to heaven. All this the painter could depict, but he could not paint the deep heaven-born peace which still possessed the souls of the threatened ones. (2) But how quiet is she when her enemies are not allowed to prey upon her! "Then had the churches rest," says the Holy Ghost in the Acts of the Apostles. (3) We know what quiet means in our communion with one another. 3. Our text seems to indicate that there were some persons who doubted all this, and said, "Well, but you speak of this city as though it could stand an attack. It cannot; it is such a feeble place; it is like a tent; it can soon be stormed; a gust of wind can blow it over." The Lord anticipates this difficulty, and shows that the feebleness of Jerusalem should be no reason why she should not still continue to exist. She is a tabernacle—a mere tent; but she is a tabernacle that shall not be taken down. The Church's feebleness, because it drives her to God, is the Church's strength. 4. To complete this part of the promise, the city, notwithstanding all her feebleness, is to be for ever complete. (1) If I understand the last two sentences,—"Not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken," we learn here that all the true members of the Church are safe. Some of them may be driven into the earth as the stakes are driven, with a heavy mallet; but the strokes of tribulation shall only give them a better hold, and minister stability to the whole structure. (2) This also relates to the doctrines of the Gospel. (3) The ordinances. II. THE PRE-EMINENT POSITION (ver. 21). III. ETERNAL SAFETY (vers. 22, 23). (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 21, 22. **The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams.**—*The glorious Lord, the only security and consolation to His people:*— I. THE LORD HIMSELF IS THE FOUNDATION OR CAUSE OF THE SAINTS' SAFETY AND BLESSEDNESS. "For there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams." This is a consideration which may well allay our fears, excite our hopes, and confirm our faith. 1. The Lord is here called "glorious." He is glorious in His personal excellence, glorious in His essential attributes, glorious in His works of creation and providence. Above all, He is glorious to the believer's view, in the marvellous work of redemption, where He displays the glorious perfections of His nature, His power, faithfulness, truth, holiness, mercy, love, and grace. His glory is manifested in the Church where His glorious Gospel is preached, where He grants His gracious and glorious presence, and where saints meet together to see and speak of His glory. "In His temple doth every one," saith the Psalmist, "speak of His glory." Yea, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." 2. This glorious Lord will be unto His Church and people "a place of broad rivers and streams." God promises to be that to His Jerusalem, which will be instead of, and vastly superior to a river, however broad its streams. This is expressive of the abundance of His grace, and the freeness of it for the supply of His Church, and for the purification, consolation, refreshment, and confirmation in the faith of all its members. The streams of this river are the everlasting love of God, Father, Son, and Spirit; the covenant of grace, its blessings and promises; the provision and mission of Christ as a Saviour, and the blessings which flow from these, called "streams" because they flow from the fountain of divine love, and because of the rapidity, force, and power of the grace of God in the application of these blessings in conversion, which carries all before it; and because of the abundance, continuance, and freeness of them, and the gratefulness and acceptableness of them to those who see the worth of them, and feel their interest in them. II. THIS RIVER OF GOD ALSO SERVES FOR THEIR DEFENCE AND SECURITY AGAINST ALL ENEMIES. The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, &c. It was the case with literal Jerusalem, that although it had no river for its pleasure, profit, and protection, yet it had this advantage from the circumstances, that no enemy could approach it in this way. And the Lord, though He be indeed instead of a broad river to His people for their supply and safety, yet He is such an one as will not admit any enemy, great or small, signified by the "galley with oars," and the "gallant ship," to come near to hurt them. III. The text adds, as a further CONFIRMATION AND PROOF OF THE SECURITY AND TRIUMPH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD, that "the Lord is our Judge." All their wrongs

will be righted and their injuries avenged. IV. The text states, as a FURTHER ENCOURAGEMENT, that "the Lord is our Lawgiver." He hath not only enacted wholesome laws for the government of His Church and people, in keeping of which there is great reward; but He writes them on their heart, and puts His Spirit within them to enable them to keep His commandments, and walk in His ways. V. THE LORD IS ALSO OUR KING. He is King of Zion and King of saints. "The government shall be upon His shoulder." He manages and directs all the concerns of His people. "His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and His dominion endureth throughout all ages." VI. The text concludes with an EPITOME OF THE WHOLE in a few words. "He will save us." Whom will He save? Those who receive Him as their Lawgiver and King. (*J. Shore, M.A.*) *The water-supply of Jerusalem*:—One great peculiarity of Jerusalem which distinguishes it from almost all other historical cities, is that it has no river. Babylon was on the Euphrates, Nineveh on the Tigris, Thebes on the Nile, Rome on the Tiber; but Jerusalem had nothing but a fountain or two, and a well or two, and a little trickle of an intermittent stream. The water-supply to-day is, and always has been, a great difficulty, and an insuperable barrier to the city's ever having a great population. That deficiency throws a great deal of beautiful light on more than one passage in the Old Testament. Isaiah's great vision is not, as I take it, of a future, but of what the Jerusalem of his day might be to the Israelite, if he would live by faith. The mighty Lord, "the glorious Lord," shall Himself "be a place of broad rivers and streams." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The rivers of God*:—I. This remarkable promise suggests how IN GOD THERE IS THE SUPPLY OF ALL DEFICIENCIES. The city was perched on its barren, hot rock, with scarcely a drop of water, and its inhabitants must often have been tempted to wish that there had been running down the sun-bleached stones of the Kedron a flashing stream, such as laved the rock-cut temples and tombs of Thebes. Isaiah says, in effect, "You cannot see it, but if you will trust yourselves to God, there will be such a river." In like manner every defect in our circumstances, everything lacking in our lives, everything which seems to hamper us in some aspects, and to sadden us in others, may be compensated and made up, if we will hold fast by God. II. Take another side of the same thought. HERE IS A REVELATION OF GOD AND HIS SWEET PRESENCE AS OUR TRUE DEFENCE. The river that lay between some strong city and the advancing enemy was its strongest fortification when the bridge of boats was taken away. One of the ancient cities is described by one of the prophets as being held as within the coils of a serpent, by which he means the various bendings and twistings of the Euphrates which encompassed Babylon, and made it so hard to be conquered. The primitive city of Paris owed its safety, in the wild old times when it was founded, to being upon an island. Venice has lived through all the centuries because it is girded about by its lagoons. England is what it is largely because of the streak of silver sea. So, God's city has a broad moat all round it. If we will only knit ourselves with God by simple trust and continual communion, it is the plainest prose fact that nothing will harm us, and no foe will ever get near enough to shoot his arrows against us. That is a truth for faith, and not for sense. Many a man, truly compassed about by God, has to go through fiery trials of sorrow and affliction. But no real evil befalls us, because, according to the old superstition that money bewitched was cleansed if it was handed across running water, our sorrows only reach us across the river that defends. III. Take, again, another aspect of this same thought, which suggests to us GOD'S PRESENCE AS OUR TRUE REFRESHMENT AND SATISFACTION. The waterless city depended on cisterns, and they were often broken, and they were always more or less foul, and sometimes the water fell very low in them. The rivers in northern Tartary all lose themselves in the sand. Not one of them has volume or force enough to get to the sea. And the rivers from which we try to drink are sand-choked long before our thirst is slaked. So if we are wise, we shall take Isaiah's hint, and go where the water flows abundantly, and flows for ever. IV. THE MANIFOLD VARIETY IN THE RESULTS OF GOD'S PRESENCE. It shapes itself into many forms, according to our different needs. "The glorious Lord shall be a place of broad rivers." Yes; but notice the next words—"and streams." Now, the word which is there translated "streams" means the little channels, for irrigation and other purposes, by which the water of some great river is led off into the melon patches, and gardens, and plantations, and houses of the inhabitants. So we have not only the picture of the broad river in its unity, but also that of the thousand little rivulets in their multiplicity and in their direc-

tion to each man's plot of ground. It is of no profit that we live on the river's bank if we let its waters go rolling and flashing past our door, or our garden, or our lips. Unless you have a sluice, by which you can take them off into your own territory, and keep the shining blessing to be the source of fertility in your garden, and of coolness and refreshment to your thirst, your garden will be parched, and your lips will crack. We may, and must, make God our very own property; it is useless to say "*our* God," "the God of Israel," "the God of the Church," the great Creator, the Universal Father, and so on, unless we say "*my* God and my Saviour"; "my refuge and my strength." (*A. Maclaren D.D.*) *The glorious Lord*:—I. THE SALVATION OF THE GOSPEL. Its value is shown—1. In the riches of the blessings that it confers. "There," *i.e.*, in the church, "shall the Lord be unto us a place," &c. (1) The first idea suggested to the mind of a Jew by the neighbourhood of a great river, would be that of unfailing plenty. By this the salvation of the Gospel is especially distinguished. (2) The next idea suggested by "a place of broad rivers and streams" is that of beauty. Running water is everywhere a great addition to the beauty of the landscape. The richest herbage clothes the banks of every stream, &c. The highest qualities of man are brought out only by Christianity; and all that is good thrives best under its influence. (3) After plenty and beauty, the chief idea is perpetuity. The river rolls on with the same calm and even current from age to age, and yields to the successive generations of mankind the same unfailing supply. 2. The salvation of the Gospel is remarkable for its freedom from attendant evils. All the blessings of the present life have some considerable drawback to their full enjoyment. The possession of wealth is apt to lead either to wastefulness and dissipation, or to avarice; power tempts to arbitrary and despotic conduct; and those who are gifted with genius are exposed to the assaults of malice and envy;—most worldly good things lead their possessor into danger, and all of them are attended by care. But it is not so with the salvation of the Gospel: "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it"; or, as it is expressed in the text, it resembles "a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby." (1) The good of the Gospel salvation is unmingled with evil, because it requires man to do nothing injurious to himself. (2) The pleasures of the Gospel are attended and followed by no sting, while it extracts their bitterness from all ordinary griefs. II. THE GLORY OF GOD AS MANIFESTED IN HIS BESTOWING SALVATION ON HIS PEOPLE. He is "glorious," because He is unto us a place of broad rivers. &c. (*W. Dickson.*) *Broad rivers and streams*:—The meaning of this promise. 1. Fertility. 2. Abundance to the inhabitants. Places near broad rivers produce a great variety of plants. The children of Israel regretted that they had left the leeks, and garlic, and onions, and cucumbers, and melons of Egypt—plants that grew by the rivers. Besides, where there are rivers there is an abundance of fish of all kinds, and in the fat pastures, such as Goshen, which was well watered by the Nile, abundance of cattle are reared, while the abundant harvests which are there produced through the admirable irrigation make the lands blessed with broad rivers and streams the sunniest of climes. Well, now, our God is all this to His Church. 3. Broad rivers and streams in like manner point to commerce. In Holland especially the broad rivers and streams make that nation what it is; the harbours are so safe, the rivers so broad, and the canals so innumerable, that in every place commerce is easy, and the ends of the earth are linked to the nation by its broad rivers and streams. In that country we find curious importations hardly known to any other people, because they have gathered up the treasures of the far-off lands, and there was a time when their broad rivers and streams enabled them to engross the mercantile power of the whole universe. Well, beloved, our glorious Lord—keep the adjective as well as the noun—is to be to us a place of commerce. Through God we have commerce with the past; the riches of Calvary, the riches of the covenant, the riches of eternity, all come to us down the broad stream of our gracious Lord. We have commerce, too, with the future. What galleys, laden to the water's edge, come to us from the millennium! What visions we have of the days of heaven upon earth. Through our glorious Lord we have commerce with angels; commerce with the bright spirits washed in blood that sing before the throne; nay, better still, we have commerce with the Infinite One, with eternity, with self-existence, with immutability, with omnipotence, with omniscience; for our glorious Lord is to us a place of broad rivers and streams. 4. Broad rivers and streams are specially intended to set forth security. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

The Church's enemies:—1. To the eye of faith the Church has no enemies at all. "Wherein shall go no galley with oars." You ramble in your garden, perhaps, in the summer-time, and a spider has spun its stoutest web across your path; you walk along and you never think that there is anything to hinder you, and yet there are those spider's strong webs, which would have caught a thousand flies, but they do not impede you. So is it with God's glorious Church: there are barriers across her path, but they are only spider's webs; on she walks; she has no adversaries, for she counts her adversaries to be nothing. 2. When we are compelled to see that the Church has adversaries, yet, according to the promise, those adversaries shall be put to confusion. They have launched the bark; the galley with oars is on the sea. The text does not say that no galley with oars shall ever be there, but "no galley with oars shall go there." Now, in order to make it "go" they must fix the mast; they must gird the tacklings, or how shall they spread the sail, and how shall they proceed on their way? Ah! but they cannot (ver. 21). 3. And then faith not only sees the confusion of her adversaries, but she also believes they are so utterly destroyed that she may go out and spoil them. 4. What is to be the end of it all? Glory to a Triune God (ver. 22). (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 22. **For the Lord is our judge . . . lawgiver . . . king.**—*Salvation in harmony with Divine relations:*—The advent of sin into the world is one of the greatest mysteries of the universe. It was the introduction of a mighty force for evil in direct antagonism to God, and to everything God ever made. Now that sin had found a footing in this world, it became a problem, perhaps the most perplexing and difficult ever known: How the Divine government should deal with sin to prevent its spread, to restrain its action, to subdue its power, and, if possible, to expel it from the throne it had usurped. Known to us are two methods in which the Divine government has dealt with sin. The first is that of stern, vigorous, prompt justice. This was the principle adopted in the case of the fallen angels. Sin in them became at once its own punishment. In the case of man God adopted another method of dealing with sin—a method of merciful and mediatorial intervention. By redemption He proposes to meet evil in its own temple, even in the heart of man, and there restrain, subdue, destroy, and abolish it. How can this be done? If done at all, it must be done in perfect harmony with the attributes and the character of God. He can do nothing contrary to His nature, or dishonouring to His law. If He saves, pardons, and acquits the guilty, it must be in perfect harmony with His law and government. Jehovah King, Jehovah Lawgiver, Jehovah Judge is our Jehovah Saviour. All the four offices blend and harmonise in one glorious Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. I. JEHOVAH IS OUR KING, and although we are rebels against His kingly authority, yet He can save us. His right to govern us is based on His creatorship. He made us and not we ourselves. All our powers of body, mind, and spirit are gifts—His gifts. Not one of them is of our own production. He hath made all things for Himself, for His service, for His will. Had the race of man continued obedient to His will, we should have continued happy and safe under His benevolent and holy rule. But the reverse of this has taken place. We have rebelled. Had He doomed us to woes unrelieved and unending, every attribute of His nature, every law in the universe, every being in creation would have given the acquiescing Amen, just and true are all Thy ways. Yet, when retribution with unrestrained force was about to fall, when truth and justice demanded the execution of the dread sentence, the curse was rolled back, wrath suspended, punishment deferred, guilty man spared, and complete eternal deliverance provided and freely offered. How came this to pass? Not by a mere act of arbitrary sovereignty. There are things which God cannot do. He cannot do an injustice. He cannot deny His Word; He cannot deny Himself. He cannot come into the midst of a rebel world armed to the teeth against His majesty, and say, "I know that all men are traitors to My rule, rebels against My authority; all deserve to die, and without exception ought to die, for I have solemnly declared that death is the penalty of rebellion; but as sovereign Lord, I select some from amongst them who shall not die, who shall escape the penalty, who shall be treated as if they had never rebelled, and ultimately be crowned with glory and immortality, like all loyal beings in My dominions. I give no reason for thus acting. I claim the right to do it by an act of sovereign will." We must all feel that this was impossible to God. This would be to abolish all distinction between virtue and vice, between obedience

and rebellion; this would be to overthrow law and right, to enthrone lawlessness, and reward crime: God could never do this. Notwithstanding that He is our King, and that we are traitors who have dared to lift our hand to smite the Majesty on high, yet He saves us. Jehovah is our King, and He will save us. But how? If He saves us, it must be in perfect harmony with His Kingship. And so He does. The Son of God equipped with human nature steps into the breach, stands between the rebels and the Majesty they have offended. The naked sword in the hand of the angered King is about to fall and smite, but Jehovah's Fellow bares His breast to receive the smiting. The strongest condemnation of sin which even God Himself could give was given when He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. II. SALVATION IN HARMONY WITH LAW. Jehovah is our Lawgiver, and He will save us. This clause teaches that God sustains towards us the relation of Lawgiver, but the difficulty in the way of saving us is in the fact that we sustain towards Him the relation of lawbreakers. There can be no question as to our guilt. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. If then we have all sinned, the law cannot justify, nay, the law condemns us. The penalty of disobedience is death. The Lawgiver cannot by an act of mere sovereignty remit that penalty. He cannot ignore or override the law which He Himself has made. If this were done, the Maker of the law would become the breaker of the law. This can never be. Salvation in order to be satisfactory to the sinner himself must be bestowed in harmony with law, and must have the consent of the law. To secure for me abiding peace I must have the assurance that the law consents to my pardon, to blot out my sins from her book of remembrance, and to cancel the sentence of condemnation. I must be assured that the law will never lift up her voice to condemn me, nor stretch out her hand to smite me, nor throw open the sources of wrath to overwhelm me. Redemption through atonement meets this difficulty. Jehovah Lawgiver becomes Jehovah Saviour. But how? Within the ark were the tables of the law; over the law was the lid, the covering, called the propitiatory or mercy-seat; over that again the cherubim in bending thoughtful attitude; between the cherubim the Glory, the uncreated symbol of the Divine Presence seated in majesty on the mercy-seat. This then is the teaching of this profound symbolism. Mercy has built her throne on law; so that when the transgressor approaches God to plead for pardon, and when God graciously bestows it, the law is present, not to condemn, but to approve, not to object but to acquiesce in the pardon: that pardon proceeds from mercy and that mercy is founded on law. Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. Now that the law has vindicated her own majesty and purity by smiting our Substitute, the law can not only acquiesce, but also triumph in your pardon, and be more signally magnified by your salvation than by your condemnation, so that we can challenge you to come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, for Jehovah Lawgiver is also Jehovah the Saviour. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." Here Jesus Christ is spoken of as an advocate or pleader. What is He pleading for? Forgiveness. The sinner cannot deny or disprove the accusation. But the Divine Advocate is there and shows Himself as newly slain, saying, I have endured the curse for him, I have been wounded for his transgressions, the chastisement of his peace has been laid upon Me, and I claim for him forgiveness. The plea is admitted, the Advocate prevails, the sinner is free; in the presence of the sacrifice the law is magnified and announces the acquittal of the penitent believer: "Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace." III. SALVATION IN HARMONY WITH JUDGESHIP. Jehovah Judge is also Jehovah Saviour. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. But is not every man judged at the hour of death and his eternal destiny then irrevocably fixed? Yes. What need then of a general judgment? One important, if not the most important purpose is this—the general judgment will give the Judge of all the opportunity of vindicating Himself. He must be justified when He speaks; He must be cleared when He judges. Assembled worlds on that day must be satisfied that every decision is in perfect harmony with truth and righteousness. For father and mother to enter heaven with even the shadow of a suspicion that the sentence pronounced upon their son was unjust or severe, would mar heaven to them for ever. For His own sake and for the sake of all His subjects throughout His vast dominions, God must silence every objection, dissipate every suspicion. How will the Judge clear Himself? Not by pleading sovereignty. We cannot conceive of Him saying to assembled worlds on that great day:

"I am sovereign disposer of all events, of all beings, of all worlds. I do as I will with each and all without giving any reason. I have endowed you with reason but I intend to treat you as though you had none. You may be dissatisfied with your destiny, or with the destiny of some in whom you are lovingly concerned; you may suspect Me of having done you or your loved ones an injustice, but that will not concern Me. You may carry your suspicion with you to your doom, it may cleave to your spirit for ever; I will not attempt to remove it or to convince you that I am right." This would be an unreasoning despotism, and one shudders at the thought of the righteous Judge dealing thus with His rational creatures. He will justify Himself when He speaks, and clear Himself when He judges. But how? When the dividing line is drawn between the righteous and the wicked, the one placed on the right, the other on the left of the judgment throne, the Judge will be able to say: "Notwithstanding that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, yet, in infinite compassion I made a provision for the removal of sin, for the deliverance of every man from its power, guilt, and pollution, and for his complete restoration to purity and bliss. These on My right availed themselves of that provision, fulfilled its conditions, sought with true repentance and faith the application of that redemption to their heart, and they stand here to-day without sin. Who will lay anything to their charge?" Turning then to the other side the Judge will be able to say: "All these on My left I have loved with an infinite compassion, I have died to redeem them, My salvation was as free to them as to the others, and would have been as effectual had they received it, but they spurned it. I shed My blood for them, but they trampled it under foot. I can do no more for them. They have chosen death and they must have it." What then is the inference? If you perish it will be your own fault; the entire responsibility of your lost condition is with yourself, and will rest on you alone, and for ever. "God so loved the world," &c., so that if you perish, it will not be because you are sinners, but rather because you spurn the remedy, and reject the only Redeemer. Sin and punishment are inseparable. You cannot divorce them. Where the one is, the other must be. If sin remain, you cannot escape punishment; for sin is its own punishment. The only method to avoid punishment is to abolish sin. God's system of redemption provides for this. "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil." Nothing that God ever made is to be annihilated. Matter may change its form, its appearance, its relations, but science teaches us that not an atom will ever cease to be. God has, however, provided for the annihilation of sin in the believer through atonement. This is the mystery of redemption, it destroys that which destroys humanity. It saves the sinner by destroying his sin. (*Richard Roberts.*) *The restoration of judgment, God's way of salvation to the Church:*—The broken and divided condition of the Christian Church is, to every right-thinking man, a subject of uneasy reflection. 1. It is in the nature of things impossible for a multitude of men to live together, or subsist as a community without the occurrence of differences, disputes, and questions of a greater or a less degree of importance. 2. The institution by which God meets and provides against this unavoidable circumstance in human life is that of the judge, the fullest general idea and true theological definition of which office is contained in these words, "If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood," &c. (Deut. xvii. 8–13). 3. The provision of a judge with absolute and conclusive authority, is God's way of meeting that evil to which human society is exposed. He demands from men that they shall bring their controversies and have them determined by the person whom He appoints; and they are to yield to the award of the judge, through submission to God, by whose voice or in whose providence he has been appointed, and through faith that God is with the judge, and is at hand to give him wisdom and discernment (Prov. xxix. 4; Judg. ii. 18). 4. The taking away of judges is one of the last and severest punishments that God inflicts upon a people. When God gives men children to be their princes and babes to rule over them—so that the people are oppressed everyone by another and everyone by his neighbour, so that the child behaves himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable—it is in His anger that He does so (Amos ii. 3). 5. Again, when God recovered His people, or spake of doing so, the restoration of the judge is one of the main acts or promises (Isa. i. 26). 6. To set judgment in the earth is declared to be one of the offices of Christ: and His kingdom is characterised as that in which "a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in

judgment"; when the people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting-places. But of peace and quiet security and well-being without the office of the judge, there is no mention in all scripture, either prophetical or historical. 7. This method and ordinance of God for the preservation of peace and righteousness among men is continually alluded to in the language of the New Testament; alluded to and recognised, and therefore shown to be perpetual. Our blessed Lord always refers to the judge as the ordained ultimate decider in all human quarrels and contentions; and although He would have His disciples to be reconciled everyone to his adversary before an appeal to the judge shall have become unavoidable, yet He clearly points out the absoluteness and peremptoriness of the ordinance, as one which God will ordinarily guide, and one which He will not suffer any man with impunity to despise. 8. The duty of those whose matter is brought before the judge is to do according to the sentence of the judge, not declining from it to the right nor to the left. This, of course, is on the supposition that the judge spoken of is the ultimate one, from whom there can be no appeal. So the general peace of society, and the comfort and quietness of the individual himself are ensured. 9. Moreover, it is through the judge that law becomes a living thing, capable of continual enlargement, and of application to the varying conditions of human society; which is itself a living thing, its character always in progress, with new interests springing up, and liable to new difficulties and complications. 10. The Church of Christ is the widest and most comprehensive society of men that can exist. How much more than all other societies of men must the Church be liable to causes of division! 11. And shall God's ordinance for peace not be found in the spiritual corporation? And if there be in the Church such an ordinance of ultimate appeal, and peremptory decision, shall not the same implicit submission be required which God commanded that men should render under the law—a submission more intelligent than under the Jewish dispensation, and therefore more voluntary, yet not less absolute—and shall not the penalty be as severe as it then was for the despiser and the presumptuous? 12. There has been no Catholic judgment in the Church since the removal of the apostles; and we are conscious of the condition to which we have been reduced by the want of judgment. Questions, doubts, disputes, discontents, hatreds, divisions, rebellions have accumulated. 13. And when God's people fall into such depths as these, how does He act towards them? "He repenteth Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone" (Deut. xxxii. 36). Such as God was to Israel the same is He for ever, the same shall He show Himself unto His Church. And unto Israel He hath said, "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellers as at the beginning, afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Isa. i. 26). Those judges and counsellors, shall not they be peacemakers for the long-vexed Church—by whom the winds and the sea shall be rebuked and there shall be a great calm? (*W. Dow, M.A.*) *Our best safety*:—I. ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S DECISION IN THE AFFAIRS OF LIFE. "The Lord is our Judge." These words do not refer to the final judgment, but to the verdict of the Judge in this life. 1. This decision is made known in reference to nations, as in this chapter. God judged between Israel and the Assyrians by destroying the Assyrian host. He showed that the Jews were His people, and He was their God. 2. The same may be said of Churches, as is shown by the history of the seven Churches of Asia. 3. So likewise of individuals, though the Divine decision in this case is not always so manifest. II. ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S WILL AS THE RULE OF LIFE. "The Lord is our Lawgiver." We are liable to take our own passions, inclinations, and desires as the rule of life. Sometimes the maxims of society and the examples of others. But the only safe rule is the will of God. 1. It is benevolent in its intentions—it aims at our happiness here and hereafter. 2. It is safe in its action—always the same. Human wisdom changes. 3. It is elevating in its effects, ennobles, enriches, exalts. 4. It is eternal. We must ever live under the rule of this Lawgiver. If we accept it as the rule of life here, it will be the delight of heaven to live under the same hereafter. III. ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY. "The Lord is our King." He is a worthy King. 1. A King who is infinite in power, and wisdom, and love. 2. A King who ever thinks of, and provides for, the welfare of His subjects. 3. A King whose dominion extends to all things; to every element and every creature; to all men and spirits, good and bad; to all regions—earth, heaven, and hell. 4. A King whose kingdom shall have no end. No revolution will ever disturb the security of His throne, and

that because the sceptre of His kingdom is a right sceptre. Let us earnestly and devoutly say, "Thy kingdom come." IV. ASSURANCE OF SAFETY. "He will save us." A result arising from the acceptance of the Divine under the three foregoing aspects—as Judge, as Lawgiver, and as King. (*Homilist.*) **The Lord is our King.**—*Our King:*—Let the great day at Hebron when David was made king by a united nation be to us a type of that greater day when a united world with a perfect heart shall crown Jesus King of men. 1. Jesus is our King by Divine anointing. 2. Jesus received regal honours without any protest on His part. 3. When Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven there was another crowning there. 4. Though Jesus was the King of men, He refused to possess universal empire. 5. Our King has two great things to do. (1) To recover men from sin. He had to bear the penalty. Jesus recovers us also by delivering us from our inclination to sin. And by giving penitence to the human heart. (2) To make us kings like Himself. He bids every man hope in God. 6. Our King is powerful. 7. He is an active King. 8. What shall we do for our King? (*W. Birch.*) *Israel's King:*—Two distinct benefits stand out as soon as we compare the condition of Israel under the judges with that under King David and King Solomon. Under the king was obtained—1. Unity. One nation with one national life, instead of isolated tribes living under their own judges, and having little cohesion with the other tribes. 2. Salvation from their enemies, and prosperity at home. (*Hubert Brooke, M.A.*)

Ver. 23. **Thy tacklings are loosed.**—*Thy tacklings are loosed:*—The tacklings may denote the good counsels of wise senators; a strong, well-disciplined army; and money, which is necessary to supply the exigences of the State. These tacklings are loosed, when few prudent men can be found to manage public affairs, and to form the manners of the citizens; when the soldiery become weak and timid, and there is a scarcity of finances to carry into execution the salutary measures that are requisite to be adopted. (*R. Macculloch.*) *They could not well strengthen their mast:*—The mast of the ship may signify the most eminent person or persons in the kingdom who were exalted above all the others. The mast, in this figurative sense, could not be well strengthened; when the proper means of aiding and supporting the chief magistrate were wanting or were greatly deficient, he could not receive the succours that were requisite to maintain the dignity and prosperity of the empire. Persons in power are incapable by themselves to advance the public welfare, unless supported by the wealth, the interest, the advice, and courage of those over whom they preside. (*Ibid.*) *They could not spread the sail:*—The sail may denote the means that were necessary to be applied and vigorously extended without delay, in order to promote the purposes to which they ought to be subservient, for the benefit of the State. These the people employed in managing public affairs were unable immediately to use, so as to give effect to the measures whereby the common interest might have been forwarded. (*Ibid.*) *The prey of a great spoil:*—The power whose situation resembled a ship in distress is supposed to have met with a terrible storm, whereby she had been dreadfully shattered, her cables and ropes loosed or broken, her masts disabled, so that she was almost a wreck. When in this forlorn condition, deserted by the mariners, who had lost hopes of her being able to stand out the tempest, the valuable cargo wherewith she was laden becomes a prey to the fraudulent and rapacious. (*Ibid.*) *The ship of state:*—The abrupt transition from the glorious future to the present or the past, is somewhat surprising at this point. It is not Assyria but Zion which is compared to an unseaworthy ship. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) Seems to describe the fate of a hostile ship. (*Prof. A. B. Davidson, LL.D.*) **The lame take the prey.**—*The prey-taker:*—Men labour under seemingly great disadvantages, and amid the most unfavourable circumstances, yet making grand achievements, getting great blessing for themselves, great blessing for the world, great blessing for the Church; and so "the lame take the prey." (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The disabilities of successful men:*—Do you know that the three great poets of the world were totally blind? Homer, Ossian, John Milton. Do you know that Mr. Prescott, who wrote that enchanting book *The Conquest of Mexico*, never saw Mexico, could not even see the paper on which he was writing? A framework across the sheet, between which up and down went his pen immortal. Do you know that Gambassio, the sculptor, could not see the marble before him, or the chisel

with which he cut it into shapes bewitching? Do you know that Alexander Pope, whose poems will last as long as the English language, was so much of an invalid that he had to be sewed up every morning in rough canvas in order to stand on his feet at all? Do you know that Stuart, the celebrated painter, did much of his wonderful work under the shadow of the dungeon where he had been unjustly imprisoned for debt? Do you know that Demosthenes by almost superhuman exertion first had to conquer the lisp of his own speech before he conquered assemblages with his eloquence? Do you know that Bacon struggled up through innumerable sicknesses, and that Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott went limping on club-foot through all their life, and that many of the great poets, and painters, and orators, and historians, and heroes of the world had something to keep them back, and pull them down, and impede their way, and cripple their physical or their intellectual movement, and yet that they pushed on and pushed up until they reached the spoils of worldly success, and amid the huzzas of nations and centuries "the lame took the prey"? You know that a vast multitude of these men started under the disadvantage of obscure parentage. Columbus, the son of the weaver; Ferguson, the astronomer, the son of the shepherd. America the prey of the one, worlds on worlds the prey of the other. (*Ibid.*) *The advantages of invalidism*:—What is true in secular directions, is more true in spiritual and religious directions. There are in all communities many invalids. They never know a well day. They adhere to their occupations, but they go panting along the streets with exhaustions, and at eventime they lie down on the lounge with aching beyond all medicament. They have tried all prescriptions, they have gone through all the cures which were proclaimed infallible, and they have come now to surrender to perpetual ailments. They consider they are among many disadvantages, and when they see those who are buoyant in health pass by, they almost envy their robust frames and easy respirations. But I have noticed among that invalid class those who have the greatest knowledge of the Bible, who are in the nearest intimacy with Jesus Christ, who have the most glowing experiences of the truth, who have had the most remarkable answers to prayer, and who have most exhilarant anticipations of heaven. The temptations which weary us who are in robust health, they have conquered. They have divided among them the spoils of the conquest. Many who are athletic and swarthy loiter in the road, while these are the lame which take the prey. Robert Hall an invalid, Edward Payson an invalid, Richard Baxter an invalid, Samuel Rutherford an invalid. (*Ibid.*) *Physical disability attended by spiritual advantage*:—Through raised letters the art of printing has been brought to the attention of the blind. You take up the Bible for the blind, and you close your eyes, and you run your fingers over the raised letters, and you say, "Why, I never could get any information in this way; what a slow way of reading. God help the blind." And yet I find among that class of persons—among the blind, the deaf, and the dumb—the most thorough acquaintance with God's Word. Shut out from all other sources of information, no sooner does their hand touch the raised letter than they gather a prayer. Without eyes, they look off upon the kingdoms of God's love. Without hearing, they catch the minstrelsy of the skies. Dumb, yet with pencil or with irradiated countenance, they declare the glory of God. A large audience assembled in New York at the anniversary of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, and one of the visitors, with chalk on the blackboard, wrote this question to the pupils, "Do you not find it very hard to be deaf and dumb?" And one of the pupils took the chalk and wrote on the blackboard this sublime sentence in answer: "When the song of the angels shall burst upon our enraptured ear we will scarcely regret that our ears were never marred with earthly sounds." (*Ibid.*) *Spiritual compensation for physical blindness*:—A lad who had been blind from infancy was cured. The oculist operated upon the lad, and then put a very heavy bandage over the eyes, and after a few weeks had gone by the bandage was removed, and the mother said to her child, "Willie, can you see?" He said, "Oh, mamma, is this heaven?" The contrast between the darkness before and the brightness afterwards was overwhelming. And I tell you the glories of heaven will be a thousandfold brighter for those who never saw anything on earth. (*Ibid.*) *Poor, yet rich*:—There are those in all communities who toil mightily for a livelihood. They have scant wages. Perhaps they are diseased, or have physical infirmities, so that they are hindered from doing a continuous day's work. A city missionary finds them up the dark alley, with no fire, with thin clothing, with very coarse bread. They never ride in the street car; they cannot afford the five cents. They never see any pictures save

those in the show window on the street, from which they are often jostled and looked at by someone who seems to say in the look, "Move on! what are you doing here looking at pictures?" Yet many of them live on mountains of transfiguration. At their rough table He who fed the five thousand breaks the bread. They talk often of the good times that are coming. This world has no charm for them, but heaven entrances their spirit. They often divide their scant crust with some forlorn wretch who knocks at their door at night, and on the blast of the night wind, as the door opens to let them in, is heard the voice of Him who said, "I was hungry and ye fed Me." No cohort of heaven will be too bright to transport them. By God's help they have vanquished the Assyrian host. (*Ibid.*) *Ordinary Christians may accomplish great good*:—There are those who would like to do good. They say, "Oh, if I only had wealth, or if I had eloquence, or if I had high social position, how much I would accomplish for God and the Church." You have great opportunities for usefulness. Who built the Pyramids? The king who ordered them built? No; the plain workmen who added stone after stone, stone after stone. Who built the dykes of Holland? The government that ordered the enterprise? No; the plain workmen who carried the stuff and rung their trowels on the wall. Who are those who have built these vast cities? The capitalists? No; the carpenters, the masons, the plumbers, the plasterers, the tinners, the roofers dependent on a day's wages for a livelihood. And so in the great work of assuaging human suffering, and enlightening human ignorance, and halting human iniquity. In that great work the chief part is to be done by ordinary men, with ordinary speech, in an ordinary manner, and by ordinary means. (*Ibid.*) *The lame take the prey*:—A long, long while that has puzzled one, why the prophet should say, "The lame take the prey." Our experience of human life goes to show that lame people seldom succeed in taking the great prizes of life. If a man is lame in his power of calculation, and cannot easily count up columns of figures; if he is lame in his caligraphy, if he is lame in his memory, and cannot easily recall names and faces; if he is lame in the power of touch, and cannot detect the difference between two apparently identical fabrics; if a man is lame in any faculty, he is crushed to the wall in the busy rush of human life and arrives at the end of the crowd to take the leavings of the rest. In human life a man who is lame anyhow misses the prey, misses the spoil, misses the prize. But in God's world, in God's Book, in God's dealings with men, "The race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong." Weakness has a fascination for God; and those who have lost everything that this world can give are they who come off best with our heavenly Father. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Henry Fawcett, Postmaster-General*:—One great Postmaster-General of England was lame in his sight. Mr. Fawcett was blind, but he took the prey of a great office which he fulfilled with great success. (*Ibid.*) *The weak favoured*:—I got an illustration of this when I happened to be staying in a farm-house. With one exception the family consisted of robust, hearty children, but there was one little lame boy. Whilst I was staying, there came in a great hamper of apples, and at once all the boys and girls in the family, having eyed them wistfully, proceeded to appropriate, and to appropriate very lavishly, the apples. The little lame fellow, with his puny, wan face, looked forward eagerly as those apples disappeared, and no one thought of him, till mother came, a bustling, quick-tempered woman. She said, "What is that you are doing? Put all those apples back again, I tell you." And very ruefully they replaced them. "Now," she said, "Jimmy, you come and take your pick." And the little lame fellow on the crutch pushed his way up to the table, took the ripest and juiciest, and filled his pockets as full as they would hold, and then went back with a flush upon his pale cheeks. Then mother said to the other children, "Now do what you like with the rest." I saw how in mother's love the lame take the prey! (*Ibid.*) *The weak specially cared for*:—I came afterwards into the house of a workman, a smith, one whose closed fist could fell any man. He had an ailing child. A little, puny thing lay and cried in the cradle. There was no chance to rear it; it must die. And he came in from his smithy—a strong, brawny man, with black hair. And I tell you that child dragged that man down to the level, and its poor, weak, puny frame was able to do for that strong man what the strongest in the village could not—it could fell him! And at once there came upon me the conception, in dealing with God, at any rate, it is not the strong man who can shoulder his way and fight the brunt and take what he will in this world, every one waiting behind him, but it is the weak who get the tenderest blessings. (*Ibid.*) *The lowly are enriched*:—When I began to preach I thought all God's best things were on the tall shelf, and

when I got very good I should be able to reach them down. Now I find all the best gifts are on the low shelf, that the babes can get at. And it is only when we become as little babes, only when we become simple, natural, and our stiff backs get bent, that we get low enough to take God's benefits. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 24. **And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick.**—*The bliss of heaven* :—Two principal circumstances are dwelt upon, as constituting the bliss of heaven. I. THERE IS NO SORROW IN HEAVEN. "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." It is otherwise in this world, ruined as it has been by sin. Here "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." And what men universally feel, they with one consent complain of. In one way or other, every child of Adam is exclaiming, "I am sick!" With some—1. The body is sick. But in heaven there is nothing of all this. 2. The heart is sick—sick of "hope deferred," of rash and ill-judged wishes, of continual disappointments. In heaven, no heart saith, "I am sick." No disappointment, there, of former hopes. Even hope finds no admission there. "We hope for that we see not." But in heaven all is sight, and knowledge, and solid experience. 3. The soul is sick. In heaven no indwelling sin will remain, to suggest evil, when we "would do good": no tempter, to recommend to us forbidden pleasures: no apostate, rebellious world, to revile, ensnare, or persecute the friends of God. Still—as there can be no doubt that memory will accompany the soul into its heavenly habitation—it may be imagined by some that the recollection of sins committed on earth must interfere with its entire felicity. But the apprehension is groundless. That a deep sense of unworthiness will exist, there is no doubt; even the sinless angels feel this. But the painful sense of guilt will be for ever excluded. II. THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION IN HEAVEN. "The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." 1. The forgiveness of sin will be more certain. Forgiveness is certain to the real believer; but who is certain of himself? 2. The forgiveness of sin will then be more complete,—not so much the forgiveness itself, as the consequences of it. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *Healing and pardon* :—This whole chapter was a gracious message from God to a people who were *in extremis*. When the worst had come to the worst, He laid bare His arm and brought deliverance for His people. Is not this a general rule with God? The peril of Jerusalem serves as a dark background to bring out the brightness of my text. I. THERE IS SUCH A THING AS PRESENT FORGIVENESS. There must be a present, conscious, enjoyable pardon of sin—1. Else there would be no joy in the world for thoughtful minds. 2. Else the main motive and fountain of love would be dried up. Forgiveness begets gratitude, gratitude creates love, and love brings forth holiness. 3. Else we should always be in bondage through fear of death. 4. Else the whole system of grace would be a dead letter, and its glorious privileges would be mere shells without a kernel. Let us bend our thoughts to a consideration of this great blessing as it is treated of in this chapter. (1) It is plainly promised in the text. (2) If we wish to obtain this free pardon it will be granted in answer to prayer. Read the second verse: "O Lord, be gracious unto us." (3) Pardon is given in connection with the exaltation of God. Read the fifth verse: "The Lord is exalted." He does not grant this forgiveness until we begin to recognise that He is a great God and a Saviour. We must see that He is great in justice, and we must bow in penitence, and honour that justice. (4) God grants pardon when men are humbled. See the seventh verse: "Their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly." (5) God grants this pardon also when the heart is searched. Read the fourteenth verse: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?" When we begin to examine ourselves, to fear because of sin, and to turn from all hypocrisy, then the Lord will accept us. (6) God will also pardon us when He is acknowledged to be our Ruler and Lord. Look at the twenty-second verse: "The Lord is our judge," &c. (7) He will also forgive us when we put our trust in Him. Read the last clause of the twenty-second verse: "He will save us." Faith must look for salvation from the Lord alone, and then salvation will come to it. II. WHEN SIN IS PARDONED, THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN ARE ALSO REMOVED. Sin had made these people sick, as Isaiah saith in his first chapter—"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." But when iniquity is forgiven, then "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." Special chastisement is usually removed when any peculiar sin is forgiven. In the case of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, if some of the temporal results of sin do not cease, yet it is only

in appearance that they remain: or rather they remain for other purposes, benign and useful, and not as wrathful inflictions. III. THIS MAKES A REMARKABLE CHANGE IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE FAVOURED PEOPLE. "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." 1. They have no need to say it when the Lord comes and dwells with them: for the Sun of Righteousness hath risen upon them with healing in His wings. 2. They shall have no thought of saying, "I am sick." He that feels the joy of pardoned sin forgets all his pains and griefs. 3. These people did not say they were sick, since they had a motive for not saying so. The three lepers who went out and divided the spoil did not say, "We are lepers": that was forgotten, and they entered the tents as if they had been in health. They went into one pavilion and ate and drank, and then they went into another. Men free from leprosy could not have made themselves more at home. They took away gold and silver and hid it; though they were lepers. So when the Lord pardons our sin there is a prey to be taken: riches of grace are at our disposal. 4. Pardoned people shall not say they are sick, for by a little anticipation they shall declare the very contrary. In a little time we shall be where the inhabitant shall never be sick again. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Sickness and sin:*—I. Let us speak of THOSE "ILLS THAT FLESH IS HEIR TO." Wherever man exists in this world, the cry is heard, "I am sick." It is so because wherever man exists there is sin. Disease has been sent to reprove the sins of men, and to correct them with salutary pain. We are not competent to decide what specific connection there is between disease and sin in the case of our fellow-men. Endurance of sickness is more often a mark of God's goodwill than of His severe displeasure. 1. Pain removes us out of the way of temptation, gives us time for reflection, when we were hastily running into danger. 2. How much a formidable sickness has helped a believer in drawing out his thoughts to the heavenly country and the passage into glory! But these considerations do not remove this original and humbling fact that sickness is a disorder in God's world and that it is connected with that moral disorder which we call sin. II. THE REMOVAL OF BOTH THESE. As sickness and sin entered together, so shall they depart together. (*D. Fraser, D.D.*) *Pardon does not involve immediate deliverance from all evil*:—Upon one other point connected with the forgiveness of sins we get instruction from the experience of Jerusalem. Pardon does not change the outside of life; it does not immediately modify the movements of history, or suspend the laws of nature. Although God has forgiven Jerusalem, Assyria comes back to besiege her. Although the penitent be truly reconciled to God, the constitutional results of his fall remain: the frequency of temptation, the power of habit, the bias and facility downwards, the physical and social consequences. Pardon changes none of these things. It does not keep off the Assyrians. But, if pardon means the return of God to the soul, then in this we have the secret of the return of the foe. Men could not try nor develop a sense of the former except by their experience of the latter. Had the Assyrians not returned, the Jews would have had no experimental proof of God's restored presence, and the great miracle would never have happened that rang through human history for evermore—a trumpet-call to faith in the God of Israel. And so, still "the Lord scourgeth every son whom He receiveth," because He would put our penitence to the test; because He would discipline our disorganised affections, and give conscience and will a chance of wiping out defeat by victory; because He would baptize us with the most powerful baptism possible—the sense of being trusted once more to face the enemy upon the fields of our disgrace. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *"Nobody is quite well"*:—A friend who met Lord Beaconsfield soon after that statesman had lost his helpful wife hoped that he was quite well. In a hollow voice Beaconsfield answered, "Nobody is quite well." This is true. (*Quiver.*) *Forgiveness and healing*:—A brother had grievously offended, and had been put out from Church fellowship for his sin; and he so behaved that his pastor thought of him with pain, and was glad to avoid an interview with him, for it only produced a sad attempt at self-justification. At length the Lord brought him to a better mind. He sought his pastor, and said, with tears, "Will you shake hands with me?" The pastor replied, "Right gladly. I rejoice to feel that the past is all forgiven. How are you?" The repentant one made this reply, "I am quite well now that you restore me to your esteem." The poor man was extremely ill, but the joy of being once more in his old place in his friend's thoughts made him refuse to say, "I am sick." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Forgiveness*:—"Thy sins be forgiven thee." It is a beautiful figure. It is as if a boat was moored to a filthy mainland and could not get away. There comes a man who cuts the cable, and the boat floats away down stream. That is the figure given. The Lord comes and

cuts the cable that binds me to the filthy mainland of the past, and my boat goes free. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VERS. 1-17. **Come near, ye nations, to hear.**—The subject is, as in chap. xiii., the Lord's judgment upon all the nations; and as chap xiii. singled out Babylon for special doom, so chap. xxxiv. singles out Edom. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Edom* represents here all the powers hostile to the Church of God as such, and is thus an idea of the profoundest and widest cosmical significance. (*F. Delitzsch.*) *Edom's punishment:*—The eternal punishment falling on the Edomites is depicted (vers. 8-10) in figures and colours suggested by the nearness of Edom to the Dead Sea, and the volcanic character of this mountain-land; it suffers the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jer. xlix. 18). (*Ibid.*) *Isaiah xxxiv. and xxxv.:*— These are two wonderful chapters, and great use is made of them by Jeremiah and by Zephaniah. This use of the Bible by the Bible is of great consequence; not only is it interesting as a literary incident, but it is full of suggestion as to the range and certainty and usefulness of inspiration. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. **My sword shall be bathed in heaven.**—*The sword bathed in heaven:*— The text draws back the curtain which separates the visible world from the invisible. It reveals celestial regions, in which there are also great struggles going on. It lifts up our eyes to the grander movements of the world of spirits; and then it declares that the sword which is to be used in fighting what seem to be the petty wars of the Hebrews and the Edomites, is the same sword which has been used in these celestial conflicts; that the means and instruments of righteousness upon the earth must be the same with the means and instruments of righteousness in the heavens. I. ALL GOOD STRUGGLE IN THE WORLD IS REALLY GOD'S BATTLE, and ought to recognise itself as such. Every special victory of human progress—the victory over slavery, superstition, social wrong, nay, even the victory over tough matter, the subduing of the hard stuff of nature to spiritual uses,—each of these is but a step in the great onward march of God taking possession of His own. Fight your battle with the sword bathed in heaven; so you shall make it victorious, and grow strong and great yourself in fighting it. II. One of the most marvellous things about Jesus is the UNION OF FIRE AND PATIENCE. He saw His Father's house turned into a place of merchandise, and instantly the whip of small cords was in His hands, and He was cleansing the sacred place with His impassioned indignation. And yet He walked day after day through the streets of Jerusalem, and saw the sin, and let the sinners sin on with only the remonstrance of His pure presence and His pitying gaze. Only in God's own time and in God's own way can the battles of the Lord be fought. There is no self-will in Jesus. He is one with His Father, and lives by His Father's will. His sword was always bathed in heaven. III. THE BATTLE WHICH GOES ON WITHIN OURSELVES IS GOD'S BATTLE, and is of supreme importance. If the battle be God's, it must be fought only with God's weapons. You want to get rid of your selfishness. You must not kill it with the sword of another selfishness, which thenceforth shall rule in its place. Selfishness can only be cast out by self-forgetfulness and consecration. To count sin God's enemy, and to fight it with all His purity and strength, that is what it means for us that our sword should be bathed in heaven. (*Phillips Brooks, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **Seek ye out of the Book of the Lord.**—*The Scriptures the Book of the Lord, to be diligently studied:*—I. THE HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE BOOK OF THE LORD. II. THE SCRIPTURE IS A BOOK TO BE READ; carefully and diligently searched, consulted and sought unto. (*T. Watson, D.D.*) *The Holy Scripture is the Book of the Lord:*—1. This Book discovers what no mortal could ever have done, and nowise could be had but by Divine revelation. 2. The perfect holiness of the doctrine. 3. The efficacy of the doctrine in its searching and convincing the conscience (Heb. iv. 12); converting souls from their most beloved lusts, even when nothing can be expected from the world for such a change (Psa. xix. 7); rejoicing the heart under the deepest distresses (ver. 8). This is not from any virtue in the letters or syllables, but from the Spirit, whose instrument it is. 4. The miracles wherewith it

has been confirmed. 5. There is an inward sensation of this in the spirits of those that have their senses exercised. (*Ibid.*) *Seeking out of the Book of the Lord*:—What is presupposed in this seeking out of the Book of the Lord? 1. That man has lost his way, and needs direction to find it. 2. That man is in hazard of being led further and further wrong. 3. That men are slow of heart to understand the mind of God in His Word. 4. That the Book of the Lord has its difficulties which are not to be easily solved. 5. That we need highly to understand it; otherwise we would not be bidden search into it. 6. That we may gain from it by diligent inquiry. (*Ibid.*) *Reasons for searching the Book of the Lord*:—1. Because the way of salvation is to be found only therein (John v. 39). 2. It is the only rule of our faith and lives (Isa. viii. 20). The lawyer studies his law books, the physician his medical books; and shall not a Christian study the Book of the Lord? 3. The Lord Himself dictated it and gave it us for that very end (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17; Rom. xv. 4). 4. We must be judged by the Scriptures at the great day (John xii. 48). (*Ibid.*) *The systematic investigation of Christianity*:—I. UNLESS THE GOSPEL BE MADE THE SUBJECT OF MUCH REFLECTION AND EARNEST INVESTIGATION IT CANNOT BE RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD. Are those truths which have a reference to the grandest objects in existence so very easily to be comprehended as to require less attention than the ordinary facts and principles which are connected with business or literature? II. Universally human nature is in a state of moral disorder and rebellion against God; and AS CHRISTIANITY HAS BEEN SENT FROM HEAVEN WITH THE EXPRESS DESIGN OF REMOVING THAT DISORDER AND EFFECTING A RECONCILIATION BETWEEN GOD AND MAN, IT IS INDISPENSABLY REQUISITE THAT ALL SHOULD KNOW IN WHAT IT CONSISTS. (*W. Keith*). *Reading the Scriptures*:—I. The Scriptures should be read with A SERIOUS MIND. The argument by which Moses urged the Jews to attend to the laws of God may be applied to Scripture at large—"It is not a vain thing: it is your life." When we read our Bible we stand in the presence of God: we are receiving His communications. II. The Scriptures should be read with EARNEST PRAYER. Divine influence is needful to impress them upon our understandings and hearts. III. Scripture should be read with PURE INTENTIONS. "If any man will do His will," &c. Nothing resists the evidence or dislikes the principles of the Bible but sin. IV. The Bible should be read with EXPECTATIONS AND DESIRES. We cannot place too much confidence in its authority, or anticipate too much comfort from its influence. All that may be expected from God may be expected from His Word. There He opens His resources and declares His will; there we read what He is, and what He can do, and what He intends to do. To read the Bible and expect nothing from its influence is to reflect dishonour upon it. V. The Bible should be read with RETENTIVE MEMORIES. It is intended not so much for present entertainment, as for future wisdom and holiness: its contents, therefore, should be stored and classed in the memory, to be drawn forth and applied as the different circumstances of life require. This study of the Scriptures produces incalculable advantages; it will afford—1. The most valuable instruction. 2. The best impressions. There is an energy in the Bible which no man of feeling can withstand. The words which it contains are "spirit and life." Under Divine influence it has counteracted carnal affections and vicious propensities; it has raised men's minds to God: it has filled them with love to mankind. So as Scripture makes men holy it makes them happy. In the midst of trouble they have an unfailing refuge. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XXXV.

The recurrence of the figures of Isa. xxxv.:—Many of the figures in this beautiful prophecy of Israel's restoration recur in the course of chaps. xl.-lxvi.,—ver. 10, for instance, is repeated *verbatim* in chap. li. 11. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *The manifold application of Isa. xxxv.*:—Without any change of its essential meaning it may be applied to the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, to the vocation of the Gentiles, to the whole Christian dispensation, to the course of every individual believer, and to the whole blessedness of heaven. The ground of this manifold application is not that the language of the passage is unmeaning or indefinite, but that there is a real and designed analogy between the various changes mentioned which brings them all within the natural scope of the same inspired description.

(*J. A. Alexander.*) *A joyous chapter:*—This chapter contains thirty-five distinct promises, among them twenty-two "shalls"—nine "shalls" of blessing and comfort; eight "shalls" of deliverance; five "shalls" of joy. It begins and ends with "joy." (*E. J. Banks.*)

Vers. 1–10. **The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them.**—*The blessings of the Gospel:*—The thirty-fourth and the thirty-fifth chapters of Isaiah are by the best scholars supposed to constitute one entire and complete prophecy, not connected specially, or at least organically, with what goes before or follows. It is a masterpiece of poetry. A single poem divided into two parts; in the first part, the prophet sets forth in lurid colours the universal judgments of God upon all the nations of the earth which have arrayed themselves against Him and oppressed His people. As an instance of what shall come upon all, he selects a single nation, that of the Edomites, and shows forth in them what shall come upon all. This awful storm of wrath passes away; and we see in the "clear shining after rain" the beautiful prospect which is opened up to both earth and man, when God's enemies cease from troubling and His people are gathered unto Himself. The almost universal habit of spiritualising this, and all like prophecies, and allegorising them into an exclusive application to present Gospel blessings, has served to hide the chief significance of the passage from the eyes of the ordinary reader. The promise of this glorious chapter is without doubt primarily and chiefly to the Jews, referring to their final restoration to their own land in the last days. That it has a preliminary reference to the return from the Babylonian captivity is possible, but it looks far beyond that time to the return from the dispersion which the Jews are now suffering. Even the joy of that first return did not fulfil the glorious promises of this vision. God's day of vengeance, and the year of His redeemed, are thus set side by side. (Compare with lxi. 2; and lxiii. 4, with Matt. xxiv, 27–31; Luke xxi. 25–28.) I. THE REJOICING CREATION. It is almost impossible not to associate the magnificent opening words of this chapter with the hope held out to the "whole creation which groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, when it shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. viii. 19–23). "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them." This is a beautiful picture of the sympathy of the earth with man. Not only do the beautiful parts of the earth rejoice with the home-coming of man from his wanderings from God, but the very wilderness and solitary places rejoice and are glad for them, because also in man's redemption the creation which was cursed for man's sake is set free from that curse. The gladness which is here ascribed to the inanimate creation corresponds with the songs and everlasting joy which crown the redeemed of the Lord on their return. The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto them and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon. Two other things are ascribed to the creation. They are represented as consciously participating in the great goodness of God to man. They rejoice even with joy and singing; and they see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God. It is the habit of our prophet thus to invest nature with consciousness and intelligence. It is the habit of all scriptural writers to put man and nature into close sympathy with each other, declaring that God is the maker of both. There is a great spiritual as well as poetic truth in this. How powerfully are we affected by plastic nature! How responsive the soil, the fruits of earth, and trees of the forest to the loving touch and sympathy of man! Who does not know how wonderfully different all nature seemed to us when we were first converted to God. What a world of beauty this will be when the curse is removed and man and nature, so manifestly made for each other, shall rejoice and be glad together! II. THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION. The outline of blessing which the prophet sets before us is not complete, but simply consists of a few bold strokes, serving to fill us with the hope of perfect and complete recovery to God. 1. Men shall see God. The vision of God has already been ascribed in a metaphorical sense to the inanimate creation. It is certainly true that, among the chiefest blessings of salvation, is the vision of God. When Jesus came into the world, we are told that in Him we beheld the glory of God, full of grace and truth. We are also told that the first effect of the new birth is the ability of the sinner to see God. The purification of the heart which comes with the new life of God in the soul, carries with it the promise of seeing God (John i. 14, iii. 3; Matt. v. 8; 2 Cor. iii. 18). But there is manifestly something more than this meant. "They shall see the glory of Jehovah and the excellency of our God." This can refer to nothing else than that

beatific vision of God spoken of by Paul in 1 Cor. xiii. 12; by John in the Revelation xxii. 4. Yet again, if we are to include the saints of the Church in this prophecy, then we shall also have to look for a more literal fulfilment still. When the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven in power and great glory (Matt. xxvi. 64; Dan. vii. 13; John i. 51; 1 Thess. iv. 16; Rev. i. 7), then the scattered Jews shall see their long-rejected Lord, as Saul of Tarsus saw Him on the way to Damascus (Acts ix. 3), and be instantly converted, and start on their homeward way, greeted by all the smiling and rejoicing flowers and trees and pools and newly fertilised wildernesses and waste places of the earth. During all these dark centuries the veil has been over the eyes of the Jews, but in this time the veil shall be taken away and they shall see the face, the glory, the excellency of Jehovah-God. 2. They shall strengthen and encourage each other. This is most probably a retrospective exhortation. In view of this promise and the certain coming of Jehovah and their restoration, they are exhorted to strengthen and encourage each other. There are those whose hands are weak, whose knees are feeble. They cannot fight the good fight of faith with courage, they cannot run with patience the race that is set before them. The long delays and afflictions experienced during the time of waiting has taken not only the courage out of many, but has filled them with despair. Therefore they were to say to those of a fearful heart or of a hasty tendency to unbelief: "Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance; even God with a recompense; He will come and save you." Thus the prophet calls upon the strong to impart their strength to the weak and their faith and courage to the faint-hearted. The new Testament writers transfer the spirit, and in part, the very words of this exhortation to the saints of the Church of God. "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak" (Rom. xv. 1). 3. Infirmities shall be removed. Not only shall the earth be restored to primitive beauty, clothed with redemption glory, and filled with an almost conscious sympathy and joy, but all the infirmities which sin has entailed on our poor sinful human nature shall be removed. In view of this entire deliverance from all the consequences of sin, along with the people of Jehovah, the sore spots of earth shall be healed too. Waters in the wilderness, streams in the desert, pools covering the parched sand, and springs bursting out of thirsty lands; no longer a mirage thrown up from a few turfs of dried herbage, but veritable grass with reeds and rushes shall greet the returning and healed pilgrims. The beginning of this marvel of redemption came when Jesus was first here, opening blind eyes, healing lame limbs, unlocking deaf ears, and loosing silent tongues. Surely, if we have the will to do the will of God, we shall know of this doctrine whether it be of God. III. THE WAY HOME. Now follows a wondrous picture of the way of the return for the long absent wanderer. The way of the transgressor is hard, and the world away from God is a barren and thirsty land; but so soon as the face is set toward God and heaven, heaven's God makes the way of return easy and sure. The dispersion of the Jews was a way of misery. In the return of the Jews to God and their own land we behold the truth of the spiritual way which God has prepared for every sinner to return to Him, and by Him to heaven. 1. It is a highway. "An highway shall be there." A broad and open way, cast up and distinguished from all other roads and tracks. It has both breadth and narrowness. Broad enough for all the world to travel over,—and He will have all men to be saved,—and yet in the highway there is a "narrow way," in which every man must walk for himself, alone and yet not alone—alone in that he must believe for himself; not alone, in that others are walking with him on the same terms and surrounded by the same conditions. 2. It is a way of holiness. That is, it is a way clean in itself, and only for the clean to traverse. "The unclean shall not pass over it." Drunkards, liars, adulterers, fornicators, covetous, idolaters, and extortioners may not walk in that way. For none of these sins shall see or enter into the kingdom of heaven. When the scoffer points to such characters in the "visible" Church, the sufficient answer is that the Church is not the way, but Jesus Himself is the Way, and all that are in Christ Jesus are new creatures, old things having passed away and all things having become new (2 Cor. v. 17). 3. God is with them in the way. For such is the meaning of the expression: "It shall be for those." God's children have in a sense to walk alone, and entering this way, they have to break with many who in the days of their flesh were their companions, but the presence and companionship of God with them in the way will more than compensate. No man who knows the fellowship of God and the saints ever misses the company of the world. 4. It is a way of perfect plainness. No one need fear getting lost in this way. It is so simple and straightforward, so guarded and marked, that the simple and unlearned

need not err therein. "He that followeth Me," said Jesus, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Besides, God has promised to hold us by our right hand, and to keep us from falling (Isa. xli. 13; Jude 24). 5. It is a safe way. No lion or any ravenous beast shall be there, nor be permitted to go up thereon. God has cleared the way of enemies, so far as their ability to harm us is concerned. It was only when "Christian" turned out of the way that he met the devil and had to fight him, and even when the lions fiercely growled at him, he discovered that, by keeping in the middle of the path, they could not approach him, being chained. IV. SAFE AT HOME. What a picture is here presented to the poor outcasts of Israel! There had been a dispersion and a home-coming from Babylon. There was to be yet another far wider and more prolonged dispersion, and then at last a final home-coming. In view of this the prophet bursts out with a triumphant exclamation of victory, in which he sets all the redeemed singing for joy. He sees the wanderers and outcasts gathering from every quarter of the earth (chap. xi. 12, li. 3). They come with songs of everlasting joy on their lips, bursting from their glad and happy hearts. It has been a long night to them, but joy has at last come with this thrice-blessed morning. Is not this a blessed picture, too, of the triumphant entrance into the presence of God of those who have fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished their course? (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) *Transformation*:—The prophecy before us is one of those in which the so-called secondary meaning is, in truth, the primary. The spiritual takes precedence of the natural. I. THE SAD CONDITION OF THE LOCALITIES ON WHICH THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS INTENDED TO OPERATE. Let us gather into one cluster all that is said of them. "A wilderness," "a solitary place," "parched ground," "thirsty land," "a habitation of dragons." With the exception of the last-mentioned, all the desolation seems to turn upon the absence of one element—water. What simile could so vividly depict the moral barrenness and desolation, whether of the individual, or of the world at large, apart from the glorious Gospel of the blessed God? What a wilderness the heart is, that has not God dwelling in it! The idea of "solitariness" may seem to disappear when this word "habitation" comes into view. But what a habitation it is! "A habitation of dragons." That, and that only, was wanting to complete the picture — the foul serpent brood, with their huge encircling folds, prepared to crush the life out of every creature that may cross their dreaded path. To a heart which has within it that "well of water springing up into everlasting life," there is no sadder scene than the unutterable desolateness of these moral wastes presented by hearts that are unchanged. What is true of the individual is equally true of the aspect presented by the world at large. It may, perhaps, be imagined that the one element which is wanting to turn all this desolation into smiling fertility is Civilisation. That has been already weighed in the balances and found wanting. What the wilderness, and the solitary place, and the desert, and the parched ground, and the thirsty land require is—the Water of Life, gushing from the smitten rock, Christ Jesus. II. THE EFFECTS PRODUCED BY THE KINGDOM OF JESUS. Even to us, in a country where water is plentiful, the beauty and appropriateness of the image are at once apparent. What a charm it adds to the landscape, whether in the form of the great ocean, bearing on its bosom the treasures of the world, or of the river winding through the pleasant meadows, which drink in fertility and beauty from the living stream! The lake with its mirror-like surface basking in the sun, suggests, too, the theme of the prophet's song. But it was with an appreciation more intense that the inhabitants of these Eastern lands regarded this emblem of the life that is in Jesus Christ. Water spoke to them of deliverance from death. Hence, wherever this glad Gospel is spoken of, we find this emblem employed to bring before the mind the joy-giving results of the kingdom of Christ. Note the results as these are brought before us in our text. 1. Gladness. It requires no great effort of imagination to realise the glad aspect of nature refreshed by copious rains, after a heat that has scorched the grass, and dwarfed the corn. Fitting emblem, this, of the great joy which the Gospel of Jesus brings with it to human hearts. 2. Fertility. "It shall blossom abundantly." This fertility not only stands connected with life, it is the outcome of its existence. The desert is always barren. But the mighty power of the Gospel of Jesus converts this moral wilderness into a fruit-bearing garden of the Lord. 3. Beauty. "It shall blossom as the rose." One has only to picture to himself a part of this earth's surface, parched, desert, and barren, and to think of the marvellous change which would be produced upon it were he, on revisiting the scene, to find it covered with the fairest flowers that our gardens know. The first and most striking

impression made upon the mind would be that of surpassing beauty. Even so is it with the marvellous moral transformation which the prophecy before us contemplates. The glorious annals of missionary effort render it unnecessary to draw on the imagination. What a beauty is unfolded in a Christ-like life! 4. Glory and majesty. "The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel." To live under the power of Jesus is the true secret of a noble life. Whatever the sphere of life which the man occupies, he is in closest alliance with the majesty of heaven, and in virtue of that alliance is raised to regal dignity. 5. A vision that extends into the Holy of holies. "They shall see the glory of Jehovah, and the excellency of our God." (*J. Kay.*) *The transformative field and force of the Gospel*:—I. THE SPHERE IN WHICH THE GOSPEL OPERATES. 1. The condition of depraved humanity is that of solitude. It is in a state of awful isolation. It is away from God and from fellowship with all holy spirits. Between corrupt souls there is no true fellowship, and there cannot be. 2. The condition of depraved humanity is that of wildness. It is a wilderness. Depraved souls are productive, but it is the productiveness of the wilderness. II. THE TRANSFORMATION WHICH THE GOSPEL EFFECTS. 1. The Gospel makes the sphere joyous. "The wilderness shall be glad," &c. What gladness the Gospel brings into the soul when received in full faith, the gladness of gratitude, love, hope, communion with infinite goodness. 2. The Gospel makes this sphere beautiful. "It shall blossom as the rose." The Gospel imparts to the soul beauty of the highest kind—moral beauty, the beauty of the Lord. 3. The Gospel makes the sphere grand. "The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it." As Carmel and Lebanon tower above the plains of Palestine, so the soul into which the Gospel enters is raised above its unconverted contemporaries. Christliness makes man great in moral strength, elevation, and majesty. 4. The Gospel makes the sphere glorious. "They shall see the glory of the Lord." (*Homilist.*) *Christianity finally triumphant*:—I. THE CERTAINTY THAT THE NEEDED DIFFUSION OF TRUE RELIGION WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED. Man is always animated to the performance of duty by the hope of success; and in the onerous duties to which Christians are summoned, we must be animated by the assurance, proceeding from the highest authority, that our efforts shall be crowned with success. Before stating the grounds upon which the certainty as to the diffusion of our religion is founded, we shall notice some matters which have appeared to render it equivocal, but which do not really interfere with it. 1. The certainty of this diffusion is not interfered with by the obstacles against which religion in its advancing progress has to contend. The obstacles are numerous and formidable; arising from the long-indulged defects of its own disciples; the varieties existing amongst men, of language, of national character, and of social habits; the public jealousies and antipathies which so often bar intercourse, and which have sometimes been kindled into desolating wars; the inveterate depravity of the human heart, nursed into rancorous maturity by the impostures, whether barbarous or refined, which have so long prevailed, and by the malignant influence of the god of this world. To many agencies such obstacles as these would be undoubtedly fatal. But our religion possesses resources which elevate it far above and beyond them. 2. The certainty of which we speak is not interfered with by the differences existing in the professing Church as to the mode in which the anticipated diffusion shall come. Some aver that the diffusion is to take place in consequence of the personal appearance of the Saviour upon the earth; others hold that it is to come by the ordinary instrumentalities already existing in the Christian system, rendered effectual by the abundant outpouring of the Spirit. How can the ignorance of a private soldier in an immense army, as to the plan of the great chieftain, argue against the fact that that plan when developed and carried out shall secure a final and glorious victory? 3. The certainty is not interfered with by obscurity as to the time at which the anticipated diffusion shall be effected. Obscurity resting over the time when the desires of the Church shall be fulfilled and when the wants of the world shall be supplied, is a direct appointment of God, not to be the object of curiosity on the one hand, nor the source of scepticism on the other. II. THE GROUNDS OR EVIDENCE UPON WHICH WE MUST CONSIDER THAT CERTAINTY AS RESTING. It is to be deduced—1. From general principles as to the character and government of God. Let it be admitted that God exists, that He is the moral Governor and Sovereign of the universe, that He is supremely concerned for the maintenance of His own honour, and that while powerful, and just, and holy, He is also kind and benevolent, desiring and resolved upon the well-being of His creatures, and

then the conclusion which we now advocate appears to us reasonable and unavoidable. If our religion be the instrument by which He will act upon the hearts of men, so as to turn them "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," then, that religion will advance and proceed until every purpose of the Divine majesty and love shall have been conducted to delightful accomplishment. 2. From the constitution and progress of our religion itself. The religion of the Gospel is formed with capacities for, and with a direct view to, universal diffusion. It does not admit of any ceremonial restrictions; it takes no note of national preferences or peculiarities; it owns no distinction of rank, clime, or colour; it addresses men on grand, comprehensive principles, dealing with them in the common wants and properties of their nature; it is founded on a redeeming provision of boundless sufficiency—a propitiation for the sins of the world; and its commission is universal as mankind. If, from the constitution of our religion you pass to its history, you find that history always bearing us onward to precisely the same conclusion. There is no class of obstacles over which it has not achieved triumphs, no order of beings among whom it has not acquired converts. 3. From the expressed testimony of the Sacred Volume. III. THE RESULTS WHICH FROM THE NEEDED DIFFUSION OF OUR RELIGION WILL ARISE. 1. Happiness in the world. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them," &c. By the disciples of scepticism Christianity has often been slandered as the cause of sorrow. But the true spiritual religion of the Gospel can produce nothing but what is accordant with its sublime and munificent nature. Christianity never spake a word but to utter a promise, never took a step but to bring a boon, never struck a blow but to emancipate a captive, never exerted an agency but to elevate and redeem a soul. As Christianity advances, there will be the full development of results, of which now we have instances. There will be happiness to individuals, to families, and to communities or nations. Yet, what is this to the happiness of the life which is to come? 2. Supreme honour to God. "They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." In connection with the diffusion of our religion God will display and magnify the majestic attributes of His nature. In connection with the display and magnifying of the Divine perfections, God will receive the homage and the highest praise of all created beings. The happiness is the happiness of gratitude. Earth, with ten thousand times ten thousand voices, will celebrate His praise; the angels of heaven and "the spirits of the just made perfect" will join in the long and loud acclaim, and redemption will constitute the noble theme of their noblest songs. (*J. Parsons.*) *Christmas blessings*:—I. THE WORLD WITHOUT THE GOSPEL IS A WILDERNESS, a "desert," a "solitary place." What though the bright promise of the spring, the warm glow of summer, the rich maturity of autumn, the quiet rest of winter, are full of beauty! What though Nature's broad plains are watered by noble rivers, though her mountains rise with majesty and grandeur, though her valleys "stand so thick with corn that they laugh and sing," and though a teeming population give animation to every habitable spot; yet, to the spiritual eye and apart from the Gospel, all is but a desert and a solitary place! And if it be so in our own fair land, which is the glory of all lands, what of the heathen nations? Men have broken loose from God. Sin has overspread the world. There is nothing to sustain the Divine life, nothing to insure spiritual health, nothing to promote the soul's eternal welfare. II. WHAT, THEN, IS THE CHANGE WHICH THE GOSPEL PRODUCES? It is the same in one and all when it comes with "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." All things become new. The "fruits of the Spirit" spring up, the solitary place is made glad, the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose. Conclusion—1. Has my heart been made glad by the Gospel? 2. What am I doing to make the hearts of others glad? These are questions which demand prompt answers, because—3. The time is short. (*Josiah Bateman, M.A.*) *The wilderness made glad*:—I. A DESERT MAY BE CONSIDERED AS BARREN AND UNCIVILISED. So, in general, are heathen countries. But, instead of unfruitfulness and barbarism, Christianity would introduce culture, civilisation, and everything which, in connection with these, tends to promote the substantial comforts of life. The Bible and the plough go together. II. A WILDERNESS MAY BE CONSIDERED AS A PLACE OF DREARY SOLITUDE. But the Gospel would introduce the endearments of society; or, at all events, sweeten solitude itself. Among even the more numerous tribes of savages, social enjoyment is but small. They have, indeed, their feasts; but these are seasons of diabolical, rather than of human mirth. Their habitual character, undoubtedly, is retiredness, melancholy,

and taciturnity. On the other hand, true religion gives birth to those feelings which prompt man with confidence to seek man; while, at the same time, it enlarges the mind, and furnishes many rational and enlivening topics on which men delight to speak out of the abundance of the heart. III. A WILDERNESS MAY BE CONSIDERED AS A PLACE OF INHUMANITY AND CRUELTY. And such are heathen countries (Psa. lxxiv. 20). IV. When we hear of a wilderness we think of A PLACE OF COMFORTLESS SORROW. The heathen world contains not within itself the means of soothing the sad distress with which it is filled. But such a wilderness would be gladdened by the Gospel, which would bring home to the afflicted and dying "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." V. LIKE A WILDERNESS, THE HEATHEN WORLD IS A PLACE OF AWFUL DANGER. "I was in perils," said the apostle Paul, "in the wilderness" (2 Cor. xi. 26). "Where there is no vision the people perish" (Prov. xxix. 18). Improvement—1. Let us improve the subject as furnishing ourselves with ground of gratitude and admonition. How thankful ought we to be when we contrast our own happy situation with the state of those who "sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death"! 2. It becomes us to consider whether we have personally embraced the Gospel. 3. Let us improve the subject in reference to the heathen. 4. According to God's wise determination human instruments are necessary (Rom. x. 14, 15). 5. The means of support must be furnished. 6. Already, He who is to be crowned Lord of all has gained some of His most signal triumphs in modern times, through this instrumentality. (*James Foote, M.A.*) *Nativity:*—Here are three things to be considered. I. THE WILDERNESS ITSELF. The world before the appearance of the Gospel was dry as a wilderness, being destitute of God's holy Spirit, which is the water of life, and the immediate cause of all righteousness. The heathen were without the good Spirit, they were exposed to the assaults of evil spirits, whose employment it is to go "to and fro in the earth," as wild beasts in a wilderness, seeking whom they may devour. And it has ever been the way of wicked men, agitated by those furious passions implanted in their nature, to become beasts of prey to one another, biting and devouring one another. But the beast which is noxious and cursed above all others is the serpent, in which we have the most perfect representation of the devil himself, and of all his children, who are called the seed of the serpent. In a place infested with such inhabitants there could be no real comfort; but on the contrary vexation, misery, disappointment, and despair. The evil that prevails among men who live without God renders this world a miserable place. II. THE CHANGE THAT WAS TO BE WROUGHT UPON IT. The knowledge of Christ engrafted in the hearts of men, soon made them green and fruitful in righteousness, and they abounded in good works, even to the astonishment of their enemies. III. THE CAUSE OF THIS BLESSED CHANGE. "They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." The glory of the natural world is the sun, whose presence it is that makes the day so superior to the night. But above all, the change of the winter into the spring, shows the power and excellency of this marvellous instrument. Therefore Christ, who performs the same things in the kingdom of grace as the sun doth in nature, is in all respects the Sun of Righteousness. (*W. Jones, M.A.*) *The desert blossoming:*—The desert shall blossom when Christ is in it, as the narcissus, the meadow-saffron, the rose. 1. There is a desert of separation from ordinary means of grace. I may be deprived, in God's providence, of my Christian surroundings. I may have to travel far from the homeland and the sound of the Sabbath bells. But Jesus may dwell in my heart by faith. And then the wilderness will be a garden. 2. There is a desert of trial. Perhaps I lose my substance. Perhaps I lose my health. Perhaps I lose my friend, the half of my own soul. How desolating the affliction is! But Jesus can bless me through it. He makes the sweetening tree grow beside Marah. 3. There is a desert of apparent disaster to the cause of God. The Church has its periods of adversity when all things seem to be against it. But Jesus teaches it to be more serious then, more patient, more devout, stronger in faith, richer in feeling, purer in aim. 4. There is a desert of death. To go out from the world which I know so well into the world which is mysterious and strange—how my heart shrinks from it! But Jesus shows me, by His Word and His Spirit and His own experience, that death is the road to glory and the path to fruitfulness and the gate into life. The solitary place shall be glad. (*A. Smellie, M.A.*) *The rose:*—According to the old versions and many commentators "the narcissus" or the autumn crocus is the plant intended. (*W. Houghton, M.A.*) *The rose:*—The name points to a bulbous

plant. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Life out of death*:—The valley of Chambra, in India, is rich in its fertility and beauty. The cause of all this fertility is a wonderful spring of water which flows from a hillside, and furnishes water for the irrigation of the whole valley, and for the use of the people who live there. Once, says the legend, the valley was without water, and there was desolation everywhere. The plants and trees were all withering, and the people were dying of thirst. The princess of the place took the sorrows of her subjects much to heart. She consulted the oracle to learn how the constant curse of drought could be removed. The oracle said that if the princess of the land would die for the people, abundant water would be given. She hastened to give her life. Her grave was made, and she was buried alive. Then forth from her tomb came a river which flowed down into the valley, restoring all languishing life in field and garden, and sending water to every door for the famishing people to drink. Ever since, the streams have continued to flow from the wonderful spring, carrying their precious benediction to every home. This old heathen legend beautifully illustrates what Christ did. The world was perishing for want of the water of life; Jesus died and was buried, and from His Cross and broken grave poured out the river of the water of life for the quenching of the world's thirst. Its streams run everywhere, and wherever they flow the wilderness has been made to blossom like a garden of roses. Beauty blooms wherever they run. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.**—*Weak hands and feeble knees*:—I. I shall attempt to show THE IMPORTANCE OF HANDS AND KNEES IN GOING TO HEAVEN. The hands and knees are those parts of the body in which the effects of fear are the most easily seen. Of course, the root of despondency and fear must lie in the heart; it is that which is first moved with terror. But afterwards these extremities, these limbs of action begin to feel the weakness also. Just so the prophet means that wherever the Christian displays most his timidity and his dismay there we must be careful to apply the remedy of comfort. 1. The hands and knees are of the first importance because they represent active duty and supplication. Hence, if the knees be weak and the hands be weak, it is little that we can do. 2. We may readily see what the prophet means by hands and knees if we observe that a Christian, although his hopes are in heaven, stands upon the earth. It is with the hand of faith that the Christian lays hold upon that which is not seen, and endeavours to climb upwards to the skies; it is with his foot that he spurns the earth and all that it calls good or great. Let the Christian's foot be weak, and he cannot then despise the things that are seen: but he will be fixing his affection on things on earth and not on things above. Let his hand of faith grow weak, and he cannot lay hold of the things that are in heaven. 3. But you will remember also that there are certain parts of the spiritual pilgrimage where hands and knees are absolutely required. John Bunyan represents Christian as coming to the foot of the hill Difficulty, and he says, "I looked then after Christian, to see him go up the hill, where I perceived he fell from running to going, and from going to clambering upon his hands and knees, because of the steepness of the place." Every Christian who knows much about Divine experience will understand what this means. II. THE ILL EFFECT OF WEAK HANDS AND KNEES. 1. We have already hinted that one ill fruit of a Christian having weak hands and knees is this, that he will not himself be able to make much progress in the Divine life. When I sit down and read the biographies of saints who have gone to heaven, I am astonished at myself, and I can only weep to think how far I am behind these men, and then how much further I must be behind my Divine Master. Surely the examples of eminent saints should spur us onward. But weak hands and feeble knees are the reasons why so few Christians attain to any eminence in the ways and works of God. 2. Weak hands and feeble knees have another ill effect. They prevent our doing any great wonder for the good of the world. 3. Again, weak hands and feeble knees very much dishonour Christ. Suppose you have a friend, and you say to him, "My friend, I have such confidence in you, that I will trust you with the title-deeds of my estate, and with all I have. Nay, more; I will trust you with my health, with my life. Do what you will with me; I have such faith in your goodness and your wisdom that I am sure you will not be unkind, and will not err. I trust you." There is something honourable in faith to the object in whom it is reposed. Now, if you are able, with the strong hand of faith, to bring all you

have and give it entire unto God, then He is glorified; but if your hand is weak, and you are hiding away some choice thing that you cannot give up to Him, if you do not stand fully to the surrender, but keep back something from Him, then that weak hand brings dishonour upon God. So also does the feeble knee. When the believer goes to his closet and bows there with his feeble knee, and asks God to bless him, and does not half believe that He will, he dishonours God. But, when a man falls on his knees, and cries, "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that such a thing is necessary to me; there is Thy promise; do as Thou hast said, Lord; I know Thou wilt give it me:" and when he rises from his knees, goes down and says to his friends, "The blessing will come; I have asked for it, and God will hear me;" why, such a man honours God. III. THE CAUSES OF WEAK HANDS AND FEEBLE KNEES. 1. Some Christians have weak hands and feeble knees because they are only infants. God's family is like every other family: we do not expect the new-born convert to run alone at first. God will not overdrive His lambs. He does not expect long marches from feeble feet. As you are but weak, you shall have lighter duties. 2. A more frequent cause of weak hands and feeble knees is starvation. 3. But, again, fear is the great weakness of men's knees; doubt and distrust are the great relaxers of the strength of men's hands. 4. Sloth may make a man weak in his hands and in his feet. Arms become strong by using them. The blacksmith gets a brawny hand by constantly using his hammer. He who climbs the mountain or walks many a mile a day, becomes strong in his feet. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Weak knees*:—Earthly life should be a spiritual race or pilgrimage to Mount Zion. We need strong knees to climb with ease steep and rugged hills; and as our spiritual journey may be likened to climbing hills, we need spiritual strength to enable us to do it with comfort to ourselves. If we have weak knees, our journey will be a series of groans, and, perhaps, a succession of grumbles; but when our weak knees are strengthened and our lungs expanded by the delicious atmosphere of the hills, the journey can be done comfortably with sacred songs and continual joy. I. Weak knees are often caused by MENTAL DEPRESSION. In these mental depressions, human aid is not of much account; we need the presence and comfort of God. Prayer is the best medicine; and if, at the same time, we can get away from the town to the sweet, pure air of the country, and climb a hill, we shall return home with a buoyant heart and an elastic tread. 1. God may allow depression to visit us to subdue our pride. It acts like a "scotch" on a wheel, or a "brake," which prevents the horses dragging the carriage so swiftly downhill as to overbalance themselves. At such times, we are taught that, after all, we must keep pace with our weak brethren. 2. Such times of spiritual depression give us a nature to sympathise with the troubled. As the proverb says, "They are of a tender nature who have been skinned themselves." 3. Heaviness of spirit is also needed to give us time for meditation and review of mercies. When you are climbing, you see nothing more than the hill before you; but when you are weary and resting, you can see the glorious landscape for miles. Ah, when weak knees are caused by toiling upwards to get nearer to God, it is a sacred token, which shall result in everlasting strength. When compelled to slacken speed, we see the goodness of God and learn to trust His direction. II. Our knees are sometimes weakened by MANY AFFLICTIONS. But though we have afflictions which make our knees bend in weakness, yet God has undertaken to give us strength according to our day. If we bear our afflictions with patience, our knees shall be strengthened to do great things for God. III. Weakness of spiritual knees may be caused by THE WEIGHT OF UNBELIEF. (*W. Birch.*) *Solicitude for the sorrowful*:—It is the duty of all men to be careful of the sons of sorrow. There be some who from their very birth are marked by melancholy as her own. The silent shades of sorrow are their congenial haunts; the glades of the forest of grief are the only places where their leaf can flourish. Others there are who through some crushing misfortune are brought so low that they never hold up their heads again, but go from that time forth mourning to their graves. Some there be, again, who, disappointed in their early youth, either in some fond object of their affections, or else in some project of their young ambition, never can dare to face the world, but shrink from contact with their fellows, even as the sensitive plant curls up its tendrils at the touch. In all flocks there must be lambs, and weak and wounded sheep; and among the flock of men, it seems that there must necessarily be some who should more than others prove the truth of Job's declaration, "man is born to trouble even as the sparks fly upwards." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 4. **Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.**—*Comfort for the fearful*:—Presumption and fear are the Scylla and Charybdis of the Christian life, and it requires Divine guidance, together with all our own watchfulness, to steer safely between them. My object is, to suit the case of those who are well entitled to hope for the Divine mercy through Christ Jesus, but are disquieting themselves, or are disquieted by the enemy with needless fears. 1. "I cannot indulge the hope that I am a Christian," one will say, "because I have never passed through the same religious exercises and experiences that others profess to have felt and enjoyed; have known no such deep convictions; have no such clear assurance of my acceptance with God." God has brought many sons to glory, but I do not suppose that any two of them have been led thither in precisely the same way, or have been exercised with precisely the same feelings. If in the main, our experiences correspond with the Word of God, in the great points of faith and love, it need not disquiet us though we never heard of another case exactly like our own. 2. But another desponding one says, "If I were truly a child of God, sin would not prevail against me as I find it does." So long as there is determined war against sin, there is ground for hope. 3. Still one may be ready to reply, "I find that sin not only prevails against me, but I seem to be worse than when I first strove against it; my heart appears to grow more wicked; my corruptions stronger, and my strength to resist to be less." To perceive more of our sin than usual, does not always prove that we are more sinful, but often the reverse; just as when one cleanses a room, though the air is filled with dust floating in the sunbeams, there is no more of it actually there than before, and there will soon be less of it as the operation goes on. We do not know the strength of our evil passions until we begin to oppose them. When one is making a special effort to lead a Christian life, then he is especially tempted and hindered. 4. Another class of disquieted ones affirm that they cannot hope they are true Christians, because they seem to love everything else more than God. If this were really true, we should have no encouragement to offer, for if God be not loved supremely we cannot be His children. But, in estimating our love to God, compared with our love to earthly things, we are not to conclude that we love that most which most excites our affections. It has well been remarked, "that a man may be more moved when he sees a friend that has long been absent, and seem to regard him more for the moment than he does his own wife and children, and yet none would think that the friend was loved the most"; so neither must we conclude, because when we are abroad in the world we find our affections vehemently stirred towards its various objects, that therefore they are supreme in our hearts. We should judge of our comparative affection by asking ourselves soberly, which of the two objects we should prefer to part with? 5. Again, it is urged by some that there is great danger of self-deception; that a person may, in appearance, be like a Christian, and yet be really destitute of any true piety, and they fear lest they should fall into the same error. The fear is usually the best remedy against the thing feared, and none are farther from the danger of making a false profession than those who are most afraid of it. 6. Some, again, have fears that they are not true Christians, because they come so far short of the attainments of some eminent Christians of their acquaintance. We reply, that the worst part of the character of those exalted saints may not be known to us, or they may not have our hindrances, or they may have been long in growing up to that state, while we are only babes in Christ. 7. Another class may say, that they cannot think any real Christian ever was so tempted and distressed with evil thoughts as they are. We reply, Job was tempted to curse God, and Christ Himself to worship Satan. We may have very wicked thoughts entering our minds, but if we do not delight in them, if we strive against them, and they are painful to us, they are no evidence against us. The very fact that they grieve us and we resist them, is in our favour. 8. Another class of the discouraged and fearful say, that they have doctrinal difficulties, that certain things in the Bible do not appear clear to them, and they fear to make any public confession of Christ till these are made plain. The best way to solve doctrinal difficulties is to engage in practical duties. But it would be endless to recount all the ways in which doubts and fears assail us. Their name is Legion, and our prayer should be that Christ would command them to come out of the man who is troubled with them, and to enter no more into him. Many seem to think that they show a commendable spirit by cherishing such fears. But there is no humility in doubting God's promises. (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *The ministry of consolation*:—Let us consider the text—

I. AS A DISSUASIVE AGAINST OUR SECRET FEARS. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not." The language is not uncommon as addressed to God's children. "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward." "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, fear not." "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." The language seems to intimate that those who are truly seeking Christ are yet liable to be oppressed by many fears. But the Lord says, you are not to be thus afraid. 1. Fear not on account of the greatness of your sins. Fathomless as are the depths of your iniquity, there is one depth which is deeper still. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." 2. Fear not on account of remaining infirmities and indwelling tendencies to evil. How many are deterred from taking any decisive step in religion because they have not attained to a certain point of spiritual advancement; forgetting that the act of taking the step is to be one of the means for attaining to this point. 3. Be not of a fearful heart through anything adverse or disquieting in your spiritual experience. Many form rash conclusions on this subject from unsound and unworthy premises, and from only partial views of Scripture. II. AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO LAY HOLD UPON THE STRENGTH OF GOD. "Be strong." The advice is of frequent occurrence in Scripture. But what are we to be strong in? Why, strong in the Lord, strong in His strength, safe through His holding up. Again, by the exhortation, "Be strong," we must understand an injunction to seek and pray for the strengthening aids of God the Holy Spirit. 1. There is the strength of preventing grace in the hour of temptation, when not permitted to come upon us; when some power we know not of keeps us out of harm's way; when the dominion of our besetting sin appears for the time to be got under, and without a struggle or a blow we conquer in the might of God. 2. Then, there is the strength of supporting grace when the struggle does come, when we have to do battle with hard thoughts in adversity, or rebellious thoughts in disappointment, with sinful thoughts in solitude, with proud and envious thoughts in the world, with unbelief and impatience, and a little willingness for prayer, and we cannot shake off these things. 3. And then there is the strength of enlightening and sanctifying grace. We grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ at the same time; and all this is through the imparted strength of the Comforter. 4. But I must not omit to notice the chief thing we are to be strong in, that which gave the prayer of Jacob power to prevail with God, namely, that we be as Jacob was, strong in faith, giving glory to God. Guard against all confused and imperfect notions of the offering of the Gospel plan, or of the power and willingness of Christ to save. Remember there is virtue enough in His blood, power enough in His arm, and grace enough at His disposal to sanctify and save a whole world of sinners. Apply to Him by faith and prayer. Place no limits where God has placed none. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and if from all, why not yours? (*D. Moore, M.A.*) *An old malady and an old remedy*:—I. A COMMON TROUBLE. "A fearful heart." Think of some of the causes. 1. Life itself is a cause. A little child does not fear. But the little child has not yet reached into the consciousness of its own personality—has not been awed by the mystery of its own existence. Wrapped in such consciousness there is always a certain fear. 2. Sin is another source of a fearful heart. The ideal relation between God and the soul is that of utmost intimacy, but sin breaks this relation. 3. The sad things emerging in life are causes of a fearful heart. 4. The difficulties of duty. 5. The monotony of duty. Sometimes when dreary stretches of duty, the same thing day in, day out, fill the vision, a real fear comes lest one fail in duty because of its uninteresting routine. 6. The revelation of man's own nature under some great surprise or disappointment is a cause of a fearful heart. The strength one fancied himself to have, turns out under some great strain to be but weakness after all. The heart in Scripture stands for the whole man—intellect, affection, will. The thing needed is that a man see clearly, love wisely, will strongly; but when fear wraps one about with mists, this is the outcome; a weak heart—no strength for doing; feeble knees—no power of purpose. II. THE OLD AND YET NEW REMEDY for this common trouble. 1. A personal God. "Behold your God." 2. A God appropriated—your God. 3. A God active. "He will come." God is not an inert passiveness, having no hand in things. Our Scripture is prophecy; God has come in the Incarnation. 4. A God for your help. "He will come and save you." 5. A rewarding God. "He will come with recompense." Think more of God than of the causes of your

fearfulness, and also appropriate God. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Fears*:—1. These words bring before us very delightful thoughts concerning God's nature and purposes. We gather from them His compassion. He graciously sends the message unsolicited. His mercy. He does not desire His people to suffer needless trouble or anxiety. His power and care, for He is able to save them from danger and so guarantee the needlessness of their fear. 2. But they remind us of a very painful condition of man, which is his tendency to fear amid the discouragements of life. These consist in many things. I. FEARS WITH RELATION TO EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. Men dread that which is greater or more powerful than themselves. Hence they fear the material forces of nature, the mighty convulsions of creation, the strength of their fellow-man, and the power of God. 2. Men dread that which to them is mysterious and unknown. Thus there is an innate fear of darkness, of death, of the future. 3. Men dread that which is more evil than themselves. Evil men, evil combinations of men, evil spirits, and the machinations of Satan. 4. Men dread those circumstances which can adversely affect their interests. That which can bring them material loss, that which checks their external advancement, that which spoils their amusement or gratification. II. FEARS WITH REGARD TO INTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. There is our relationship to God. As an all-seeing observer, as a just Judge, as an avenging King. We stand before Him as an Almighty Jehovah, who knows our thoughts, sins, and desires. 2. There is our future state of existence. Guilt makes cowards of us all. 3. There are our domestic relationships. The broken cord of affection, the ruptured friendship, and the lost treasures. 4. There is the mental, moral, and bodily anguish and suffering. Great and terrible do they appear as they enshroud our existence and threaten our future. Now, as these things brood over the soul, and darken the horizon of life, there is heard speaking to the soul of the faithful, earnest believer in Christ the trumpet word of our text—"Fear not." There are many reasons why we should not fear. 1. There is the fact of our Father's love. He does not willingly afflict the children of men. 2. There is the fact of our Father's power. He is able to support and to overrule all adverse circumstances. 3. There is the fact of our Father's presence. He is always near. The true antidote to fear is faith. (*Homilist.*) *He will come and save you*:—It is no abstract salvation that we hope and wait for, but a Saviour—a Saviour before whom no enemy can stand. His coming will be the deliverance. Danger, bondage, weakness, and sorrow shall be done away, and in the consciousness of the grand release, "The eyes of the blind shall be opened," &c. (*W. Hubbard.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.**—*Good hope for the afflicted*:—I. This joyful prediction was literally fulfilled in the MIRACULOUS CURES WHICH OUR LORD PERFORMED IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH. II. The cheering prediction is spiritually fulfilled, in THE EXPERIENCE OF SINNERS, IN THE DAY OF CONVERSION. III. This pleasing prediction is also accomplished, in a spiritual sense, in THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN, IN THE DAY OF GRACIOUS REVIVAL, AFTER A SEASON OF DECLENSION. IV. The delightful prediction is gloriously fulfilled in THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN'S DEATH, AND AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST. (*D. Fraser, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **Then shall the lame man leap as an hart.**—*A threefold promise*:—1. Banished crutch. 2. Accentuation of speechless tongue. 3. Irrigated Sahara. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) **And the tongue of the dumb sing.**—*Dumb singers*:—I. NOTE THE PERSONS WHOM GOD HAS CHOSEN TO SING HIS SONGS FOR EVER. "The tongue of the dumb shall sing." Their singing does not come naturally from themselves; they were not born songsters. No, they were dumb. How this ought to give you encouragement in seeking to do good to others! If you have neighbours who are profaners of the Sabbath, haters of God, unwilling to come to the house of God, despising Christ; if you find them as far gone as you can find them, recollect He maketh the dumb sing, and therefore He can make them live. II. Now I am to enter into some rather more lucid DESCRIPTION OF THESE DUMB PEOPLE. Who are they? Sometimes I get a good thought out of *Cruden's Concordance*. As I opened it at this passage, I found Master Cruden describing different kinds of dumb people. He says there are four or five different sorts, but I shall name only four of them. 1. Those who cannot speak—that is the usual acceptation of the word dumb—the others are, of course, only figurative applications of the term. Now, spiritually, the man who is still in his trespasses and sins is dumb. He is dead, and there is none

so dumb as a dead man. "Shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Shall Thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, or Thy faithfulness in destruction?" As "no man can call Jesus Lord, except by the Holy Ghost," these people cannot do so truly. But, all hail sovereign grace! They are dumb by nature, but He will not leave them so; they cannot now sing His praises, but they shall do it; they will not now confess their sins, but He will bring them on their knees yet, and make them pour out their hearts before Him. 2. But there is a sort of dumb people that will not speak. They are mentioned by Isaiah. He said of preachers in his day, they were "dumb dogs that would not bark." 3. I will now introduce you to a third sort of dumb people. They are dumb because they dare not speak; and they are good people. Here is one of them: "I was dumb with silence; I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it." And it is so blessed to be dumb in that fashion. The Lord's servant will often have to be dumb under trials and troubles. You are, it may be, in the deepest trouble now, and obliged to be silent; well, you shall sing yet for all that. If you cannot cheer the darkness with "songs in the night," yet He shall "compass you about with songs of deliverance." We are not always to be silent with affliction. The saints have known joy, unspeakably great, in the midst of trial intolerably hot. Their murmuring has been silenced, and their thanksgiving has become vocal. An old Puritan said, "God's people are like birds; they sing best in cages." 4. We have one more kind of dumb people—those who have nothing to say. I will give you an instance; Solomon says in the Proverbs—"Open thy mouth for the dumb"; and he means those who in the court of judgment have nothing to plead for themselves, and have to stand dumb before the bar. Like that man of old, who, when the king came in to see the guests, had not on a wedding garment; and when the king said, "Friend, how camest thou in hither?" he stood speechless; speechless, not because he could not speak, but because he had nothing to say. Have not you and I been dumb, and are we not now, when we attempt to stand on law terms with God, when we forget that Jesus Christ and His blood and righteousness are our full acquittal? We can now sing this anthem: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Not God, for "He hath justified." "Who is he that condemneth?" Not Christ, "He hath died, yea rather, hath risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, and maketh intercession for us." III. THE OCCASIONS WHEN THE TONGUE OF THESE DUMB PEOPLE SINGS THE BEST. I think it sings always, little or much. If it is once set at liberty, it will never leave off singing. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **In the wilderness shall waters break out.**—*The figure of the wilderness:*—The lovely poetry of this passage is almost thrown away upon us who have had no actual experience of the wilderness. Our imagination has been largely helped by the vivid and pathetic descriptions from travellers who have been through it; but the most powerful imagination cannot enable us to feel its awful reality. The interminable expanse, the distressing sameness, the horizon for leagues on leagues unbroken by a solitary tree or shrub. The burning sand blinding our eyes and scorching our feet. The very pathway, confused and often obliterated by the blast of the burning wind, is strewn with the bleached bones of the poor creatures who have fallen victims to the heat and drought. Not a bird flying over our heads, nor a harmless animal to be seen browsing a scanty pasture. The night is made terrible and the gloom is deepened by the roarings of the lion and the howlings of the jackal and the hyæna. Not a scrap of food of fruit or root to be obtained, and, worst of all, not a drop of water to quench the fiery thirst. Our parched lips can scarcely close. And this dreadful place is so interminable that it takes days and weeks to traverse; only here and there at long intervals does the exhausted and almost demented traveller come upon the green oasis and the priceless well of water. In the Old Testament the horrors of the desert are often used to figure the miserable aspect of life, and the privations of the human soul. "My soul is athirst for Thee, in a barren and dry land where no water is." "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God." "My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God; when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?" "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground." And here Isaiah, wishing to show the glory and beauty of a true vision of God, compares the change out of the darkness and misery of soul to the transformation of the wilderness into a garden. (*C. Voysey, M.A.*) *The wilderness of existence:*—The heart of man is the real wilderness, where dearth and drought and quenchless thirst torment and destroy him until he get the vision of the glory of God, which is His love. When man sees that, the waters break forth in the wilderness of his soul, and streams in the desert. His heart shall blossom as

the rose and blossom abundantly; and not only flowers but fruit shall he bear for the healing of the nations. When man learns how God loves us all, then shall he find joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. That is the essence of the poem. But it teaches yet a great deal more. When man's heart is turned from a wilderness into a garden by the knowledge of God's love, he is not only happy in himself, but he is a fountain and stream of happiness to others. "Then the eyes of the blind are opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then doth the lame man leap as an hart and the tongue of the dumb can sing." His love for others is kindled and set aglow by the sight of the love of God. So we get three distinct ideas out of the poetry before us. The knowledge of the love of God as the source of all blessedness—first, to bring joy and gladness into individual souls, and then to make them fruitful in bringing joy and gladness into the hearts of their fellow-men. (*Ibid.*) *God alone the satisfaction of humanity:*—If we would only believe it, we should see that in proportion as we regard our surroundings as a desert, we are giving proof that we belong to a higher order of existence than those who can be satisfied with the common pleasures, the bread and water of merely animal life. If we belong to that higher order, if our true realm is not of this world, we shall not be able to satisfy ourselves with all that this world can possibly furnish. Our thirst will only be inflamed and not quenched by every effort to allay it with earthly gratification. And I do not think it unreasonable to ask you to take the next step—which is more like a leap than a step—and to admit that God never intended us to be perfectly happy here on earth, in and through only the satisfaction of our earthly desires. He has so made us that the world and human life, lovely and delicious as these are, shall yet be to us a very wilderness full of weariness and hunger and thirst, until we have found our true satisfaction in Him and His love. (*Ibid.*) *The joys of the godly:*—The whole secret of our happiness lies in this knowledge of the love of God. 1. It adds enormously to every lawful pleasure and indulgence. We take our joys in company with God. In our recreation, in our games, in our mirth and laughter, we revel all the more freely and heartily because we never forget that He is there, never forget that it is from Him that have come our varied powers of enjoyment and the numberless resources which minister to it. We set God always before us, and therefore in all the so-called blessings and comforts of life we are free from sin in the using. We will not enjoy any pleasure for which we cannot give Him thanks. And it is amazing what a large extra number of pleasures we find in consequence. 2. A still greater wealth is poured upon us by the sight of the love of God. It turns all our pains and sorrows into joy. It gives us perfect contentment with our lot. We know it could not have come against His will. We know it has come, then, to do us good. If we will only be patient and bear it like a man, we shall soon see the blessing which God had wrapped up in it; when our God comes to us in the wilderness of our woe, the water breaks forth and we are satisfied and refreshed. He is our living fountain of peace and hope and joy unspeakable: His love touches the strong rock of our heart's rebellion, and lo! the streams of gladness flow forth and we are like a well-watered garden. Then our poor blind eyes are opened to see only good, where we thought there was only evil. Then our deaf ears are unstopped, and we listen joyfully and thankfully to His soothing and cheering whisper of peace. Then our palsied limbs leap up at His call and we do the duty that lies nearest to us; we begin to make the best of our altered conditions and tread cheerfully the path of thorns in which His hand is leading us. And the tongue of the dumb shall sing. Our stubborn lips fast closed in anger and resentment, our tongue cleaving to the roof of our mouth in distress and despair, shall now move in harmony with the gladness awakened by the sight of His love. We shall glorify Him in the fires of tribulation; we shall sing of His great salvation. (*Ibid.*) *The desire to bless others:*—And yet more and more comes out of that inexhaustible fountain of goodness and joy. The sight of the love of God not only transfigures the life of each individual, but makes us do our best to convert the wilderness around us into a garden. Atheists have confessed to me how barren of any practical good atheism is, how absolutely deficient in any inspiring motive for kindly endeavour to help others. But we know, by our own experience, that the sight of God's love which has turned our own wilderness into a garden, has likewise stirred us up into an enthusiasm of brotherly love and has borne fruit in practical endeavours to bring streams into the desert of lives not our own. (*Ibid.*) *Streams in the desert:*—The streams are spiritual, and refer to the diffusion of the Gospel and the manifold blessings of salvation over the world. I. A FEW OF THE BLESSINGS WHICH THESE STREAMS IMPART. They are a source of—1. Spiritual fertility. No other streams

are possessed of the same fertilising power. Modern writers show a tendency to ascribe to the influence of civilisation and knowledge all our social, moral, and religious blessings. But how do they reconcile their theories with the comparatively barren effects of Egyptian science and civilisation, Greek philosophy and art, and Roman law and discipline? Be the influence of these latter what they might, they wrought no radical change on man's moral and spiritual character. 2. Spiritual beauty. Wherever streams flow in such lands as Judæa, there luxuriance waves, but in an endless variety of appearance. Not less diversified is the influence of Divine grace on the character. Religion does not obliterate nature, but works in harmony with it, preserving all its innocent idiosyncrasies, so that as in the natural world are to be seen the cedar, the palm, the fir, and the rose, so in the Church, along the streams of Divine grace, are to be seen a John and a Peter, a Martha and a Mary. 3. Spiritual joy. Every one has experienced the refreshing influence of water. This is an image of the deep satisfaction and joy which true religion is fitted to impart. No other streams convey the same joy. II. SOME OF THE DISTINGUISHING EXCELLENCES BY WHICH THE STREAMS ARE CHARACTERISED. 1. They are full and abundant. 2. They are free to all. Men have tried to fence round these streams, and to reduce them to the limits of their own selfish hearts and narrow creed; but God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as ours. While this is a cheering, it is also a solemnising, thought, laying the responsibility of our own ruin on ourselves. 3. They are near and accessible. If a visit to such rivers as the Ganges or the Nile were requisite to our salvation, how many would be unable to comply with the condition. But these streams flow wherever the Gospel comes. 4. They are ever spreading in their influence. What is the garden of the Lord compared with the desert of this world? It is seen blooming in little oases here and there. But these streams are destined to spread and multiply, and to cover the whole earth with spiritual verdure and beauty. Conclusion—1. These streams are at present accessible, but may not be so long. Come to them now. 2. Remember that Jesus is the only channel through which they can reach us. (*W. Johnston.*)

Ver. 7. **And the parched ground shall become a pool.**—*The mirage of the desert:*—We must understand these words as they would be understood in the East. The parched ground is rich in what is known as mirage—the image of water, a sheen that cheats the eye, and so successfully cheats it that the thirsty traveller says, I see rivers! It is the mirage—(from *mirari*, to wonder at)—a beautiful thing: water on every hand: presently we shall drink and be glad. The traveller moves, the mirage recedes; the traveller would seize the blessing, but the blessing was only in clouds: an optical delusion; the eye has deceived the appetite. In the reign of Jesus Christ the parched ground shall become a pool of real water, and the thirsty land springs, fountains: the period of mirage has vanished, the period of reality has set in. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The mirage and the pool:*—The mirage—what is that? In place of an enticing lake, the traveller finds only ground "dry as a bone," as my Arab guide expressed it. So the mirage stands as the emblem of the sham, the pretence. And the pool—what is that? It is the patch of real water found in the desert; an oasis, around which may be found palms, shade, and refreshment. The pool is the real thing; it offers refreshment and contentment. To an Oriental the mirage becoming a pool meant a transformation from illusion to reality. The entire picture is a permanent mirror of human life. I. Let us look at THE MIRAGE. It appeals to a need of our nature. To the thirsty traveller the mirage offers water and fruit. Our nature is full of needs. We are not self-contained; we must continually receive help from without. Our senses, our minds, and our hearts cry out for their food, and their cry is natural. In reply to their cry, both the real food of our nature and the mirage present themselves. The real and the sham are before us, and we have to choose between them. Alas! too many follow the mirage. In vain old travellers warn the younger ones. II. Let us look at THE POOL. No one would go after the mirage if they knew it was the mirage. Men want reality, and they think they seek it until a humiliation reveals the fact that they have been chasing an illusion all the time. Now, the message of the Gospel is a message of reality. The Gospel offers to transform our illusions into realities, by offering to transform us. Bring God into life, and the traveller sees reality everywhere. The reality touches every part of his nature. 1. His senses. He is neither ascetic nor libertine, but remembers ever that his body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Because God's temple he will seek, by proper exercise, to preserve its beauty. The senses, being the transitory and lower part of our nature, will never be allowed to

occupy the dominant place in life. 2. His mind. He to whom God is the supreme reality will take care that he never allows a partial knowledge of any subject to interpose itself as a thick veil between his soul and God. 3. His heart. When a man finds God he finds Him who is love, and when he rests in that love he experiences no shock of disappointment. And the other loves that are permitted to us, when exercised within the circle of the larger love, are harmonious with it, and so bring us peace and joy without alloy. (*F. C. Spurr.*) *The mirage a reality*:—The real translation of these words is not "The parched ground shall become a pool," but "The mirage shall become a pool." The thing that you believed would be the satisfaction of your life, the sight of which had brought new vigour to your limbs and strengthened your mind for the onward journey of the pilgrimage, that, says the prophet, shall become true. The mirage, the illusion of your life, shall become a reality. What has been the mirage that humanity has seen in its journey? The prophet enters into certain details that we might glance at for our profit. The first thing that such men would want would be the slaking of their thirst, the satisfaction of some desire. Might we not go back to the beginning of the history of man, and see that it has been a series of efforts succeeded by failure to gain satisfaction? We have all of us, as humanity at large, been struggling from the beginning to be satisfied. And the soul has said to itself, If I can once lay hold upon that particular thing, then I shall be satisfied. It may be wealth, it may be honour, it may be physical strength, it may be popularity. And we have reached it, but we were not satisfied. We found that the same want began all over again; year after year, men have seen a mirage, and said to themselves, If I could reach that, my soul would be satisfied. Many a man, grown old and weary with repeated failure, has said to his soul, in the secret communion of his own heart, "What is it that thou dost desire, O my soul? I have made a home. I have gathered about me those I love. I have increased knowledge. I have widened the circle of my friendships. But I am not satisfied. Still there is something that does not slake the thirst of my soul." And while these men so long ago thought as we do now, one man stood up in the midst of them all, and shouted aloud, as if it were a great discovery, "My soul is athirst for God." That is the trouble with humanity. It is athirst for God, and it has supposed that it could satisfy its longings with the things that are touched and seen. And the prophet, knowing the long struggle and the repeated failure, looked in the faces of these men, and said, "The mirage shall become a pool," your satisfaction shall be met. But such a prophecy as that called men's minds away from themselves to the thought of others. Individual salvation, if it could be brought to any one of us here to-day, would not be enough. The woman who knows that she stands in the light of the love of God, but that her husband is in the outer darkness, the man who knows that he has led an upright and true life, but that his son is turning away to wickedness, cannot be satisfied. We are bound one to another. Hear the word of the prophet: "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." There shall come, says the prophet, a day when in the desert a highway shall be built, and men shall know that they are not wandering in this trackless waste, with no knowledge of the home from which they have come, and no understanding of the end and object of the pilgrimage. But their feet shall stand on the way that others have travelled before them, and they shall hear the voice of the past saying to them, This is the way, walk ye in it. And walking in that path, united with the great company of pilgrims who have been through the same experiences, known the same sorrows, been beckoned on by the same mirage, they shall have strength and hope and comfort in the consciousness of this great companionship of the redeemed who walk on the highway of their God. Again, we look back over the long history of the race, and we find that something else is needed. If we could see to-day the camp in which the earliest forms of civilisation were gathered, before cities were built, or roads were laid, or empires dreamed of, we should find that the camp encircled itself at night with fire, while without were the beasts roaring for their prey, causing the little children to nestle close to the father who could protect them, causing the women to shudder, and even strong men to ask themselves, May the fiery barrier be broken down, and the beasts that are outside the camp invade us and destroy what we love? Oh the illusion, the mirage, as it must have seemed to them, of stately cities and strong walls, and beasts for ever banished from the land! But the prophet said, "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there." The day will come when the people shall know that they are protected, when fear shall be taken away from them. The fear of what? Of

beasts? Not that alone, for when the beasts were banished from the land, there was man to be afraid of. And the children said, Who will protect us from the enemy? And the father said, I will. And then the father came to die. And he rolled despairing eyes and cried, Ay, but who will protect me now? I must go into the unseen land, and face the shadows that I now behold. Who will protect me now? Who will protect me,—not from the beast, not from men, not from the spirits that may haunt me, not from hell, but from sin? Who will keep me from the corruption of sin,—worse than any evil that the world has ever seen or dreamed of? The prophet said, The mirage shall become a pool. That which seems impossible shall surely come to pass. Once more. On the journey much was lost, much was suffered, much endured. And the pilgrim who stepped out so blithely at the beginning of the march was found at the end to be an old man with the hope deferred that maketh the heart sick, the disappointment and weariness and sorrow, the hatred of those whom he had tried to help along the journey, the fear in his own heart that it was all an illusion. So at the last there was something more needed for these weary men. Was all that had been dropped on the journey to be gathered up again? Was all that had been suffered to have its reward? The prophet said, The mirage shall become a pool. What you have dreamed of joy and peace and glory shall be your portion. For "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." The mirage, the illusion, shall become a reality. These words were spoken thousands of years ago. What I would like to ask you is, How shall we read them to-day? Is it true that the thirsty soul has been satisfied? Is it true that there is a highway in the desert, and that the wayfaring man need not err therein? Is it true that no lion is there, nor any ravenous beast, but that in the consciousness of safety men are making their journey? Is it true that the redeemed do return and come to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads, and that sorrow and sighing flee away? Are these things true? Why, look into your own experiences, and think for a moment, not of your sorrows nor trials nor temptations, not of the weariness and disappointment of life, but of its glory, and see if what the prophet said be not true. See if it is not true that things that in that day seemed an illusion are to-day the realities of life. Why, multitudes of men and women know what it is to have the satisfaction of the soul, God with us; the knowledge that our sins have been pardoned, that they shall never rise up in judgment to meet us; the assurance of God's undying love; the knowledge of the sympathy of Him who was crucified for us; the consciousness that God is about us and by us and in us,—is the pool at which our thirsty souls do drink. And the way. Have we not that way? There are men and women who are lost, men and women who are wandering through this world, not knowing where they came from nor whither they are going. But is it true of those who have been drawn to the company of Jesus Christ? Are their feet not upon the way that leads to eternal life? Who would give it up? Those who do not know it think that it is a mirage. You know that your feet are on the highway, and though you may be a fool in many things, yet you shall not err from the way of salvation. It is the way that comes from God and leads to God, the way of Jesus Christ the Saviour. And protection. It is hard for us to picture to ourselves what it must have been for the camp to hear the roar of the beasts. We are not afraid of death, for Jesus died. We are not afraid of hell, for He descended into hell. We are not afraid of God nor of God's judgment, for it is the judgment of a father. We are not afraid of anything but sin, and says the apostle, "Sin shall not have dominion over you. You are not under the law; you are under grace." Christ is personally helping every one of us. Nothing shall separate us from His love. We have no cause for fear. "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast, but the redeemed shall walk there." The promise and prophecy of joy,—have we not known it? It is not true that sorrow and sighing have left the world, but has not the sorrow and has not the sighing fled away from you, as you have entered into the communion of your God? Have you not come to Zion with everlasting joy upon your head, as you have remembered, not the special things for which you ought to be thankful, but as it has been borne in upon you that you belong to God and God to you, and that the glory and beauty of life is not in doing God's will as a hard law, but in doing God's will because you have come to love God's will? The prophecy is not to come true; the prophecy has come true. What the prophet said was that these things should come,—the satisfaction of human want, the consciousness that the feet were on the everlasting way, the protection from all evil, and the everlasting joy of Zion in the days of the Messiah. And now if you ask me whether this prophecy rests upon any principle,

and whether its fulfilment has got anything back of it but the individual hope that may be true, I answer you, Yes, it has. It has the revelation of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ that man and God are one. And because man and God are one, therefore the mirage that humanity has beheld is the reflection of the refracted rays of the will of God passing through the medium of human life. And every man who has purified himself is, in his own day and according to his capacity, some sort of revelation, not of his own will, but of God's will revealed through him. "The mirage shall become a pool." The satisfaction of your soul you shall know, because you are God's and God is yours. Is not that what St. John meant, when he wrote, in that wonderful fifth chapter of his First Epistle, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him"? Because your will, your prayer, purified from selfishness, is no longer your will or your prayer. "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities," and "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." The prophecy has come true, and yet it is as nothing compared with that which shall be in the day when we know Him more than we know Him now. What should be our attitude? One of unbounded thankfulness that He has seen fit to reveal Himself to us as our Father, and ourselves as His sons. One of unflinching courage, one of undying hope; for every glorious vision that humanity has had upon its pilgrimage of personal joy, of larger truth, of nobler civilisation, of human glory, shall, in God's good time, be fulfilled, because it is not the will of man, it is the will of God. (*Leighton Parks.*)

Vers. 8–10. **And an highway shall be there.**—*Highways* are among the characteristic features of civilisation in a country, since they are the means of regular and easy communication between the opposite parts, and especially of all with the capital; but in times of foreign invasion they fall first into the power of the enemy, and are most completely deserted by the inhabitants (Judg. v. 6); and in Judæa, or any other country where wild beasts still exist, these keep aloof from the roads as long as they are kept open by traffic, but reappear in them if unfrequented, as in the story of the old prophet who met the lion on the way from Bethel. And this highroad shall not only be so well marked and made that the most ignorant and inexperienced shall keep his way there without difficulty, but neither shall it be appropriated by the unclean heathens, nor stopped by any roaring lion,—any Sennacherib, or spiritual archetype of Sennacherib. It shall be called, for it shall really be, "the holy way," the road set apart for the use of Jehovah's own chosen and consecrated people, whom He has redeemed and brought back from bondage; it shall be entirely for those. (*Sir E. Strachey, Bart.*) *The way to heaven*:—In describing the happiness of the Christian pilgrim, the prophet looks to the natural inconveniences of a wilderness, which are chiefly three—the want of water, the want of proper roads, and exposure to danger, particularly from beasts of prey; and he meets these with corresponding promises of abundance of water, an excellent highway, and complete protection. I. THE NATURE AND PROPERTIES OF THIS WAY PREPARED FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD, in their journey heavenward. 1. It is a way of Divine appointment, being like the king's highway, established by authority. 2. Like a highway, this path is designed for general use. 3. This way is denominated, "The way of holiness," or, the separated way. "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate," &c. The path of Christians is not merely a new path, among the many with which the broad way is filled. They have not changed one mode of sinning for another—they have chosen the way of holiness. 4. The prophet says, further, of the way to Zion, "the unclean shall not pass over it." When the Israelites left Egypt, a mixed multitude went with them (Exod. xii. 38). This mixed multitude proved a great snare to Israel. 5. This is a way remarkable for its plainness, and there is also the privilege of a guide (ver. 8, marg.) II. THE REFRESHMENT AND COMFORTS PROVIDED FOR CHRISTIANS BY THE WAY. "And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water," &c. Give a thirsty man what you may, if you do not give him what will assuage his thirst, you have not relieved him. There must be a suitableness in the object to his state, else it cannot profit him. III. THE COMPLETE PROTECTION AFFORDED THEM. Is not the pilgrimage of Christians a journey of danger? But though the highway to Zion is through the habitation of the most ferocious of animals, yet those beasts of prey, though on the right hand and on the left, shall not enter on this highway. While the redeemed keep this way, they are safe: it is only when

they leave it, that they are in danger. We have no example in Scripture of the Lord forsaking His people while they kept this way. The history of the people of Israel furnishes an illustration of this subject. Their males were required to go up to Jerusalem three times a year, to observe the great festivals of the law. Now, on such occasions, they had to leave their frontiers, their wives and children, and all their property, exposed to surrounding enemies. But God gave them a promise, that no man should desire their land, when they went up to appear before Him thrice in the year (Exod. xxxiv. 24). Accordingly, though they were surrounded by the most hostile nations, not a man of them felt the least inclination to touch a thing that belonged to Israel, so long as the law of God was observed. But when Israel forsook the law of their God, and had recourse to the help of idols and of men for their security, then the restraint which had been put upon their enemies was removed, and their land became the prey of invaders. (*David Russell.*) *The road to the city*:—I. This road of the text is THE KING'S HIGHWAY. In the diligence you dash on over the Bernard Pass of the Alps, mile after mile, and there is not so much as a pebble to jar the wheels. You go over bridges which cross chasms that make you hold your breath; under projecting rock; along by dangerous precipices; through tunnels adrip with the meltings of the glaciers, and, perhaps for the first time, learn the majesty of a road built and supported by governmental authority. Well, my Lord the King decided to build a highway from earth to heaven. It should span all the chasms of human wretchedness; it should tunnel all the mountains of earthly difficulty; it should be wide enough and strong enough to hold fifty thousand millions of the human race, if so many of them should ever be born. It should be blasted out of the "Rock of Ages," and cemented with the blood of the Cross, and be lifted amid the shouting of angels and the execration of devils. The King sent His Son to build that road. He put head and hand and heart to it, and after the road was completed, waved His blistered hand over the way, crying, It is finished. II. This road spoken of is A CLEAN ROAD. Many a fine road has become miry and foul because it has not been properly cared for; but the unclean shall not walk on this one. III. The road spoken of is A PLAIN ROAD. "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." That is, if a man is three-fourths an idiot, he can find this road just as well as if he were a philosopher. The pardon is plain. The peace is plain. Everything is plain. IV. The road to heaven is A SAFE ROAD. "No lion shall be there." V. The road spoken of is A PLEASANT ROAD. God gives a bond of indemnity against all evil to every man that treads it. "All things work together for good to those who love God." No weapon formed against them can prosper. VI. THIS WAY ENDS IN GLORY. I do not care how fine a road you may put me on, I want to know where it comes out. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion," &c. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The way to heaven*:—I. THE WAY ITSELF. There is only one way that leads to heaven. 1. Jesus Christ is the way. 2. It is by faith that we enter into, and make progress in this way. II. THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS WAY. Christ is divinely, infinitely excellent. III. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO ARE WALKING IN THIS WAY. 1. They are all, by nature, in the same circumstances with the rest of mankind. 2. From this situation they are redeemed by the obedience and death of the Son of God. 3. They are all holy persons. 4. They are constant, regular, and progressive in the way of holiness—they walk there. 5. They are all happy persons. They "come to Zion with songs," &c. (*W. S. Smart.*) *The King's highway*:—I. THE FEATURES OF THE WAY. 1. An open way though narrow. 2. A holy way though gladsome. 3. A safe way though simple. II. ITS TRAVELLERS. 1. The Lord of the way Himself (see margin). 2. His ransomed ones. Good company, sympathetic, pilgrim songs and converse. 3. Angel-escort. Jacob. "He shall give His angels charge . . . to keep thee in all thy ways." III. ITS TERMINATION. Path of just brighter to "completion of day." Heavenly Jerusalem Zion's templed hill. Farewell to pilgrim's staff and worn sandals. Welcome endless rest, wide open gates, greetings of the glorified, the bosom of God, and coronation of joy. (*Homiletic Review.*) *The way to Zion*:—Viewed as a description of the way of salvation through Christ, this prophecy calls upon us to consider—I. THE TRAVELLERS of whom it speaks. 1. They were once journeying along a very different path. They are called "the redeemed," and the term implies that they were once in bondage. This is the natural condition of us all. 2. But these travellers have been delivered from this state of bondage. 3. There are three ways of redeeming a captive—by exchange, by a forcible rescue, or by ransom. It is by the last of these that the people of God are here said to have been liberated. II. THE WAY along which they are journeying.

III. THE HOME to which it is leading them. To return to Zion implies, in the first instance, to be admitted into the visible Church of God, and to a full participation of all its privileges. But it implies also much more. It directs our eyes upward to that holy hill on which the heavenly Jerusalem is built, "the city of the living God." Of this unseen residence of the just, the earthly Zion was a type; and we may find it a profitable subject of meditation to trace—(1) The resemblance; (2) the contrast between them. 1. The hill of Zion was the peculiar residence of God. There His temple was erected, and there the mercy-seat, the visible symbol of His presence, stood. In heaven also Jehovah has a temple, and "the way of holiness" leads to it. 2. The Jews were taught to regard their sacred mountain as the source of all their blessings. When salvation was promised them, it was to come "out of Zion"; when they were to be strengthened and blessed, "the Lord out of Zion" was to strengthen and bless them. Hence we find Daniel turning towards Jerusalem when he prayed in Babylon, and Jonah looked towards the holy temple of his God when he cried amidst the waves for deliverance. And what real happiness is there, which comes not from above? 3. Zion also was the place in which the people of the Lord assembled. And who can describe the blessedness which will flow from the fellowship of heaven? 4. The earthly Jerusalem was a splendid city; "beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth, was mount Zion"; but even in the height of her greatness, when the glory of the Lord rested on her tabernacle, she afforded but a poor emblem of the heavenly city. At the time, however, to which the words of the prophet primarily relate, the contrast was peculiarly striking. The Zion to which the liberated Jews so joyfully returned, was "a wilderness, and Jerusalem a desolation." And where is Jerusalem now? Where is its temple? The heavenly Zion, however, knows no destruction and fears no change. It is "a city which hath foundations"; an abiding city. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *The King's highway:*—I. THE KING'S HIGHWAY IS A PLAINLY MARKED ROAD. In the Bible we have an accurate map of the country and all its roads. From first page to last, one name is conspicuous—Jesus Christ. 1. There is the great Patriarchal road; travelled by Adam; in bad repair in Noah's time; a broad way of promises to Abram, who travelled along it out of Ur; broader still to his children. 2. Then there is the great Mosaic road. Great pains taken to make it a good road; scores of workmen, called laws, upon it; hedges of immense height to keep people from the dangerous jungles of heathendom. Sign-posts everywhere. Most people murmured at it as rough or steep. But some, like Moses and Aaron, and Caleb and Joshua, saw "Christ" written up all along the way; upon their sacred buildings and altars; upon their religious teachers; even upon the garments of the people. 3. By and by the road widened into the great Prophetical road. David and Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and others, repaired the road. But after their time the road was sadly neglected. Few were found upon it. The fences were broken, and the people wandered in by-paths, until things became so bad that it seemed as though the road would be shut up altogether. 4. But "suddenly" (Mal. iii. 1) the King sent and put it into a thorough state of repair, so that it was like a new road, and it was called "the new and living way"; and though very rugged and narrow at times, it has always been kept open until this day. II. THIS HIGHWAY IS "THE WAY OF HOLINESS." It leads to God. They who travel along it bear His image. Dwelt in, and led by the Holy Ghost, they exercise themselves to have always a conscience void of offence, so that men can see that they walk holily, justly, and unblameably. III. THIS HIGHWAY IS A SAFE WAY. "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." IV. THIS HIGHWAY IS A WAY OF JOY. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return," &c. The captives of Babylon, concerning whom this was primarily written, rejoiced because they had passed through the wilderness, and had survived the dangers of that journey; because they were re-instated in their former home, and the smile of God once more rested upon them. And we,—delivered from wrath, cleansed from sin, returned from banishment, restored to our proper home in the heart of God, dwelling in peace and safety as members of His household, the church,—have not we abundant cause for rejoicing? (*W. J. Chapman, M.A.*) *Holiness, under the old dispensation and under the new:*—We can hardly make a greater mistake in our theology than to suppose that the gospel dispensation has been designed by God in order to bring down the standard of the divine claims to the level of human infirmity. So far from this being the case the gospel dispensation has been inaugurated and designed specially in order that human infirmity may be raised to the level of the divine claims. The prophet was looking forward, as it would seem, to the glories of the Christian dispensation, and this was the characteristic of this new era that he

contemplated with the most complete satisfaction: "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness." But it may occur to some to ask, "Had there been no knowledge of the 'way of holiness' under previous dispensations? Does holiness of life belong only to the gospel age?" I reply, Undoubtedly there were holy and humble men of heart before the Incarnation—men who lived in advance of their age. These were the bold pioneers of spiritual progress, who made their way through the pathless forest and the trackless waste ere the King's great highway was opened for our feet. It was with them as with the pioneers of civilisation in our own days. Hardy travellers have made their way right across the continent of Central Africa, exploring in almost all directions the vast and unknown region; but there is no highway across the continent of Africa: and those, therefore, who have crossed it, or attempted to do so, have had to face great and untold difficulties, and endure a vast amount of hardship and privation. By and by, if the world lasts long enough, and civilisation progresses, there may be a grand trunk road right across that continent, and by and by perhaps railways may be laid, and easy communication established, with that remote and barbarous region. It is even so with regard to the highway of holiness. Before the Christian dispensation earnest and devoted men attained to various degrees of holiness, but the King's highway to holiness was not yet open. It was not yet revealed to the world what true and perfect holiness was, nor how we are to rise to it. "Righteousness" rather than holiness was set forth in the law. It needed the Incarnation of the Son of God to reveal it to man. And not until the Word of the Father was clothed in human form, and lived among His fellow-men in fashion as a man, did human eyes contemplate the true ideal of holiness, the standard and type of absolute perfection. In the life and conduct of Christ that standard was embodied and revealed; by the death and resurrection of Christ the spiritual power was secured to us by which it becomes possible for us to rise to the level of conduct so indicated. The highway of holiness was thus opened; and it now becomes possible for "the wayfaring men, though fools," to walk therein. There are two thoughts, then, specially suggested to our minds in this connection. 1. In order to open the highway of holiness it was necessary that a perfect example should be given to mankind, so that men could understand what perfect holiness means; and that has been presented to us in the human life of Jesus. 2. Christ also imparts to us the secret of all true spiritual power by bringing us into close and blessed connection with God. The same power which rendered it possible for Jesus Christ as a man to be perfectly holy is thus brought within our reach by the Incarnation, and death and resurrection, of Jesus Christ. Thus we may say, not only have we the map and the chart of the highway of holiness placed in our hands, but also the highway itself opened up to us by the communication of a spiritual ability to tread therein. But if those advantages are real, they carry with them enhanced responsibilities. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *The highway of holiness:*—Let us consider some of the characteristics of the life of holiness to which the prophet here calls our attention, and the conditions which are attached to the right of way. I. It is the WAY OF THE PURIFIED. "The unclean shall not pass over it." Until we are cleansed from our "old sins" we are not in a position to pass over the King's highway of holiness. Some people who desire to live holy lives are no better than legalists. They cannot love much, because they have not had much forgiven them; thus they lose the true motive of a Christian life, while they are crippled in their efforts to attain to the proper standard of holiness, both by the weight of unforgiven sin and by absence of that spiritual power which flows to us through reconciliation. We must pass through the gate before we can pass along the way, and that gate is the Cross, where the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Nor is it difficult to find a reason for this necessity. Indeed, this passage gives us a sufficient reason if we are to accept the marginal rendering—"For He shall be with them." It is quite true that Jesus Christ was the Friend of publicans and sinners; but He was their Friend because He saved them from their sins. And it is so now; those only who hate their sins, and who come to Christ to be delivered from their sins, can walk along the highway of holiness, because He is sojourning with those who sojourn there, and He cannot walk with the unclean. But having called attention to this statement as a reason for the necessity of cleansing, let us now dwell upon it as a characteristic of the way of holiness, and of the experience of those who pass along it. II. The highway of holiness is THE PATH OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DIVINE. When Christ was here on earth He ever moved along this way, and He is still to be found there by those who pass along it. Indeed, so closely is His presence and our fellow-

ship with Him connected with true spiritual holiness, that we can scarcely say whether the holiness is the fruit of the fellowship, or the fellowship the effect of the holiness. It is only while we walk in the light, as He is in the light, that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. These two elements in our experience act and react upon each other. III. It is THE WAY OF RIGHT DIRECTION. "Wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." Here is a promise that may well comfort us in the perplexities of life. The reason why we make such great mistakes as we sometimes do is surely that we get off the King's highway of holiness. We begin to pursue our own pleasure, or to gratify our ambition, or, we seek to please other people, and to avoid the cross. But when the wayfaring man is on the highway of holiness this promise will be fulfilled. He may seem to make mistakes, but God will overrule what appears to be a blunder to His own glory. There is yet another thought suggested by this clause which may serve to explain some of our errors. The prophet here speaks of those who are fools as being assured of right doctrines. May not one cause of mistakes sometimes be that we are not content to take the place of fools? We feel too much confidence in our own sound judgment and commonsense, and so we scarcely regard it necessary to inquire of the Lord. I do not mean to say that we ought not to use our natural faculties. They are a trust from God, and we are bound to use them. But we are warned not to lean to our own understanding, and he who gives us this advice would have been a much happier man and made much fewer practical mistakes if he had only taken it himself. But there is yet another reason why we sometimes err, suggested to us by this clause. And this other reason brings before our minds the fourth characteristic of the way of holiness. IV. It is only THE WAY OF RIGHT DIRECTION TO THOSE WHO ARE WAYFARING MEN. Do we not sometimes err because we have so little of the wayfaring man about us? Living as we do in a luxurious age, how many of us surround ourselves with luxury, and lay ourselves out for self-indulgence! We are called to use the world as not abusing it; surely it is the abuse of the world when we allow it to take the place of heaven. There is a quaint old Latin proverb which tells us, "The penniless travellers shall sing before the robbers." No wonder; for what can the robbers take from them? And many a Christian might sing defiance of all enemies—even of the great robber himself, if only we made over our all to its proper Owner, and regarded it as a sacred trust to be used for Him. V. It is THE WAY OF SAFETY. "No lion shall be there," &c. Is Satan, then, really to lose his power to do us harm? He may come to the hedge which fences in the highway from the rest of the world; he may growl and roar, and do his best to terrify you, but so long as your eye is single, and you are moving on the King's great highway of holiness, the lion cannot lay a paw upon you or inflict a single wound. VI. It is THE WAY OF JOY. VII. It is THE WAY THAT LEADS HOME. (*Ibid.*)

The highway of the King of kings:—I. Isaiah proclaims that this way shall be A HIGHWAY. Not a way confined, as the Old Testament way was, to one particular people. Not a way confined to any particular class of persons, rich in preference to poor, learned in preference to unlearned. Not a way confined to any particular sect, or any particular communion of persons. But a way open and public to all. Then, woe to the man who presumes to set up a turnpike upon this highway. And yet this is what is done. Some would even have us believe that we cannot set our feet upon this way except through the help and invocation of saints and angels. Others tell us that we must have a priest at our elbow. Others say that we must belong to some particular sect of Christians. And others say that we must belong to some particular class of persons, such for instance as the learned. Such are the turnpikes, such are the barriers, which men presume to set up upon the highway of the King of kings. II. Though it is clear that this way is accessible to all sects, classes, and conditions of men, yet THERE IS ONE EXCEPTION, and that one exception is not due to God, but to man himself. "It shall be called the way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those," viz., for the holy. III. Here is A SPECIAL INVITATION TO THE WAYFARING MEN—men who have not the advantage of learning, education, and accomplishments. It is the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, without which even the best acquirements are nothing, which makes up to wayfaring men for the absence of all the advantages of learning, education, station, and leisure, which are the privileges of those who occupy the higher grades of life. IV. On this Christmas Day WE CELEBRATE THE OPENING OF THAT WAY which Isaiah describes. V. AT THE VERY END OF THIS GREAT VIADUCT IS HEAVEN. (*E. Girdlestone, M.A.*) *Simplicity of the religion of Jesus:*—It is impossible to transport ourselves back to a time when the New Testament was not,

and when the civilisation which has come forth from the New Testament had not even been hinted at. 1. In that old time the choicest wisdom of the world did little else than puzzle itself over problems which are now known in their solution to the children in our schools. Whether man was anything more than an animal; whether with the death of his body a man did not cease to be, was an undecided question. But the mystery touching life was almost as great as the mystery touching death. The best impulses of men to do that which was wise and good had no direction. A hundred teachers taught a hundred different ways of living. The interrogation of ages was: What is truth? Men sought it with a patience that would appal a modern disciple; sought it until they died, and died with the infinite sadness of knowing that all their seeking had been in vain—that they were no wiser than they were when they started their career of investigation. 2. The duty of all men that teach or can teach is to make things plain, simple, easily discerned by the popular perception, readily felt by the popular conscience, and easily appropriated by the popular emotion. It was largely because the language of Jesus was easily understood, and hence sympathetic, that the common people heard Him so gladly. 3. Well, the old prophet, looking along the line of his craving, in which he represented the craving of humanity, the craving for light as to what death meant and of instruction in human duties, saw a happy day ahead. He saw a day when ignorance should give place to understanding, and the fear born of it, and the torment born of the fear, should harass men no more. He saw a day when the way of holiness should be so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, should not err therein; that is, when not only the wise should find it readily, but when those whose intellects were unassisted by education, and whose abilities to discern between right and wrong were not extraordinary, should easily distinguish between good and evil. When Christ was born, the sun arose; when Christ came up from the grave and brought life and immortality to light in His resurrection, the clock of ages struck the hour of mid-day, and the Sun of Righteousness stood full-orbed, armed on all sides with beams, in the spiritual zenith of the world. 4. If you desire to see the fulfilment of the old prophet's prediction, look at your own age, and you behold it. In the fact that the Bible lies waiting perusal in your own homes, see and recognise that the day has come in which all that any man can long for in the way of knowledge as to his duty of life, in the way of the destiny of his soul after death, is realised. 5. The way to judge a system of instruction is not by listening to what men say about it, but by studying what the author of it said and did. If you wish to know what the system of salvation is, as included in the coming of the Christ, go to your New Testament record and ascertain from His own lips what it is. 6. Do not go expecting that His system is mysterious, for we often fail to see the simplicity of a thing, by having a previous impression that it is profoundly complex. This is the old blunder which both Jew and Greek made centuries ago. The ritualists of our day match the Jew, and the man of supreme culture types the æsthetic Greek. If you will go to the Master Himself, and not to His disciples, past or present, you will be struck as much by what is not in His system, as by what is in it. 7. One of the proofs of the fine wisdom of the Saviour is seen in His studiously keeping out of sight whatever would lead the minds of His followers in speculative directions. All questions of casuistry, such as the scribes and lawyers were continually tempting Him to discuss, He brushed aside as incompatible with the object of His mission. He came simply to establish divine connections with men, to teach the race virtues, and implant in their souls the germ of simple piety. (*W. H. H. Murray.*) *The holy road:*—1. THE WAY to the heavenly Zion, the dwelling-place of God. Zion of old was the place of the one altar of sacrifice and the one mercy-seat, where the Lord in manifest glory communed with His covenant people. Pilgrimage to the holy place was an important part of Israel's religious life. During the invasions of the land, and especially during the captivity, the solemn festivals were neglected, and there seemed to be no way up to the house of God. Then godly men sighed for the tabernacles of God. How much they longed for a highway by which they could march to Zion! We speak of another Jerusalem which is above. 1. There is a way to God and heaven. It is noteworthy that this road is one, a highway and a way. Many roads lead to ruin, but only one to salvation. Years ago, at the University of Utrecht, several Christian students met together from various nations, and on one occasion it was agreed that four persons, representing Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, should describe the work of grace upon their hearts. The earnest brother from New England, and the friend from the Cape of Good Hope, and the missionary student

from India, all found that their stories agreed with that of a young nobleman of Holland. Scenes and circumstances widely differed, but the joys and sorrows, the struggles and the victories of each, were the same, and one hope filled every heart. We differ in the pace with which we traverse the way, but the way itself is one. Jesus saith, "I am the way." He is not only way, but end to all who put their trust in Him. This way is made through the wilderness: "a highway shall be there"—where the sand is always shifting, where if the traveller once loses his bearings he is doomed to certain death, with the vulture's maw as his only sepulchre. A way is made for us through the deserts of sin, and the wildernesses of sorrow, over hills of doubt and mountains of fear. That way runs close at thy feet, poor wanderer! This way was cast up at great expense; for road-making over a long and rugged country is a costly business. Who could make a way over the mountains of our iniquities but Almighty God? It cost the great God the Jewel of heaven. This road has lasted now these thousands of years; it is still in good travelling condition, nor will it ever be closed till all the chosen wayfarers shall have reached the many mansions of the Father's house. This way, being made by Divine power, is appointed by Divine authority to be the King's highway. Whosoever travels by this road is under the protection of the King of kings. This highway has conducted many already to God. It is said to be "a highway and a way": it is not only a highway by appointment, but it is a way by use and traffic. 2. The name of this way. The way of faith is not contrary to holiness, but it is "the way of holiness." If you are ever in a doubt about which is the right path, remember those words of the Saviour: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it." Prefer strictness to laxity. God's way is the way of holiness, for He has founded it upon holy truth. He is not unholy in the saving of any sinner. Those who follow that road do so by a holy trust. We must not believe that Christ will save us in our sins—that would be unholy faith; but we must look to Him to save us from our sins; for that is holy faith. It is also the way of holy living. 3. This way is a select way. "The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those." Literally this may mean, "The uncircumcised and the unclean." These were excluded from the house of the Lord, and here they are excluded from the sacred way of Israel: of this the spiritual meaning is that unless we are washed in the blood of Christ, and renewed in the spirit of our minds by the Holy Spirit, we are not in the way of God. It is a select way, for it is reserved for a select people—"it shall be for those." Who are they? Look backward, and you will read of some who make the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad: of some whose blind eyes were opened, whose deaf ears were unstopped. You read of the lame men who were made to leap as an hart, and of dumb men who began to sing. This highway is reserved for those upon whom a miracle of grace has been performed. This way is for the ransomed. "The redeemed of the Lord shall walk there." Another fact makes it very select. "He shall be with them" (marg.). 4. It is a plain way. The true Gospel is as plain as a pikestaff. 5. It is a safe way. "No lion shall be there." There is one lion which those who make Jesus their way need never be afraid of: that is, the lion of unpardoned sin. Another lion also roars upon us, but cannot devour us, namely, temptation: you shall not be tempted above what you are able to bear. As for that grim lion of death of which some speak, it does not exist. II. OUR DUTY IN CONNECTION WITH THIS WAY OF HOLINESS. 1. The first thing is carefully to discriminate between road and road. When you see a road which looks broad, smooth, pleasant, and well-bordered with flowers, say to yourself, "There are many ways, but since only one of them leads to eternal life, I must be careful. I will pray, 'Lord, be my guide, even unto death.'" Do not believe that sincerity is enough; you need truth as well. 2. When you know the road, you should scrupulously keep in it, for many ways branch from it. 3. Are we in the way? Then let us be very earnest in telling other people of it. Travelling the other day by a country road the traveller wished to know the way to a certain spot. He inquired of one who sat by the roadside, but all the answer he got from him was a vacant stare, and a shake of the head. A little time after he found that the poor man was deaf and dumb. I am afraid there are many such Christians nowadays: they are spiritually deaf to the woes of others, and dumb as to giving them either instruction or encouragement. All they seem to do is to shake their wise heads, as if they knew a great deal more than they meant to tell. I asked a person, the other day, the road to a certain place, and in the politest possible manner he answered, "I beg your pardon, but I am quite a stranger in these parts." That was a very sufficient

reason for not directing me. He could not tell what he did not know. If any of you do not know the way, and are strangers in these parts, do not tell anybody: but let this mournful reflection go home to your consciences: "I cannot tell another the way to heaven because I am a stranger in these parts." God grant that we may never stretch the arm of our testimony beyond the sleeve of our experience! 4. If you are not in the road, may the Lord help you to get into it this morning. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Appian Way and the highway to heaven*:—You have heard of the Appian Way. It was three hundred and fifty miles long. It was twenty-four feet wide, and on either side the road was a path for foot passengers. It was made out of rocks cut in hexagonal shape and fitted together. What a road it must have been! Made of smooth, hard rock, three hundred and fifty miles long. No wonder that in the construction of it the treasures of a whole empire were exhausted. Because of invaders, and the elements, and Time—the old conqueror who tears up a road as he goes over it—there is nothing left of that structure excepting a ruin. But I have to tell you of a road built before the Appian Way, and yet it is as good as when first constructed. Millions of souls have gone over it. Millions more will come. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The pilgrim and his destination*:—Dean Alford's grave is shaded by an old yew tree in St. Martin's churchyard, and these words are recorded on the headstone: "The Inn of a traveller on his way to Jerusalem." (*J. N. Norton.*) *The way of salvation plain*:—I remember the story of a Swedish king in years gone by who, when he was ill, was greatly concerned about his eternal state. There chanced to come to the palace an old farmer, known to his majesty for his piety; the king called him to his bedside, and said, "Tell me, what is the faith that saves the soul?" The peasant explained it out of his heart in plain language, much to the king's comfort. The king remained ill for months, and again fell into doubt and fear. Those about him urged him to send for the Archbishop of Upsala, as a learned prelate who could allay his fears. The bishop came to the royal couch, and gave his majesty a logical and theological definition of faith in most proper terms. When he was gone the king said, "It was very learned, no doubt, and very ingenious, but there was no comfort in it for me; the peasant's faith is the faith that can save my soul." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Holiness can be understood by the unlettered*:—A minister was speaking to a disciple of Jesus, not much versed in the terminology of the schools, on the subject of entire holiness. At last she turned to him and said, "I don't know what you mean in the way in which you speak of it, but if you mean constant readiness for heaven, I've got that." She was a Christian woman, who habitually rested on Jesus for full salvation, and into whose heart there was poured the comfort of conscious readiness to do or suffer God's will, as He might direct. (*W. G. Pascoe.*) *The highway of holiness* is along the commonest road of life—along your very way. In wind and rain, no matter how it beats—it is only going hand in hand with Him. (*M. G. Pearse.*)

Ver. 9. **No lion shall be there.**—*Human animalness*:—I. MAN NATURALLY POSSESSES SOMETHING OF THE ANIMAL NATURE. That man by nature has animal desires and passions is no fault of his own, nor is it a misfortune to the possessor if these are inherited in harmonious proportion with the mental and spiritual propensities. They are all from the Divine Creator. They are all essential to man's enjoyment, and symmetrical development. The Creator wastes no material. As the watch contains no unnecessary spring, wheel, cog, or screw, so every passion, emotion, affection, from the lowest to the highest, as coming from God, is of account. II. When the animal nature is fed and strengthened to the neglect and at the expense of the other and higher faculties and tendencies of the human make-up, then the animal appears in a great variety of forms. III. MAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS TREATMENT OF HIS ANIMAL NATURE. It is not to be crucified, or wholly exterminated, but kept in subordination, subject to the ruling of the mental and spiritual. Some by nature have a great deal more to contend with on this line than others. The first nature, the animal, can be transformed into the "second nature," the man; and if made "a new creature in Christ Jesus," such must necessarily be the result. (*W. G. Thrall.*)

Ver. 10. **And the ransomed of the Lord shall return.**—*Marching to music*:—My object will be to give the text its highest practical appropriation as setting forth in glowing language the return of God's spiritual Israel, His ransomed ones,

from every land. I. WHO THEY ARE. 1. "The ransomed of the Lord." To ransom signifies to redeem or free from captivity or punishment by paying down an equivalent, to rescue from danger and death, to deliver from the possession of an enemy either by exploits of warfare or purchase by gold. The Lord's ransomed people are, therefore, those who have been spiritually rescued, emancipated, delivered. They are the purchased property of God by the precious blood of Christ. 2. The ransomed of the Lord are the regenerate of the Holy Ghost. They have been quickened into new life as well as redeemed. 3. The ransomed of the Lord are the adopted into the family of God. What a unique and beautiful sequence we have here. Life purchased, life begotten, life ennobled. II. WHITHER ARE THEY JOURNEYING? "To Zion." The old-time Zion was typical of the "city which hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God." Let us glance at the parallelism. 1. Zion of old was the seat and scene of worship. The ransomed of the Lord in returning are going to Zion above, to join the immortal worshippers in the "temple not made with hands." We shall worship, but we shall also serve in multifold ministries of good. 2. Zion of old was the seat of royalty. "There were set," we are told, "thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David." Jerusalem was the metropolis of the nation—the centre of monarchy, authority, power, and splendour. Heaven is the city of the Great King. On its sapphire throne, belted as with a rainbow of mercy and grace, sits the Mediator-King of the New Covenant, crowned with many crowns, holding the sceptre of righteousness. To His ransomed ones He says, "Verily, I say unto you, that ye which follow Me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye shall also sit upon thrones." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." 3. Zion of old was the seat of rest. It was the terminus of the pilgrim-worshippers' journey. With the ransomed of the Lord it is now the pilgrimage; but daily they pitch their moving tents a day's march nearer home, heaven, rest. What a magic word is "rest." What volumes of meaning it holds! Rest from conflict, rest from sorrow, rest from suffering, rest from self and sin, rest from all the ills of the time-life! Rest in the Lord in holy contemplation, holy worship, holy service, holy visions, holy companionships, holy pleasures for evermore! III. WHAT IS THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THEY JOURNEY? "With songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." They march to music made in the sanctuary of the soul. Undoubtedly the allusion is to the Songs of Degrees or of the Ascents, which the rejoicing tribes sung on their way to the great festive celebrations at Jerusalem, or to the pæans of deliverance the emancipated exiles rang out as onward they pressed to the land of their fathers and God. Thus the homeward-bound hosts of God on the highway of holiness are urging their way. They are like soldiers returning from the scene and spoils of a great victory, with heart and step keeping time to jubilant melody. But the ransomed not only sing on the way home, they also "Come to Zion with songs." It is a jubilant arrival. IV. WHAT DO THE RANSOMED OF THE LORD REALISE ON THEIR ARRIVAL HOME? "Joy and gladness"—*i.e.* outward and inward joy. The joy of holy retrospect; the gladness of present possession of glory; the joy of fulfilled hope, perfected manhood, satisfied life, prospective progression, intellectually and morally, for ever and ever. It is the "joy and gladness"—1. Of heavenly reunions. 2. Of perfected knowledge. 3. Of the beatific vision. This "joy and gladness" will mean the exclusion of "sorrow and sighing." As light expels darkness, and day excludes the night, so the rapture of joy prevents the sighings of sorrow. (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*) *Deliverance from the burdens of life*:—1. What are the real sources of that deep power of sorrow which broods so heavily over life? There is, first, over our bodily life and the world of nature which subserves it, the continual blight of pain and suffering. In nature's highest beauty, even to our power of imagination, there is always some imperfection. But it is no mere pious imagination to declare that its burden is absolutely as nothing in comparison with the burden of the spiritual evil, the blindness, the weakness, and the sin of man. These are the two great burdens which are so heavy upon our human life, and they are worst in this—that they seem to separate us from our Father in heaven, alike by the mist of doubt and by the gloom of fear. 2. Need I remind you how the Gospel meets both these things and scatters them to the winds? That law of suffering and of death it hallows doubly by the revelation of the Cross, because it overrules it to our own good, because it makes it a condition of our saving others. The Gospel deals still more

decisively with the burden of sin. In it lies the very essence of redemption. But you will ask me, "Is that promise realised after all?" Remember, that by the very nature of the case the kingdom of Christ here is seen only in the first stages of its conflict against the power of evil. What it can offer us is only a true but an imperfect earnest of a perfect future. Has it given us, and does it give us now, that which it thus professes to give? I answer unhesitatingly, Yes. These things are no dream. They are a present and blessed reality, and we feel sometimes as if they were the only reality in a very fleeting and unsubstantial world. But the reality is yet imperfect. Joy and gladness may be ours, but sorrow and sighing have not yet fled away. There is a heaven hereafter in which alone all these promises shall be quite fulfilled. (*A. Barry, D.D.*) "*Everlasting joy upon their heads*":—This expression may allude to the ancient custom of wearing crowns in seasons of mirth and festivity, which were considered as marks of honour and dignity; or, it may refer to the practice of anointing the head on joyous, festive occasions, which probably gave rise to the phrase used by the royal poet of "the oil of gladness" (Psa. xlv. 7). (*R. Macculloch.*) **Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**—*The flight of sorrow*:—I. WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STATEMENT that sorrow and sighing shall flee away? The susceptibility of sorrow and the power of expressing sorrow will not be destroyed; but there shall be no appeal to the susceptibility, and no use for the power of sorrowful expression. 1. The sorrow of bodily disease shall pass away with the pain, the languor, the weakness which disease imposes, the nervous excitement which it often sets up, and the debility which it so frequently creates. Disease shall pass away, with all its interruptions of domestic and social intercourse, with all its power to mar our enjoyment, and to interfere with our work. It will flee before a new constitution, before the health and vigour and young rich life of a body, raised in incorruption—raised in glory—raised in power—raised in Christ-like spirituality. 2. The sorrow of dying will pass away. The fear of death—the pains of death—the separations of death—the material consequences of death—the abasement of death. 3. The sorrow of bereavement will pass away. And with it widowhood, orphanage, the loss of wife and children, and every painful farewell which death so often and so rigorously exacts. 4. The sorrow of poverty will flee away, with its hunger and thirst, its nakedness and cold, its homelessness and wretchedness, and all the neglect and contempt, the painful dependence, the degradation and dishonour, which it too often brings. 5. The sorrows caused by the sins of others will flee away. The wicked, whatever now may be their power, through relationship or through position, shall cease to trouble. Slavery, oppression, and persecution will utterly cease. The sorrows caused by the hell-fired tongue, by the fist of wickedness, by the feet swift in running to do mischief, shall flee away. Nothing shall enter the sorrowless world that defileth, that worketh abomination or maketh a lie. 6. The sorrows produced by the fear of evil, by dark imaginations, and by blighted hopes, shall flee away. The fiat, "Peace, be still," shall be spoken to every soul. 7. The sorrows of this life's illusions and delusions shall pass away. Everything shall, by and by, far exceed your hopes. 8. The sorrows of sin will pass away. The smart of the conscience, remorse, dread, discord between the passions and the sanctified will, chastisement, even temporary Divine desertion. 9. Every "heart knoweth its own bitterness." The own bitterness of the heart shall flee away. Secret sorrow—sorrow that you hardly admit to yourselves—sorrow upon which you have never put the raiment of speech—the sorrow that you have never groaned out to the nearest friend you have—nameless sorrow, "my sorrow"—sorrow in all its roots, in all its branches, sorrow in all its blossomings and fruits, in all its depths, and in all its manifestations, shall flee away. And this fleeing away of sorrow will leave the channels of the emotions open only to the streams of enjoyment. What a mighty effect this will have upon the character and the entire life! The flight of sorrow will enlarge the love of the heart: for suffering often makes us self-enclosed and self-engrossed; it will help, moreover, to secure uninterrupted intercourse and unbroken activity; it will be the departure of correction no longer needed—the withdrawment of discipline not further required—it will be like the fleeing away of winter when the time of the singing of birds has come. II. WHEN SHALL THIS BE? The text points to Hezekiah's reign—to that portion of his reign through which God blessed the people whom he governed with remarkable prosperity. But does this exhaust the text? We think not. If you think it does, there are other words from the mouth of God on this subject

(Isa. xxv. 8; Rev. vii. 17). When shall this be? It shall be to the individual saint when his earthly career terminates. To the saints as a body, this will be realised at the times of restitution of all things. III. BY WHAT SIGNS MAY WE BE ASSURED THAT OUR SORROWS WILL FLEE AWAY? There are five sure signs. 1. Personal faith—not in King Hezekiah, but in King Jesus. 2. Acknowledged and avowed citizenship in the kingdom of the Saviour. We lay stress upon avowal, because where there is no avowal there must always be reason for doubting and suspicion. 3. The fleeing away of sin—the being cleansed from sin. 4. The present effect of sorrow. If sorrow bends the will and subdues the affections, then it is sanctified, and herein is a sign that sorrow will flee away. 5. A living hope—hope born of faith—hope the child of God's promises—the hope which is the anchor of the soul. Write on your hearts this one sentence concerning your sorrows and sighs, they shall flee away. The love of God, like the sun upon the snow-drift, which melts the snow, raises it in vapour and then disperses it, shall make sorrow flee away. The power of God, like the north wind, which driveth away the rain, shall constrain sorrow to flee away. (*S. Martin.*) *Sorrow and sighing shall flee away* :—There is consolation in this very form of expression —"flee away." It shows an instability as characterising sorrow in the case we contemplate. Sorrow to the redeemed man is not the sea which is found in its appointed bed in summer and in winter; but it is the crested wave which is here to-day and gone to-morrow. It is not the mountain which stands in its place year after year, and century after century; but it is the clouds which rise from the valley, and travel up the sides of the mountain, and sometimes cap and completely hide it, but which from their very nature must flee away. The sorrows of the saints are sorrows which from their very character must pass away. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VER. 1. **Sennacherib King of Assyria came up.**—*Sennacherib* was one of the most magnificent of the Assyrian kings. He seems to have been the first who fixed the seat of government permanently at Nineveh, which he carefully repaired and adorned with splendid buildings. His greatest work is the grand palace at Koyunjik, which covered a space of about eight acres, and was adorned throughout with sculptures of finished execution. He built also, or repaired, a second palace at Nineveh, on the mound of Nebbi Yunus, confined the Tigris to its channel by an embankment of brick, restored the ancient aqueducts which had gone to decay, and gave to Nineveh that splendour which she thenceforth retained till the ruin of the empire. (*G. Rawlinson.*) *Sennacherib's invasion of Judah—Lessons* :— 1. That a people may be in the way of their duty, and yet meet with trouble and distress. Hezekiah was reforming, and his people in some measure reformed; yet their country is at that time invaded, and a great part of it laid waste. Perhaps they began to grow remiss and cool in the work of reformation, were doing it by halves, and ready to sit down short of a thorough reformation; and then God visited them with this judgment, to put life into them and that good cause. We must not wonder if, when we are doing well, God sends afflictions to quicken us to do better, to do our best, and to press towards perfection. 2. That we must never be secure of the continuance of our peace in this world, nor think our mountain stands so strong as that it cannot be moved. Hezekiah was not only a pious king, but prudent, both in his administration at home and his treaties abroad. His affairs were in a good posture, and he seemed particularly to be upon good terms with the King of Assyria; for he had lately made his peace with him by a rich present (2 Kings xviii. 14), and yet that perfidious prince pours an army into his country all of a sudden, and lays it waste. It is good for us, therefore, always to keep up an expectation of trouble, that when it comes it may be no surprise to us, and then it will be the less a terror. 3. That God sometimes permits the enemies of His people, even those that are most impious and treacherous, to prevail far against them. The King of Assyria took all, or most, of the defenced cities of Judah, and then the country would, of course, be an easy prey to him. Wickedness may prosper a while, but cannot prosper always. (*M. Henry.*)

Ver. 2. **And the King of Assyria sent Rabshakeh.**—*Invasion of Judah by Assyria*:—In chaps. xxxvi.–xxxix. a historical part follows, which retiring from the ideal distances of chaps. xxxiv., xxxv. into the historical realities of chap. xxxiii., begins with the statement that "at the conduit of the upper pool in the road of the fuller's field," where Ahaz preferred the help of Assyria to that of Jehovah (vii. 3), stands an embassy of the King of Assyria with a section of his army. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Rabshakeh* or Rab-Sak, the chief cup-bearer, or general staff-officer in the Assyrian service, entrusted with diplomatic business. It is the title of an office, and not the name of a person. The "Tartan" was the supreme military officer, or commander-in-chief, while the "Rab Saris" was the chief of the Eunuchs, and a confidential officer. Rab = chief. (*B. Blake, B.D.*) *The Rabshakeh*, Sennacherib's Bismarck. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Vers. 4–20. **Rabshakeh said unto them.**—*War orators*:—We have a class of speakers in this country who are silent on all great social and cosmopolitan topics, but make themselves heard and felt the moment any matter of warlike fascination comes to the surface. All other questions float down the stream of public opinion without causing them even to indicate their existence. But let a question involving blood appear, and with marvellous celerity all these pugilistic men come from the obscurity of barracks and service clubs, and from no one knows where, often fuming about no one knows what. They remind one of those animals noted for their bloodthirstiness in the warm regions of Africa—the caribitos (*Serrasalmo*). Their haunts are at the bottoms of rivers, but a few drops of blood suffice to bring them by thousands to the surface; and Humboldt himself mentions that in some part of the Apure, where the water was perfectly clear and no fish were visible, he could, in a few minutes, bring together a cloud of caribitos by casting in some bits of flesh. With equal ease we can collect our war orators if we only give them one sanguinary pretext. (*Scientific Illustrations and Symbols.*)

Ver. 5. **Now on whom dost thou trust?**—*Trust in others sometimes dishonoured*:—That question may not be without importance in matters of ordinary life. We have all to trust our fellows, more or less, and I suppose we have all had to smart in some degree, as the result of it. We may trust the mass of men in trifles without any serious consequences; but when it comes to large sums, when the whole of a man's fortune, for instance, is staked upon the character and reputation of someone else, then it is not altogether an unimportant question, "On whom dost thou trust?" Many have rested on some choice friend, and found him play the Judas! How often have our dearest counsellors turned away from us as Ahithophel did from David! How frequently have we confidently rested upon the integrity, friendship, and fidelity of some person whom we thought we knew and could trust, and we have found that "Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." Use discretion in all your transactions in life, as to how far you will trust the sons of men. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *In whom art thou trusting?*—I. Let us put this question, and collect A LITTLE BUNDLE OF ANSWERS. 1. I think I hear some answer, "I do not know that I have thought about the matter at all; I hope it is a long time before I shall die, and there is no need to trouble myself before it is necessary, and, therefore, I put the matter off." Do not you think that you are very foolish? There is a gate to death, ay! and to hell, too, from the place where you are now sitting. Suppose you were sure of a long life, would you wish to delay being happy? 2. I hear one say, "I thank God I am about as good as most people; when my poor neighbours have needed charity, they have never found a churl in me. I hope I can say it will go well with me, and if it does not, sir, it will go badly with a good many." I am afraid it will go badly with a great many; but I do not see what consolation you ought to get out of that, for company in being ruined will not decrease, but rather increase the catastrophe. The sum and substance of your confidence is, that you are trusting in yourself. Now, do you really and honestly think that you are of yourself sufficient to bring yourself safe to God's right hand? I think your conscience can remind you of some slips and flaws. 3. "I trust in my priest; he has been regularly ordained; he belongs to an Apostolic Church; he tells me that he will forgive my sins if I confess them to him, and that when I come to die he will give me my viaticum." Do not be misled; your priest might as well trust in you as you trust in him. 4. "Well, God is merciful. He is not so severe as to be unkind towards us, and we dare say, though we may have a good many faults, yet as He is a very good and gracious God,

He will forgive our sins and accept us." If you go to God out of Christ, you will find Him to be a consuming fire, and instead of mercy you shall receive justice. 5. "Well, sir, I do not say that I can trust to my works, but I am a good-hearted man: I am a man of good intentions, and though I have a great many faults, yet I am good-hearted at bottom, and I think God will look at my heart, and will put me right at the end, notwithstanding my slips and wanderings by the way." It will turn out, I am afraid, to be a delusion and a snare. Your heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Do not talk about its goodness any more, for when you do, you give God the lie, and how can you expect to go to the heaven where God is, when you are thus insulting Him all the while? II. THE CHRISTIAN'S ANSWER. "I trust," says the Christian, "a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." To some this does not look like a real trust. "Why, we cannot see God," says one. "How do we know all about this Trinity? Is this a real trust?" Cannot you trust in a thousand things you have never seen or heard? Some of you may be earning your living by electricity, but you never saw it. Some have said, "But does God interfere to help His people? Is the trust you impose in Him so really recognised by Him that you can distinctly prove that He helps you?" Yes, we can. We can say, also, by way of commending our God to others, that we feel we can rest upon Him for the future. III. SOME WORDS OF ADVICE TO THOSE WHO ARE SO TRUSTING. 1. Drive out all unbelief. If we have such a God to trust to, let us trust with all our might. 2. Let us seek the Holy Spirit's help in this matter. The Author of our faith must be the Finisher of it also. 3. Let us try to bring others to trust where we have trusted. 4. We must prove our faith by our works. (*Ibid.*) *Unregenerate human nature bad all through* :—That is a very silly thing which people say of men when they die. "Oh, he was rather loose in his morals, but he was a good-hearted man at bottom." It reminds me of Rowland Hill's saying, "Yes, but when you go to market to buy apples, and you see a number of rotten ones at the top, if the market-woman says, 'Oh, never mind, it is only the rotten apples at the top, they are very good at bottom,' you will say to her, 'My good soul, I will be bound to say the best are on the top, and they will not improve as you go down, for generally they will get far worse.'" And so if a man is bad on the surface, I cannot tell how much worse he may be down below. It is said there was a man who used to swear and drink, who, nevertheless, applied for membership with Mr. Hill, and gave this reason for it, that though he did drink occasionally and frequently swear, yet he was good at bottom. Mr. Hill said, "Then you think I am going grovelling down through the dirty foul filth of your life to get the little good that is somewhere at the bottom of you! Why, sir, it will not pay for the risk of digging out, and I am not going to do it." (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 11. **The Syrian language.**—*The Syrian language, i.e.* Aramaic, spoken between Palestine and the Euphrates, the language of international intercourse and commerce in those days. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Vers. 13–21. **Hear ye the words of the great king.**—*The bland insinuations of the enemies of God's people* :—When Satan would tempt men from trusting in God and cleaving to Him, he doth it by insinuating that in yielding to him they may better their condition; but it is a false suggestion, and grossly absurd, and therefore to be rejected with the utmost abhorrence. When the world and the flesh say to us, Make an agreement with us, and come out to us, submit to our dominion and come into our interests, and you shall eat every one of his own vine, they do but deceive us, promising liberty when they would lead us into the basest captivity and slavery. One might as good take Rabshakeh's word as theirs for kind usage and fair quarter; therefore, when they speak fair, believe them not. Let them say what they will, there is no land like the land of promise, the holy land. (*M. Henry.*)

Ver. 19. **Where are the gods** ?—*Hamath*, at the north border of the Holy Land, a large town on the Orontes, depopulated by the Assyrian in 720. *Arpad* = Aradus, a town on the coast, now a heap of ruins. *Sepharvaim*, or Sipar, a town to the north of Babylon, built on both sides of the Euphrates. (*B. Blake, B.D.*) *Inquiry for gods* :—These inquiries may, by a slight accommodation, be used as showing some characteristics of false gods, and showing, by implication, the glory and worship which are due to the one living Lord. Men have a distinct right to

inquire for their gods. Almighty God Himself does not shrink from this test of personality and nearness. He will be inquired of. He has proclaimed Himself accessible. "Come now, let us reason together." God is within reach of the heart of man; and religion, as well as bringing with it a Divine fear, brings with it also a Divine companionship. Men cannot live on mere sublimity. Man cannot get hold of infinitude. He must have something that he can lay the hands of his heart upon. God must give miniatures of Himself, which little children even can put away in the hiding-places of their love as their chief jewels. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *What is a man's god?*—A man's god is whatever is the supreme object of his admiration and trust. It may be beauty, it may be strength, it may be money, it may be fame, it may be self-righteousness, it may be self-confidence. Now there are times in life when a man instinctively or by force inquires for his god; and he who cannot, in such critical hours, find his god, has made the profoundest and saddest spiritual mistake in the bestowment of his affections and the gift of his trust. There are times when you are dissatisfied with yourself; when you feel your utter nothingness. Take a season of utter prostration, when the strong man is withered. At such a time we look out for something greater than ourselves. Is there no one who can meet us in this extremity of feebleness,—who can come down to us, not in the thunder of His great power, but in the condescension of His almightiness? Look at a time of commercial panic, business distress, when no man knows whom to trust. Man cannot be satisfied then without the supernatural; he may even drift into superstition. Atheists pray when they are in extreme pain or peril. There are times when all men either come quietly, with reverence and tenderness, to seek God who has withdrawn for a moment, or when they are startled, are frightened into momentary devotion. (*Ibid.*) *Man-made gods*:—1. Some people have made money their god, and there is not a more helpless god in all the temples of idolatry. He will never come to you in the crisis of your life. He will make little compromises with you, help you over divers stiles, solve certain little problems for you. But when your soul is in agony, when your life has wrought itself down to the one last spasm, he will be a dumb god. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. If you could take a five-pound note with you across the grave into yonder invisible mysterious world, nobody would know what it was. You would have to explain it, and nobody would believe you. You might hold it up, and show the watermark, and lecture upon it, and turn it round and round, and nobody could change it. 2. There is another god that some men are making. Its name is Luck! Some men say, "Things will not turn out so badly after all. I have always been able to get upon the sunny side of the road, and something will occur to get me upon that side again. I have trusted the chapter of accidents. My chances have always turned out right, and they will turn out right again." There never was so mocking an idol as luck. The young man who throws in a game of that kind and is lucky, will have another game to play. He has another competitor who will force him, and say, "Now you must have the dice out again." The name of that last competitor is Death, and he will play you. The young man says, "I do not want to play." Death grasps him by the throat, and says, "You shall play!" Now he gets hold of his dice-box, and Death always wins. 3. Some men's god is a well-favoured countenance. They trust to their shape, figure, bearing, expression. They say, "My face is an introduction, a certificate, a guarantee: wherever I go a space is cleared for me." A very superficial god! I can imagine such persons brought into circumstances which will try their god severely. Yonder is a man lofty in stature, portly in bearing, commanding in all the attributes of external person. He says that he feels a pain piercing him. He is taken home, and betakes himself to his bed. His physician comes to his room and says, "This is a case of small-pox." That god of his will be dug in the face till the man's own mother will not know him, and the sister who loved him best will pray to escape from his presence. God can blotch your skin! God can send poison into your blood! And you, who sneered at ungainly virtue, at unfavoured honesty, may be a corrupt, worm-eaten, pestilent thing in the dirt! What, then, if any man should say to you, Where is thy God? (*Ibid.*) *The revelation of the true God in times of human need*:—This part of the subject is not free from difficulty. Many a man has felt the most intense pain on observing what he supposed was God's absence from the scene of human affairs. This difficulty must be grappled with if we would be honest to all sides of our great subject. In reply to this difficulty I suggest three things. 1. As a mere matter of fact, attested by a thousand histories known in our own

experience, God has appeared in vindication of His name and honour. 2. As a first principle in sound theology, it must be admitted that God Himself is the only true judge as to the best manner and time of interposition. By so much as He is God this point at least must be conceded. Let us be fair to the Almighty, as we would be fair to man. Stephen was taken by the mob, dragged out and stoned. "Where was his God then?" was once the mocking inquiry of a well-known free-thinker. Go to Stephen himself for an answer; and when he, outraged and dishonoured, said with his dying breath, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,"—to have wrought in the human soul, under circumstances so tragic and terrible, a desire like that, was to do more for Stephen than if he had been lifted up by myriads of angels out of the hands of his murderers and set in the sun! Do not let us forget God's spiritual gifts to us. Though the stones were falling upon him and he was in the last agonies, he said in a whisper, the sound of which shall survive the voices of all thunders and floods, "I see heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." It is only in crises, in extremities such as these, that the highest reach of faith is realised, and that faith itself becomes victory. 3. Then the very absence of God, being dictated by wisdom and controlled by love, must be intended to have a happy effect upon human faith. When God is absent, what if His absence is intended to excite inquiry in our hearts? It is in having to grope for God we learn lessons of our own blindness and weakness and spiritual incapacity. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VER. 1. **Hezekiah . . . rent his clothes . . . and went into the house of the Lord.**—*The distress of Hezekiah*:—Hezekiah was probably weak in body, and therefore had lost true courage of soul. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Peril should drive the soul to God*:—The best way to baffle the malicious designs of our enemies against us is to be driven by them to God and to our duty, and so to fetch meat out of the eater. Rabshakeh intended to frighten Hezekiah from the Lord, but it proves that he frightens him to the Lord. The wind, instead of forcing the traveller's coat from him, makes him wrap it closer about him. (*M. Henry.*)

Ver. 3. **This day is a day of trouble.**—*Hezekiah's day of trouble*:—Ahaz the father and immediate predecessor of Hezekiah on the throne of Judah, engaged himself, and virtually his successors, to pay tribute to the kings of Assyria. Such a state of vassalage Hezekiah no doubt rightly though hazardously declined to continue, and this is what is meant when it is said of him that "he rebelled against the king of Assyria and served him not" (2 Kings xviii. 7). Any such refusal on the part of Hezekiah to acknowledge the despotic king of Assyria as his lord-paramount we may be sure would not be allowed to pass unchallenged, and hence Sennacherib's invasion of the kingdom of Judah in order to compel submission to what the king of Judah objected to and declined to do. This is what constituted Hezekiah's day of trouble. (*W. Alnwick.*) *Days of trouble*:—1. Hezekiah but represents what has been the general experience of man, for there has probably never lived a man on the face of the earth whose lot it has not been to have some days of trouble and annoyance. 2. If we cannot entertain a reasonable hope of any such thing as immunity from trouble, we can, however, endeavour to live and act so that our troubles may not be more than they need to be. It cannot be doubted that many bring much trouble on themselves, and subject themselves to many heart-aches and heart burns, which they ought never to have known, and probably would not have experienced had a different course of conduct been pursued, a course, perhaps, pointed out to them by those gifted with greater wisdom, prudence, and foresight than they themselves were possessed of, but which by their obstinacy of will and unjustifiable determination to take their own way, they were led to reject. 3. We are not, of course, to think that because many and great troubles fall to the lot of a man, he has necessarily acted foolishly, acted in opposition to any law of God, either natural, religious, or spiritual. This was just the grievous mistake Job's friends fell into. 4. It is only in heaven that trouble will be a thing unknown, and where all tears will for ever be wiped away. 5. We cannot but see the importance of being well prepared for days of trouble before we are made

sensible of their presence with us. If we are wise enough to prepare ourselves for them their approach will be no surprise to us, and we shall be the better able to battle with them, and to turn that which is an evil in itself into a blessing, and so much help to us in our journey heavenward. 6. There can be no doubt that troubles are often sent by a wise and gracious providence for this very purpose. 7. It now only remains for me to make a few further remarks on how to deal with days of trouble when from being matters of prospect or future contingents, they have become translated into actual and stern facts. In dealing with such days we shall find much instruction and guidance afforded us by the example of Hezekiah in dealing with his day of trouble. As soon as Hezekiah became acquainted with the invasion of Sennacherib, he went into the house of the Lord, the sure resort of God's people in the time of distress, there in prayer to lay both his trouble and its cause before God, and at the same time he sent Eliakim and Shebna unto the prophet Isaiah to desire that man of God to lift up his prayer in behalf of the remnant that was left. We are informed what was the blessed result of this union of prayer on the part of the king and the prophet. The day of trouble was removed, and the sun, which one day was shrouded in darkness, the next, shone forth bright and clear, every cloud being swept from the sky. The course taken by the king of Judah in his day of trouble and distress must commend itself to all who are found in similar circumstances by its marvellous success. It is a fact, in spite of the sneering scepticism of some people, that prayer is a really great power, and that as a means for the attainment of ends consistent with and approved by infinite wisdom and goodness, it will succeed when other means, such as men in their ignorance sometimes elect to employ as the best and fittest, utterly fail to reach the end aimed at. (*Ibid.*) *Hours when prophets have influence* :—In the midst of his distress Hezekiah sent "unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz." So far Hezekiah was right. He might have gone himself directly by an act of faith to the living God, but he had regard to the constitution of Israel, and he availed himself of the ordinances and institutes appointed of Heaven. Hezekiah made through Eliakim a pathetic speech to Isaiah—"This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy." There are hours when prophets come to the enjoyment of their fullest influence. Isaiah had been despised and derided, but now his hour has come, and he stands up as the one hope of Judah. The question was, What can you, Isaiah, do to extract Israel from all the peril which now presses upon the people of God? In the sixth verse we see how nobly the attitude of Isaiah contrasts with the attitude of Hezekiah. Instead of the word of inspiration proceeding from the king it issued from the prophet. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A dangerous crisis* :—"The children are come to the birth," &c. Obviously a proverbial expression for a crisis which becomes dangerous through lack of strength to meet it (lxvi. 9; Hos. xiii. 13). (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left.**—*Efficacious prayer* :—I. THE PERSON WHO WAS TO ENGAGE IN THE WORK OF INTERCESSION was one of great eminence in the Church and commonwealth, a great and good man, a prophet of the Lord, and one who was indulged with peculiar nearness to Him. Persons of eminent piety will not be contented with ordinary applications to the throne of grace; they will seek till they find, and wrestle till they prevail. This was a day of trouble, as Hezekiah calls it; and, therefore, it ought to be a day of prayer. Intercession is the duty of all saints. But herein ministers should take the lead. They are the Church's watchmen, and God's remembrancers. Zedekiah, who at one time cast Jeremiah the prophet into a dungeon, at another time desired an interest in his supplications, and sent messengers to him, saying, "Pray now unto the Lord our God for us." And God often spares the wicked for the sake of the righteous, and in answer to their requests, even as the intercession of Abraham was accepted for the inhabitants of Sodom. II. THOSE FOR WHOM THE PROPHET WAS REQUESTED TO PRAY were "the remnant that was left"; a certain number known unto God, and who remained after the rest were scattered or destroyed. This should teach us, that though in our prayers we should be forgetful of none, yet we are to be particularly mindful of our fellow-Christians, especially when in a state of adversity. It becomes us also to be attentive to public and national calamities, as well as to those which are personal and private, and to spread them before the Lord in prayer and supplication. III. There is something observable as to THE MANNER IN WHICH THE PROPHET'S INTERCESSION IS REQUESTED. "Lift up thy prayer." This expressive form of speech may teach us to remember—

1. That the glorious object of prayer is infinitely exalted. 2. The low and mean condition of the worshipper. 3. The secrecy of prayer, according to our Lord's direction, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet," &c. Lifting up a prayer may denote the same thing as David expresses by the lifting up of the soul to God, in mental and silent ejaculation. 4. The importunity and ardour of prayer. In lifting up our prayer to God, our affections should rise high, though our voice may be low and feeble. 5. The spirituality and heavenly-mindedness of the person engaged. 6. Boldness and confidence, accompanied with the hope of being heard and answered. 7. The proper end of prayer, which is not to draw the Divine Being near to us, but ourselves to Him. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*)

Ver. 10. **Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee.**—*A piece of satanic advice*:—I. LET US WEIGH THIS PIECE OF SATANIC ADVICE. It is a very dangerous temptation for three reasons. 1. Because it appeals to the natural pride of the heart. There is a universal instinct which makes a man abhor the idea of being deceived. There is something in the very idea which rouses all the pride that lies latent in every heart. 2. There is no disguising the fact that if God did deceive us we are in a hopeless plight, and therefore there is force in the temptation. 3. The methods of God's government being beyond our comprehension, sometimes appear to incline towards the tempter's suggestion,—from appearances one might say, "God is going to leave us in the lurch." II. LET US TURN ROUND AND TEAR THE ADVICE UP. 1. We may tear it up because it comes too late. If God be a deceiver we are already so thoroughly deceived, and have been so for years, that it is rather late in the day to come and advise us not to be. 2. We may tear it up, because if God deceive us we may be quite certain that there is nobody else that would not. From all we know of our God, His holiness, His righteousness, and His faithfulness, if He can deceive us, then are we quite certain that there are none to be trusted. 3. There is not one atom of evidence to support the libel. Search the world through, and see if you can find a man who will deliberately say, "I have tried God, I have trusted Him, and He has deceived me." 4. There is overwhelming evidence to refute it. Never yet did man trust his God and be put to shame. Heaven and earth and hell declare that Jehovah never hath deceived and never can deceive. (*A. G. Brown.*) *Sennacherib versus Jehovah*:—Never before in his experience had Sennacherib heard of a God who could resist his progress; he believed in the almighty power of Asshur. (*B. Blake, B.D.*)

Vers. 14–38. **And Hezekiah received the letter . . . and read it . . . and spread it before the Lord.**—*Hezekiah's prayer and deliverance*:—In the struggles, defeats, and final triumph of the ancient people of God in their conflicts with the surrounding nations, we have a key to the purposes of God in respect to the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world; a key to the interpretation of the principles and powers underlying the conflict between the people of God and the unbelievers of this world. God's hand is in this earth's history; His eye is upon all men and His ear open to their counsels; at the proper time and in the proper place He will frustrate all the combinations of evil and bring to pass all His purposes of righteousness. It is not by might nor by power that believers triumph over their spiritual enemies or win their victories, but by the interposition of God's almighty arm. The preceding chapter is so closely connected with that from which our present study is taken, that the two must be read together. Jerusalem was under siege, or at least was threatened with siege and capture by the Assyrian king. In spite of all Hezekiah's efforts to buy a peace for himself and his kingdom, the greedy, haughty, and most powerful king was determined to be satisfied with nothing short of entire and full possession of Jerusalem itself. (For further historical setting let the reader consult 2 Kings xviii. 13—xix.; 2 Chron. xxxii. 1-21.) The first peremptory message, with the proud and blasphemous boasts of Sennacherib, threw Hezekiah into great distress of mind and profound dismay. He appealed to the prophet Isaiah, who encouraged him to keep silence and trust in God (vers. 1–7). A sudden rumour of an army marching in his rear caused a diversion of the Assyrian's purpose, but meantime he sent another haughty message to Hezekiah, warning him that he was powerless to resist, and intimating his return presently to capture the city This was a written message (ver. 14), and it again disturbed Hezekiah, but apparently his faith in God was not shaken, and so he resorted again to the temple and spread the whole matter out before the Lord and sought

help and deliverance. I. THE PRAYER OF HEZEKIAH. Hezekiah was a righteous, though not a perfect man. He was habituated to prayer. 1. The place and attitude of prayer. "Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord." This was the proper standing-ground on which to make petitions. God had promised to meet His people there, and hear and answer their prayers (2 Chron. vii. 14, 15). We have not now any particular place in which to pray, but we have a Name which to plead—the name of Jesus, and "whatsoever we ask in His name," other conditions being also fulfilled, "shall be done unto us." Jesus is the true "meeting-place" between God and His people; He is the true ground on which prayer is to be made. By Him we have access to God (Eph. ii. 14). Then Hezekiah did another thing. He took the haughty and insolent letter of Rabshakeh and "spread it before the Lord." So should we take God into our confidence, and "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make our request known unto God" (Phil. iv. 6). We too often plan our own deliverance or our own work and then ask God to ratify it, whereas the first thing to do is to spread the matter at once fully before God, reverently submitting to His plan and will, seeking in His wisdom the right thing to do. 2. The address. Here was a reverent remembrance of His majesty and a silent appeal to His power, in which also Hezekiah renewed his own confession of faith: "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel." Israel was in trouble, and God was Israel's God, not a mere titular deity, but the great God of hosts. This is a familiar designation of God and Jehovah, and refers to His universal sovereignty and power. "That dwellest between the cherubim." This is a reference to the fact that God had been pleased to make His dwelling-place on the mercy-seat between those mysterious figures called the cherubim, from which place He was always graciously inclined towards His people. If the cherubim symbolise the incarnation (of which I, at least, have no doubt), then the reference to God's position between them, or, as we would now say, "God in Christ," is very significant. David made a similar appeal to God on behalf of Israel: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel; Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth. Stir up Thy strength and come and save us" (Psa. lxxx. 1, 2). "Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth." The views of Sennacherib were that each nation and kingdom had their own gods (xxxvi. 18–20), but Hezekiah ascribes to God not only aloneness in His being, but oneness, and universal sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the earth. He therefore could interfere in the plans of the Assyrian king for the purpose of frustrating them, as well as come to the defence of His own peculiar people; besides, there was a refutation and repudiation of the boasted idol gods who had been compared to Him. "Thou hast made heaven and earth." It is a favourite thought of Isaiah and the old prophets, and indeed all the Jews who were instructed in the knowledge of God, to couple His redemptive with His creative power. Thus did Hezekiah throw himself on all the great attributes of God before he began his petition. 3. The supplication. "Incline Thine ear and hear, open Thine eyes and see." Shall all the doings of this vain and proud braggart go past without Thine observation? Shall all his scandalous words in which he has openly derogated Thee pass by Thine hearing? True prayer has always reference to the glory of God, however much our own personal desires and needs may be involved in the things asked for. "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee" (ver. 10). "Lord, refute and roll back that scandalous speech and reproach." 4. Confession. Hezekiah was not unmindful of the difficulties that opposed themselves to him, of the dangers that confronted him, nor of the truth of the statements of the letter concerning the power of Sennacherib. "Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire." For two centuries they had had a steady career of conquest. There was no denying this; and many of the countries and kingdoms that had succumbed to their power were much stronger than that of Hezekiah at this time. There was therefore some show of truth in what they said (2 Kings xv. 19, 20, 29, xvi. 9, xvii. 5, 6; Isa. xx. 1). Faith does not ignore difficulties nor close its eyes to precedents in which the enemy has triumphed, but then it is bold in the belief that God is able; and that what may seem to be failure is due to other causes than the lack of power or covenant faithfulness on the part of God. 5. The faith in which the prayer was made. Hezekiah having admitted the prowess of the great enemy, proceeds to say to the Lord that the triumph of Sennacherib over other nations and their gods proves nothing in this case, from the fact that the gods of the nations were

no gods at all, but mere idols of wood and stone, the work of men's hands. Hezekiah in thus declaring his faith in God above all idols, seems also to call on God to make this truth apparent to the Assyrians. Here his jealousy for God momentarily rises above his anxiety for Jerusalem. 6. The petition. "Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand." This is the simple, brief, and comprehensive petition. Just save us. We do not dictate the means, we do not dictate the nature of the salvation. Sometimes the most effective prayers are the shortest. "God be merciful to me, a sinner," was a very brief prayer. So was "Lord save me," but both were heard and answered; so was Hezekiah's. 7. The argument. Hezekiah's argument is all gathered up into this consummation, "that the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art Jehovah, even Thou only." True believers long always that others may know their God. It is right for us to desire that our own may know God, and even our friends, but it is the part of the true Christian spirit to desire that even our enemies might know God, to long to see even all the nations of the earth brought to a saving knowledge of the truth. This was a true missionary prayer of Hezekiah. Sometimes the knowledge of God can only be spread by the overthrow of some great political power, or the removing of some gigantic enemy, such as Assyria and Sennacherib. It proved to be so in this case. II. THE DELIVERANCE. After his prayer (we do not know how long after) Isaiah, who seems to have been supernaturally informed of the prayer, and in like manner put in possession of Jehovah's reply, "sent word to Hezekiah," that inasmuch as he had submitted the matter concerning Sennacherib to God for help and deliverance, his request would be heard and answered. The following verses give an account of the answer. 1. The promise. The first part of this promise is to the effect that the "virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee" (vers. 22, 23). This seems to be not only an answer to Rabshakeh for his vain and blasphemous boasting, but also an assurance to Hezekiah. The daughter of Zion, like a virgin maid, was in herself weak and helpless; nevertheless she held all the threatening of the Assyrian in scorn and contempt, and would shake her head in derision at him, either in defiance of his onset or following him with mockery in his retreat from the city. Then follows a message to the Assyrian direct, in which God rebukes him for his boastful blasphemies, and reminds him of how in the ages past God has overthrown and destroyed the nations which had presumed to oppose themselves to Jehovah. Then he is told that God's eye has been upon him, and that now Jehovah was about to "put a hook in his nose" and lead him away out of the country in contempt, not even giving him the glory of a battle. Then follows another promise to the remnant of Judah that they should again "take root downward and bear fruit upward" (vers. 24–32). Then comes again God's "Therefore," concerning the Assyrian. (1) "He shall not come into the city," not even near enough to shoot the first preliminary arrow at it, much less near enough to use shields, or even raise an embankment against it for the purpose of a siege. Sennacherib's army was not then under the walls, but only gathering in the distance, when the "letter" came to Hezekiah. God now assures the king that it shall not approach the city. He should be delivered, and that without even a siege. (2) "I will defend this city to save it for Mine own sake." This of course meant that, without even the secondary help of man, He would in a supernatural way defend it, and that for His own sake. Rabshakeh had defied God and put contempt upon His name, while boasting his own prowess, or that of his king. God would vindicate His name and save His city by such a demonstration of supernatural power, without the immediate agency of man, as would leave no doubt in the mind of the Assyrian as to the fact that the Lord was God indeed. Now and again God has done such things just to clear up the testimony and leave men no excuse for their opposition on the ground of ignorance. He did it with Pharaoh, who challenged His power. 2. The fulfilment. "Then the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred and four score and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses." This was an awful visitation. All the more so that it was done in the night and with perfect silence (2 Kings xix. 35). Who can withstand His judgments? Who is strong enough to fight against God? Let the wicked wonder before they perish at the rebuke of His countenance and the breath of His mouth. 3. Sennacherib's humiliation. It must have been an awful humiliation for this proud king to take his march over the same route by which he had approached

Jerusalem, not laden with the spoil of the captured city, leading thousands of the chief men and princes, and King Hezekiah himself in his triumphal captive train, but with his shattered army to be the gazing stock of the countries he had subdued, and a by-word among his own people. We must fancy that he entered Nineveh with muffled drums, or no drums at all, with trailing or furled banners. When God does rise up to humble the proud, He does it thoroughly. A further humiliation awaited him. He went after up into the house of his idol to worship, not immediately, for he appears to have lived some twenty years after this defeat. But, at any rate, instead of his god defending him, much less giving him assurance of further victories, his own sons, who should have stood by and comforted their father, conspired together and slew him. So ended the career of this proud boaster, and so began the decline of this great Assyrian power. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) *Hezekiah's prayer and deliverance:*—It is said of Hezekiah that "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel." Let us with reference to this side of his character notice some lessons suggested by this story of his trouble and his deliverance. I. FAITH DISCOVERS GOD. The king of Judah needed such discernment to be sure that God was on his side. He must have been surprised when the Assyrian commissioner said to him, "Do not believe that Jehovah will take your part; this is my master's message to you: 'The Lord said to me, Go up against this land to destroy it.'" That was not the first time nor the last when bad men have claimed Divine authority. II. FAITH ASKS GOD FOR DELIVERANCE. The army of Judah understood very well that they were no match for the Assyrians: they were far weaker in numbers and were demoralised by a long experience of defeat and servitude. Sennacherib had taken pains to increase this impression. When this letter reached Hezekiah, he "went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord." That was his privilege—that is the right of every one who believes; it is our prerogative as God's children. He offers us help in every extremity, only requiring that we feel our need. III. FAITH INSPIRES FAITH. Hezekiah "trusted in the Lord," but not always. Like most men he found it easier to believe when he could see the way. When the Assyrian army was moving toward Jerusalem, in the early part of his reign, he was frightened: he forgot his God and so forgot himself, even sending to the invader this humiliating message: "I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear" (2 Kings xviii. 14). And his unbelief spread. The people, who had little enough of spirit at the best, now, following their leader, gave up in despair. But there came to the king in his distress an inspiration—a friend had been raised up for his deliverance. It was the prophet Isaiah; a man who knew how to trust in the Lord at all times; when the sky was darkest he could see the stars beyond. When, after Samaria fell, leading men proposed an alliance with the Egyptian king, "No," he said, "woe to them that go down to Egypt for help." "As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also He will deliver it." That faith inspired Hezekiah, giving him a reinforcement of courage which he very soon needed. He rallied and organised his forces for defence, and then went personally among the people, with the cheering exhortation, "Be strong and courageous," &c. His faith inspired faith in them. IV. FAITH OVERCOMES (vers. 33–36). What delivered Hezekiah? Not his generalship; not his army; it was "the angel of the Lord." (*T. T. Holmes.*) *Sennacherib's letter:*—It is bad to talk proudly and profanely, but it is worse to write so, for that argues more deliberation and design; and what is written spreads farther, and lasts longer, and doth the more mischief. Atheism and irreligion written will certainly be reckoned for another day. (*M. Henry.*) *Hezekiah's prayer:*—Professor Cheyne refers to a striking parallel in the Egyptian version of Sennacherib's overthrow. "On this the monarch (Sethos) greatly distressed, entered into the inner sanctuary, and before the image of the god (Ptah) bewailed the fate which impended over him. As he wept he fell asleep and dreamed that the god came and stood by his side, bidding him be of good cheer, and go boldly forth to meet the Arabian (Assyrian) host, which would do him no hurt, as he himself would send those who should help him." (*Herodotus.*) *Prayer a way of escape:*—I know an ancient castle on a high rock, which used to be garrisoned by soldiers. From inside the castle a long, winding passage, cut out of the solid rock, and called Mortimer's Hole, leads right away under the town, and opens up at a great distance. It was the way of escape for the garrison in a case of extremity. Prayer is such a door of deliverance, and no man can shut it. (*J. E. Page.*)

Prayer for help answered:—"When," Sir Josiah Mason once said, "I have done everything I can and see no clear way, I say to myself, God help me. I have brought out all my judgment, my brain can do no more, so may it please Thee to give me a push." "And," he added, "I get the push, for as sure as I ask for help, help comes." (*Sunday School Chronicle.*)

Ver. 23. **Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed?**—*Isaiah's saving idea of God*:—Isaiah in his day saved Jerusalem by teaching the people a better idea of their God. For forty years he had been witnessing to a truer thought of God, and at last the crisis and the triumph of his religious statesmanship came. Jerusalem would have surrendered to Assyria had not Isaiah at last brought king and people, in their despair, to the faith in God to which for forty years he had borne witness. At an hour when the Assyrian was making his rapid march towards the city, two props of the people's confidence had entirely given way: their reliance upon Egypt, and their confidence in their religion. Isaiah had told them over and over again that these supports were rotten, and would give way when the crash came. And they did when at last came the scourge of the nations which had swept other cities before it reached Jerusalem. For a moment the luridness of the popular despair was lit up by a wild light of passion and revelry: "Let us eat and drink," they said, "for to-morrow we shall die." Then the hour for the triumph of the prophet's lifelong truth was come. He led a sobered people and a humbled king to the Holy One of Israel. (*Newman Smyth, D.D.*) *The Divine holiness and Fatherhood:*—The historic truth is that wherever a better idea of God prevails men are delivered. The deep, permanent, at all times greatly needed lesson is, that the prophet's truer teaching of God is for the salvation of a city. The subject for us to inquire concerning is, whether we are being saved by any truer, stronger ideas of our God? Are we saving our society, our neighbourhood, our city, our land by nobler knowledge of God? 1. Do you hope to work out the redemption of men by education? It is a means, a sharp instrument for good or evil, but Rabshakeh could blaspheme in two languages. We have to face the question: "What leaven is to keep the school itself from moral corruption?" 2. But much, it is said, may be accomplished through sanitary and political science. Undoubtedly. Even Ahaz did a good thing when he looked after the water supply of Jerusalem in fear of a siege, although he would not hear a word that Isaiah was saying to him by the upper pool in the fuller's field. But if Isaiah had not been the heart and the soul of the city in its critical hour, all the work that the kings had done in repairing the walls and looking after the watercourses, would never have kept the Assyrian out. Sooner or later we shall have to go down to the God on whom we depend, if we are to build anything of permanent worth. 3. What, then, is our better saving thought of God? (1) We are coming to know better the Divine Fatherhood of men. (2) Yet, this first truth of the Divine Fatherhood of men, and His special Fatherhood towards the son of His trust and love, does not exhaust our redeeming knowledge of God. Our text exalts the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah's vision of Him whose glory fills the whole earth was the vision of the Holy One. In the holiness of God the prophet saw the falsehoods of the court and the people burning as with everlasting fire. And when Jesus Christ in that sublime moment to which St. John has borne witness in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel, summed up His whole lifelong teaching in His last prayer for the disciples, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, Holy Father, O righteous Father. (3) There is one way in particular by which we, with all our worldliness, may be brought more fully into the saving power of these truths of God. It is through our increasing sense of God's omnipresence, of the Divine immanence, of Immanuel, God with us. (*Ibid.*) *God His people's defence:*—A magistrate in Hamburg once held up his finger and said to Mr. Oncken, the Baptist preacher: "Do you see that finger, sir? As long as I can hold up that finger I shall put you down." "I can see," said Mr. Oncken, "what you cannot see; I can see the mighty arm of God, and as long as that arm is held up for my defence, you will never be able to put me down." (*Christian Age.*)

Vers. 31, 32. **The remnant.**—*The root and fruit of Christianity:*—I. THE REMNANT THAT ARE SAID TO HAVE ESCAPED. Truly this is a description of the Lord's Church in every age. "Strait is the gate," &c. "Even so now also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." This remnant that is left

is in great distress. A peculiar characteristic of this very small remnant is that they have escaped. They are apart from the great bulk of professors. They have escaped from the reigning power of sin; from the sentence of the law; from self and self-confidence, and from all apprehension of the second death. II. Glance at THEIR BEING THE OFFSPRING OF A DISTINGUISHED TRIBE. Although Joseph had an exuberance of blessings pronounced upon him by his fond father, and he probably realised them all, both in a temporal and spiritual point of view; yet the true dignity rested upon the house of Judah. Mark here the Gospel sense of this declaration, that Judah, the little chosen few, the Lord's own living Church, have the sceptre among them—the sceptre of righteousness of their glorious Lord who sprang out of Judah, and is ruling and reigning among them. His presence is enjoyed, His love tokens are felt, the joys of His salvation are experienced amongst those that are a minority, the little flock that He has chosen and redeemed for Himself. III. THE ORIGIN OF THEIR LIFE. They have a root. What is a root? It is a concealed, hidden life. If you have no more religion than what is seen, it is not worth your possessing. The real Christian has a hidden life. It is an abiding and downward growing principle. Even in wintry seasons and trying times, there should be at least the fruits of humility and self-abasement and meekness and gentleness, the fruits of the mind of Christ. And this is taking root downwards. IV. THEIR TENDENCY UPWARD WITH FRUITFULNESS. The believer in Jesus has a life which is always tending upwards. If earth content you, your religion is not worth a straw. The fruits which this tribe bear upwards are diverse and profuse. "The fruits of the Spirit," are said to be "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, gentleness, faith; against such there is no law." They are outlaws—there is no law for them. "The fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ." Mark their upward tendency—"to the praise and glory of God." (*J. Irons.*) *The remnant*:—The sacred writers are frequent in speaking of a "remnant" as alone inheriting the promises. The word "remnant," so constantly used in Scripture, is the token of the identity of the Church, in the mind of her Divine Creator, before and after the coming of Christ. (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*) *God's remnant*:—We may learn—1. Not to entertain mean thoughts of our Lord, because there are but few sincere Christians. 2. To value the true religion and the professors of it. 3. God's zeal for His children in working such marvellous deliverances for them, though they are so few in number. 4. Let us own our dependence upon God, and regard Him as our only defence and salvation in time of trouble, seeking to Him, as Hezekiah did here, by devout prayers and supplications, and craving the assistance of His Church and ministry, as this king did of the prophet Isaiah, to obtain of Him an answer of peace and love. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *Rooting and fruiting*:—This is a promise for the encouragement of a downcast people. It is the seer's way of looking through the clouds and finding the sunshine. Judah had stood like a splendid tree, with roots deep and branches wide. The hurricane had struck it, and it was plucked up by the roots. The kings of Assyria had swept down on the people of God like a very besom of destruction. Their cry to God brought back the assurance that His hand was still on the kings of Assyria and that He had a large hope to offer Judah, the hope that the remnant should grow again, taking root downward and bearing fruit upward. It does not take a large start to come to large growth. Rooting for the sake of fruiting—it is a familiar scriptural thought. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which bringeth forth his fruit in his season." In the parable, the seed that grew so quickly withered away because it had no root. The fig-tree which bore no fruit was dried up from the very root. And so on, probably twenty times in Scripture, where rooting and fruiting are connected. Of course you observe the simple naturalness of it. That is what we are accustomed to everywhere else. That is what we are to expect in the spiritual life. Trees and plants take root downward and bear fruit upward. So do souls; each in its appropriate soil and each in its appropriate fruit, but by processes that are as natural in one case as in the other. You cannot explain the process in either case without God; you need Him at the start of it, and in the progress of it, and at the end of it. And you find Him working through the laws He has made. The spiritual life is not an exception to the rest of the round of life; it is the same natural life, has its laws as native to it as the natural laws are native to the rest of life. Then you observe how the rooting is unseen, underground, unthought of, and the fruiting is above ground, in evidence, out in the light. Here is a laying bare of the necessity of the inner life and the outer life as well. Neither is indifferent to the other,

You do not want roots for their own sake, and you cannot have fruit without them. If you are going to improve the quality of the fruit, you must often start in a better care of the root. In that fact lies one of the puzzles of history and of human life. It is not difficult to find when the fruit began to appear, but the root is always baffling. So it is difficult to find the influence of the fruit already borne on the fruit that is riper and richer. Take the sphere of education. It is not difficult to find when the first school that might fairly be called a public school appeared; but it is quite impossible to find who first originated the idea of which it is the fruit—the idea of the equality of the mental rights of men. It is quite certain that there was a time when that idea was not fruit-bearing, if it existed. And it is evident, too, that the fruit borne through the years of the schools has reacted on the root idea, enlarging it and making it better. We have better schools now because we have a better root idea out of which to grow them. And so we come to a word about the two parts of our personal lives—this unseen root-life we are living, and the seen fruit-life we are meant to live. There is always peril that one may be neglected in the care of the other. On the one hand there are many who are seeking to develop the inner life, as though for its own sake, seeking to gain new inner beauty and grace and assurance, without letting that inner life assert itself in outer seen life. On the other, there are some who are caring well for the outer life, doing much for the Master, active in every good work, but caring little for the inner life, the root-life, out of which must grow the seen life if it be a secure life. Both are to be commended for what they do; each is to be warned for what he does not do. The life that is hid with Christ in God is meant to be seen of men for the glory of Christ. There is to be, do you not see, a measure of concealment and a measure of publicity, a certain hiding of life and a certain revealing of life, a degree of secrecy and a degree of openness? The men whom you most admire, I suspect, are men who always seem to have a measure of reserve power, but they are not men who live behind barriers, whom you never approach with any sense of companionship. They have an inner life, a taking root downward, out of your sight, and you do not forget it in your dealing with them; but they have also an outer, assertive life, the fruit of that inner life. Carry it just a little farther in the personal life into the fundamentals of religion. Every man of us carries about with him a certain bundle of convictions, a certain set of creed-articles, which are his personal and inviolable property. They may be like or unlike anybody else's bundle. There are some of us whose possessions in this way are very small, and we tend to think that creeds and doctrines are not important; we go in for action, for conduct. We say that the world does not judge you by what you believe, but by what you do. And there is a measure of truth in it, of course. But are we so ignorant as not to know the power of a mighty conviction? Do we not realise the tremendous energy of a fruit-yielding root of belief? It is not enough, therefore, that we say we do this or that that is good. That is bearing fruit upward; but the power to bear fruit and the quality of the fruit, its power to feed and refresh the world, will be limited, be sure of it, by the amount of strength the roots of the life have gathered. They must go deep and far, or the branches will soon be stunted and starved. This same principle of root and fruit applies to the church of Christ. There have been times of a mistaken accent on either of the two phases of life. Sometimes the church has seemed to exist for its own sake, caring for itself, counting its task ended when it had done so, and careless of that true fruit-bearing which is meant to be its glory. Then there have been times when, in the joy of fruit-bearing, the inner strength of the church has been neglected. That is a strong accent on the root of the church, its creed, its inner life. On the other hand, who has not observed the weakness of the mere gathering together of people around no particular standard? That is one extreme. There are not a few churches which touch the other extreme. The preaching is faithful and truthful, the people are well indoctrinated in the faith, they hold the great truths of the gospel without wavering, but they make no successful onslaught on the world. And the same need and the same danger are not only in the pulpit, but also in the pew. I suppose there are few churches whose people are not called to constant care in maintaining the balance between the demands of their own church, which is root-work, and the demands of the kingdom at large, which is fruit-work. It appears markedly in the matter of benevolence. There are always a few to whom it is almost positive pain to see money going away from the church. Some resent all that goes to foreign missions; some all that goes out anywhere. They rejoice far more in a large gift for local

expenses than they do in a large gift for charity or missions. On the other hand, there are some who neglect the demands of the home church, chafe under calls for it, are attracted by the outlying thing. I have not described the rank and file of any church in these extremes, but I have stated the two broad lines of peril to which a church is subject. For each is a peril. One is a magnifying of the root and a stunting of the fruit; the other is a magnifying of the fruit and a neglect of the root. But you cannot express the essential fact of rooting and fruit-bearing in terms of money. It yields to no terms except that of life. Leaving the church as an organisation, let your mind turn again to yourself as a living Christian, meant to take root downward and bear fruit upward. The Word makes plain what the rooting soil of the Christian must be. "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may grow up into Him in all things." Of the early Christians it was said, "See how they love one another." The strength of the church in history has been the intimate fellowship that has bound its people together and made them one body. Its inner power has been in large part in its being rooted in love. But not in that alone. The Word again bids us be rooted and built up in Christ Himself. Therein lies real power, the sending of the life root down deeper and deeper into Him, until the nourishment of life comes from Him. We have seen numberless enterprises start in the name of religion, flourish as did the seed of the parable and presently wither away, their root not running down into feeding soil. And what has thus appeared in a large way appears in many a life in the small way. Men individually also are striving to bear fruit without rooting in Christ, without drawing the very life sap of their beings from Him. God keep His church true to its soil, rooting it in love, rooting it in Him who is the very life of God revealed to us men for our salvation. (*C. B. McAfee, D.D.*)

Ver. 33. **He shall not come into this city.**—*The momentous issues involved in Sennacherib's defeat*:—We do not, perhaps, realise the magnitude of the crisis, not alone in the life and fortunes of Isaiah, but in the history of the Jews, and, indeed, of the world at large. It is not too much to say that if Sennacherib had taken Jerusalem, in all human probability the Jews would have ceased to exist as a nation, and the world would not have been prepared for the coming of Christ. They had not yet reached a point in their training at which the national life and religion could have survived such a calamity as that which a century later overtook Jerusalem in the time of Jeremiah; and there is every reason to believe that had they been carried captives now, they would simply have been absorbed into heathenism, as the ten tribes doubtless were. (*Edward Grubb, M.A.*) *Jerusalem and Leyden*:—The siege of Jerusalem reminds us of the siege of Leyden in later days. William the Silent (as Hezekiah had done before him) put his sole trust for deliverance in God. On the last night of the siege, and when help from man seemed hopeless, God came to their aid, and with His ocean and tempest delivered Leyden, and struck such terror into their enemies, that when the morning dawned, the Spaniards had fled, panic-struck, during the darkness. Leyden was relieved, and every person within its walls repaired to the great church to return thanks to Almighty God. (*Sunday School Chronicle.*) *Deliverance*:—The history of God's people is one oft-repeated story of deliverance. Years ago, the Sultan of Turkey declared that every Christian missionary would be banished on a certain day. The Christians met in earnest prayer, and one said, "The great Sultan of the universe can change all this." He did. The Sultan of Turkey died on the very day he had named for the expulsion of the missionaries, and they were allowed to remain. (*J. S. Drummond.*)

Ver. 36. **Then the angel of the Lord went forth.**—*The destruction of Sennacherib's army*:—The narrative does not say here (but see xxx. 30, 31) what secondary means, if any, were used. But it does not exclude the use of secondary means. As Dean Plumptre remarks, a modern historian would dwell on the details of the pestilence. To Isaiah, who had learnt to see in the winds the messengers of God (Psa. civ. 4), it was nothing else than the "angel of the Lord." (*Expository Times.*) *A parallel in English history*:—In English history there is a striking parallel to the events of this period of Jewish history. Edward VI., under the guardianship of Cranmer, had established a pure form of religious worship in England. On his death, Queen Mary upset everything, and drove into retirement those who escaped the fires of Smithfield for their allegiance to the Protestant faith. With Elizabeth a new era dawned, and the religious life of the country

displayed itself in great enthusiasm, resulting in the overthrow of the Armada. The reign of Ahaz was like unto that of Mary; with the accession of Hezekiah begins a reign like unto that of Elizabeth, having in its course the magnificent defeat of Sennacherib's hosts by the arm of the Lord. (*B. Blake, B.D.*)

Ver. 38. **His sons smote him with the sword.**—*Sennacherib's ignominy*:—The sacred history would seem to imply that this disastrous end came at once; but here twenty years of ignominy count for nothing. "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind to powder." Sennacherib died in 681 B.C., some twelve years after Hezekiah. (*B. Blake, B.D.*) *Sennacherib's sons*:—The two parricides fled to the land of Ararat, therefore to Central Armenia; Armenian history derives the tribes of the Sassunians and Arzrunians from them. From the royal house of the latter, among whom the proper name Sennacherib was common, sprang Leo the Armenian, whom Genesius describes as of Assyrio-Armenian blood. If this is so, no fewer than ten Byzantine emperors may be regarded as descendants of Sennacherib. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Humiliation of Napoleon I.*:—Napoleon said that "God was always on the side of the biggest battalions," and God flung the lie back into his teeth. (*S. K. Hocking.*) *The end of worldly ambition*:—Take the greatest rulers that ever sat upon a throne. Alexander, who wept because there were no more nations left to conquer, at last set fire to a city and died in debauch. Hannibal died from poison administered by himself. Cæsar, having conquered three hundred cities, was stabbed by his best friends. (*G. S. Bowes.*)

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VERS. 1–8. **In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death.**—*Hezekiah's sickness: the historical framework*:—It cannot surprise us now to be carried back to the time when Jerusalem was still under the despotic sceptre of Assyria, since the purpose of the concluding piece (xxxvii. 36–38) was merely in anticipation to complete the picture of the last Assyrian troubles, by relating their termination as foretold by Isaiah (xxxi. 8). (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *The parallel passage* (2 Kings xx. 1–11) varies more from that before us than in the preceding chapter. So far as they are parallel, the narrative in Kings is more minute and circumstantial, and at the same time more exactly chronological in its arrangement. On the other hand, the Psalm is wholly wanting in that passage. All these circumstances favour the conclusion that the text before us is the first draft, and the other a repetition by the hand of the same writer. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Hezekiah's sickness and recovery*:—This sickness and recovery of Hezekiah from the gates of death, was an event of such national importance as made it properly find a place here, as well as in the historical books. For the throne of David, as far as we know, was without an heir at this moment; and Hezekiah's death might have been followed by some such interregnum, anarchy, and seizure of the crown by a soldier, as hastened the downfall of the kingdom of Ephraim. Such a failure in the succession, in times of national depression and disorganisation, would be pregnant with evil even in England now; and we must remember that in Judea then, as in all Eastern and patriarchal governments still, the personal character of the hereditary sovereign was of an importance to the people which it has to a great degree, though not utterly, lost in every country of Europe except Russia. Let us contrast the character and acts of Hezekiah with those of his immediate predecessor and successor, and we shall see of what moment it was that the interval by which his reign separated theirs should be prolonged fifteen years; and especially when the country needed a hand disciplined by experience and guided by faith to recover it from the moral and material disorganisation into which (as we know from Isaiah's discourses) it had fallen during the Assyrian supremacy. And thus this crisis in the personal life of Hezekiah—the fact cannot be denied, though here, as in so many like cases, our philosophy cannot trace out the connection of cause and effect—became the type and symbol of the like crisis in the life of the nation: it, too, was sick unto death, and was granted a new period of life by God after it was past the help of man. (*Sir E. Strachey, Bart.*) *Hezekiah's disease*:—When the prophet first came to him he addressed

him in words clearly indicating the gravity of the disease. "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order," &c. We cannot, therefore, think that it was an ordinary simple boil with which the king was affected. Nor have we any ground for supposing, as some have suggested, that the disease was bubo-plague, which does not occur as an isolated case, and we have no evidence to lead us to think that any epidemic of such a disease prevailed. But it might have been, and probably was, a carbuncle, which is often a most severe and painful thing, endangering and often terminating the life of the sufferer. For this a poultice of figs would be an appropriate local remedy, as in the present day are cataplasms of various kinds. But doubtless the recovery of the king was through Divine interposition, by which the danger to life was averted, and of which Isaiah's prescription was but a symbol. The answer to his prayer, accompanied by the promise that on the third day he should go up to the house of the Lord, is sufficient evidence that the cure of a disease by which he had been brought to death's door, was not brought about by natural means. (*Sir Risdon Bennett, M.D., LL.D.*) *What was Hezekiah's disease?*—My friend, Dr. Lauder Brunton, tells me that he has been led to view the disease as "tonsillitis," from the similarity of the symptoms described by Isaiah with those of some cases of quinsy (tonsillitis). "In many cases," says Dr. Brunton, "that I have seen, the pains in the bones have been so severe as to attract the attention of the patient, to the exclusion of all mention of sore throat. If Hezekiah suffered from tonsillitis, his comparison of a lion breaking his bones is a very apt one, and the swelling of the tonsils would also explain the alteration in his speech, which made him 'chatter like a crane or a swallow.' The dried figs would be almost the only poultice that could be applied to the boil in his fauces, and the rapid maturation of the inflamed boil in the throat affected by the poultice would explain the rapid recovery." (*Ibid.*) *Every disease is a little death:*—I have heard it said that every disease is a little death; therefore God sends us many little deaths to instruct our preparation for the great death. The oftener a man dies, the better he may know how to die well. (*T. Adams.*) *A sick man's glass:*—I. THE MESSAGE sent to Hezekiah while he was sick. 1. The time. 2. The person to whom it was sent. 3. The person by whom it was sent. 4. The message itself. "Set thine house in order." 5. The reason why the king is advised so to do. "Thou shalt die, and not live." II. THE BEHAVIOUR OF HEZEKIAH when he had heard the message. 1. He turned his face to the wall. 2. He prayed. 3. He wept sore. (*R. Hachet, D.D.*) *Hezekiah's sickness:*—1. These words present to our view a person (1) of the highest rank (2) in the prime of life (3) and the full tide of prosperity, seized with a mortal disease: a case which ought strongly to remind the securest of us all, how uncertain our condition is here on earth. 2. By the goodness of God, a prophet was sent to him, to admonish him of the preparation that his state required: and the same goodness hath provided that you shall all be frequently admonished of the same thing, by the ministers of His Word. 3. The admonition given him was the means of prolonging his days in peace and comfort: and those given you, if received in a right manner, may, both naturally and providentially, contribute to procure you longer and happier lives in this world; and will certainly lead you to a life of eternal happiness in the next. (*T. Secker, LL.D.*) *The duties of the sick:*—The text mentions the obligations of sick persons—I. RESPECTING THEIR FELLOW-CREATURES. "Set thine house in order." This direction may well be enlarged to comprehend—1. Due regulation of all affairs in which the sick are interested. (1) The principal point at which men should aim in settling their temporal affairs is justice; and one of the most evident branches of justice is paying debts. (2) Besides those who are commonly called creditors, there is another sort—I mean those to whom we have done injuries, and owe restitution. (3) But as we have all, more or less, need to ask pardon, another of our duties evidently is to grant it in our turn: when others have used us ill, not to "recompense" or wish them "evil for evil." The expedient to which, it is said, some have had recourse, of forgiving if they die, and being revenged if they live, is as foolish a contrivance to deceive themselves, and to mock God, as the human heart can frame. (4) The next thing, after providing for the payment of our debts, and which, like that, should be done in health, but much rather in sickness than not at all, is disposing of the remainder of our substance. The principal rule is, that we ought not to be governed in it by fanciful fondnesses, much less by blamable resentments. 2. Proper advice to all persons with whom the sick are connected. II. RESPECTING MORE IMMEDIATELY GOD AND THEIR OWN SOULS. "Then Heze-

kiah prayed unto the Lord." His prayer, indeed, if the whole of it be recorded in Scripture, was only that he might recover; a request which for the public good he had urgent reasons to make in the first place. And that being instantly granted, he had no need to apply further to God, in relation to his sickness, otherwise than by thanksgiving, which he did. But they who have more extensive wants at that time are both authorised and bound to enlarge in proportion the subject of their addresses to the throne of grace; and therefore I shall endeavour to comprehend under this head all the religious duties of the sick. 1. The first principle of all regard to God is faith. There are indeed very good persons who, in illnesses, are tempted to partial, or even total unbelief. And if any seeming reasons for it be suggested to their minds, they ought to inquire after, and oppose to them reasonable answers. 2. Self-examination. 3. Such repentance as our case requires. 4. The sick ought to be very constant in every other exercise of private piety. For as they are cut off from active life, they have more leisure for religious contemplation. And as they want all the improvement and comfort which they can have, so they will receive the most of both by frequent lifting up of their hearts to "the God of patience and consolation." (*Ibid.*) *Hezekiah's sickness and recovery:*—I. THIS SICKNESS WAS VERY GRIEVOUS, upon several accounts. 1. For the nature of the disease, which is supposed to have been pestilential. 2. The pain of his distemper was aggravated with the sentence which the prophet passed upon him in the name of God. The hope of recovery, which contributes very much to the cure of any distemper, was taken away from him. 3. Hezekiah's sickness and sentence of death were embittered with this consideration, that he was going to be cut off in the strength of his age. This shortening of life was always esteemed as one of the calamities of our mortal condition; especially in so high and happy a station as that of a king. David prayed against it, saying, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my age." 4. That which made Hezekiah more loth to leave the world at this time was, that he had no child to succeed him in his throne. II. HIS REQUEST he enforces with the following arguments. 1. He begs God to remember how he had walked before Him in truth and with a perfect heart. 2. Whereas other kings had been too apt to consult their ease and carnal interests in the practice of religion, Hezekiah had a true and thorough zeal for the glory of God in all that he did. III. He urged it with importunate cries and tears, WHICH PREVAILED WITH GOD TO HEAR HIM AND GRANT HIS REQUEST. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *Supreme attention to spiritual concerns* (with Luke x. 42):—Let us reflect—I. ON "THE ONE THING NEEDFUL," *i.e.*, living religion. II. ON THE CONSEQUENT DUTY OF "SETTING OUR HOUSE IN ORDER, knowing that we shall die, and not live." (*W. Graham.*) *Hezekiah's sincerity:*—This verse (ver. 3) is not an angry expostulation, nor an ostentatious self-praise, but an appeal to the only satisfactory evidence of his sincerity. (*J. A. Alexander.*) **Set thine house in order.**—*Human mortality:*—I. We have here set before us THE FACT OF OUR MORTALITY. "Thou shalt die, and not live." How apt we are to think of other people's death, but not of our own. We are ready to say, "O! it was no wonder that little, weak infant died—it was no wonder that worn-out, aged man or woman died—it was no wonder that sickly person died." And when we hear of sudden deaths, by some strange disease or accident, we have a secret feeling that the same thing is not likely to happen to ourselves. There was something peculiar in their condition or circumstances, which made them more open than ourselves to that awful visitation. Yet why all this foolish hiding of the truth? Until we are able boldly and peacefully to face this truth, there is no real comfort for us in this world. When our Almighty Father in heaven sends to us such a message as this, "Thou shalt die, and not live," it is not to vex and to distress us, but only to awaken in us those thoughts which are needful for us in our present state of being. II. HOW WE ARE TO "SET OUR HOUSE IN ORDER," so as to be able to meet with calmness both the actual coming of death and the thought of its coming. With the best of men, the near approach of that last dread hour is a time of deep solemnity. 1. The first point in this work is to see that our hope for eternity is placed upon a right foundation; and none other can be found but that which God Himself has laid for us to build on—namely, His own free mercies in His dear Son, Jesus Christ. 2. If we would "set our house" truly "in order," we must remember that there is a work to be wrought in us, as well as for us. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord!" (*J. W. Colenso, D.D.*) *Preparation for the end of time:*—I. THE INJUNCTION URGED. "Set thine house in

order." We refer—1. To temporal affairs. This is evident from the more literal translation: "Give charge concerning thine house." 2. To spiritual matters. II. THE REASON. "For thou shalt die, and not live." 1. Death is certain for all. 2. The time is uncertain; therefore, it is every one's duty to be prepared. 3. The time may be very near. 4. The best of men need special preparation. Hezekiah was not a bad man, but he had a special message. So God often sends a time of sickness as a special warning. How much better and happier will every man be if he has set his house in order! (*Homilist.*) *New Year's thoughts*:—The first Sunday in the new year is surely, with every minister of Christ who watcheth with the eye and love of a true shepherd over his flock, a time for—1. General rebuke. 2. Remonstrance. 3. Godly encouragement. I. THE AUTHORITY OF THE COMMISSION. It came directly from God at the mouth of His prophet; and whatever comes from God must be characterised by God's attributes, must bear the impress of His wisdom, must be pregnant with the purposes of His love. II. THE SUDDENNESS OF THE COMMISSION. How it must have startled the king on his bed! III. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE COMMISSION. "Set thine house in order"—this is the direction; "for thou shalt die, and not live"—this is the doom. Thou art the man upon whom the mark is set, this carries the reflections home. When shall I die? How shall I die? Shall I die a hard or a peaceful death? Shall I die as an impenitent and despairing sinner, or as a pardoned, a redeemed, a rejoicing saint? (*T. J. Judkin.*) *Preparation for death*:—Our being ready for death will make it come never the sooner, but much the easier; and those that are fit to die are most fit to live. (*M. Henry.*) *Contemplating the time of death*:—Perhaps the most awful moment of our lives is when we first feel in danger of death. All our past life then seems to be a cloud of words and shadows, altogether external to the realities of the soul. Not only childhood and youth, happiness and sorrow, eager hopes and disturbing fears, but even our communion with God, our faith in things unseen, our self-knowledge, and our repentance, seem alike to be but visions of the memory. All has become stern, hard, and appalling. It is as if it were the beginning of a new existence; as if we had passed under a colder sky, and into a world where every object has a sharpness of outline almost too severe for sight to bear. Let us see what we ought to do when God warns us. I. WE MUST ASK OURSELVES THIS QUESTION, Is there any one sin, great or small, of the flesh or of the spirit, that we willingly and knowingly commit? This is, in fact, the crisis of our whole spiritual life. By consent in one sin, a man is guilty of the whole principle of rebellion. A holy man is not a man who never sins, but who never sins willingly. A sinner is not a man who never does anything good, but who willingly does what he knows to be evil. The whole difference lies within the sphere and compass of the will. II. WE MUST NEXT SEARCH AND SEE WHETHER THERE IS ANYTHING IN WHICH OUR HEART IN ITS SECRET AFFECTIONS IS AT VARIANCE WITH THE MIND OF GOD; for if so, then so far our whole being is at variance with His. III. A third test by which to test ourselves is THE POSITIVE CAPACITY OF OUR SPIRITUAL BEING FOR THE BLISS OF HEAVEN. When St. Paul bids us to follow after "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," he surely meant something more than a negative quality. Doubtless he meant by "holiness" to express the active aspirations of a spiritual nature, thirsting for the presence of God. IV. There are TWO SHORT COUNSELS which it may be well to add. 1. That we strive always to live so as to be akin to the state of just men made perfect. 2. That we often rehearse in life the last preparation we should make in death. (*H. E. Manning, D.D.*) *Hezekiah warned*:—1. He was warned. 2. He was religiously warned. Isaiah was charged with the intelligence. 3. He was considerately warned. He was not to die on the morrow, he was to have time to set his house in order. Sometimes we feel as if we would rather not have that time, and yet there is a merciful dispensation in the arrangement which gives a man an opportunity of calmly approaching the end. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) "*Set thine house in order*":—What does this injunction signify? I. THAT WE ARE TO GIVE ACCOUNT OF OUR STEWARDSHIP. II. THAT WE ARE TO BE DILIGENT IN OUR DAILY WORK. III. WE MUST LEARN TO LEAVE OUR POSSESSIONS, AND HOLD OURSELVES READY TO DEPART. (*C. Schwartz.*) *The habitual thought of death not painful*:—The time will of necessity come when to every man that lives these words will be spoken. God Himself will speak them in the manifest dealings of His providence, making this known to us in some way which our own hearts will instinctively interpret. Why should we be afraid to think of

death? 1. Do you reply that there is in man a natural love of life? No doubt there is. But what, then, is that true life which lies beyond, and to which the act of departure, which we call death, is but the entrance? 2. Or, do you say that we are naturally repelled from mortality, and that we shrink from thinking of the lifeless and decaying flesh? I admit it, and there is a necessary and wholesome lesson in the bitterness of it, for how should we know what sin was without some little conception of what death was? But I plead that this is but for a time, till the body shall rise again in glory. The horror is to those who live and watch the dead. 3. Or, do you say that you fear death because it will stop for ever all the schemes and activities of life? Do you think that the state into which we shall enter will be a passive calm? Every hint and word in Scripture appears to me to point to something very different. 4. Or, do you say that you shrink from the idea of never seeing again the blue skies and the sweet flowers, and losing all the sights and sounds that make this world beautiful? Again, I think that you are wrong. Certainly all the imagery of the Bible suggests a different conclusion. 5. Or, do you say that you dread death because you cannot bear to think of parting from those you love, and losing that sweet intercourse, and that happy interchange of mutual affection, which spring from love? Well, all separation is painful; but in itself, and of necessity, this separation need only be for a time—a brief parting, with an eternal reunion beyond it, when, free from the little hindrances that mar a perfect love on earth, we shall renew a pure affection, consecrated for ever by the seen presence of God. 6. Do you say that you dread to think of death because you are not certain of your state before God? Ah! here we reach the deepest secret of all, the true source of the uneasiness with which men think of their mortality. "The sting of death is sin," &c. The Eternal Father is ready to forgive; the Eternal Son sufficient to atone; the Eternal Spirit almighty to convert and sanctify; all ready; nay, all pleading, inviting, expostulating, entreating. 7. Do you say that you dread to think of death because the thought saddens and darkens life? Surely this is no longer true, if, accepted in Christ Jesus, we have peace with God. (*E. Garbett, M.A.*) *Preparing for the end*:—I. Preparation for death is an immediate duty, because YOU CANNOT TELL WHAT A DAY MAY BRING FORTH. II. IT OUGHT TO BE A CALM, DELIBERATE, AND INTELLIGENT PREPARATION. Not with panic, or haste, or gloom. III. THERE IS A GOD TO MEET, whose eyes will inspect the house. IV. THERE ARE IMPORTANT MATTERS TO BE ADJUSTED ARISING FROM OUR HUMAN RELATIONS. (*Homiletic Review.*) **Thou shalt die.**—*Death*:—I. DEATH. 1. In its causes. The primary cause of death was sin. But the immediate and acting cause of mortality is the frailty of our bodies. 2. In its nature. What is it to die? It is not to terminate our existence. We are well assured that nothing in being can cease to be, either of itself or by the influence of other finite beings, but only by an exercise of the almighty power of the Creator. To die is to undergo a solution of our present mode of existence, in which the immaterial soul is severed from the material body, and exists thenceforth for a time alone; whilst the body, bereft of life, loses the qualities necessary to preserve its substance, and becomes disorganised, and resolved into its primitive elements. How near is this world to the next! God's wisdom and goodness have appointed a bed of sickness to be the general precursor of death. By this He repeats solemnly, and enforces, His thousand other warnings to us, and, in our seclusion from the engagements and pleasures of time, gives us a further opportunity of becoming familiar with the things of eternity, and making our peace with Him. But His wisdom discovers in what ways our deceitful hearts will teach us to abuse His mercy, and He provides against the evil. Had we always the warning and opportunity of sickness, we might neglect God till it was given to us; and God has, perhaps, therefore, appointed that death should sometimes come unwarned. 3. In its consequences. I will not view them as they affect the body: let us leave it, lifeless and cold, in the narrow coffin and the quiet grave, awaiting the trumpet of the archangel. The effects of death on the soul include, doubtless, the enlargement of its capacities, as well as its entrance on eternal joy or misery. II. ITS PERSONALITY. "Thou." The young. Those in the prime of life. Those of mature years, &c. III. ITS CERTAINTY. "Thou shalt die." 1. What has become of all our race—Adam, Noah, &c.? 2. Where are the multitudes that have peopled your town in past days? All who have lived before us have died, and all now living are dying. (*J. Badcock, LL.B.*) *Death sometimes sudden and unexpected*:—I have known the bride to expire on her bridal day, the shopkeeper when serving his customers,

the player on the stage, the clergyman in his pulpit, the lowly Christian on his knees in prayer, the swearer uttering his curse, the thief with his plunder at his side. (*Ibid.*) *The human body, beautiful yet frail*:—The beautiful frame of man it is impossible to consider unaffected by its frailty. A distinguished philosopher, on rising from the study of the human frame, was so impressed with this, and with the complicated nature of its machinery, and the numberless parts that must all duly discharge their functions to continue existence, from moment to moment, that he trembled and feared to move, lest, by disordering some one of them, he should fall on the floor a corpse. (*Ibid.*) "*The biography of death*" was the title of a sermon preached by a famous London minister. For death has had a parentage, birth, history, a career of conquest and victory, a coronation and kingdom, a ghastly dining-hall and retinue of hired servants, and, finally, a record of disaster, defeat, and death! The last enemy to be destroyed is Death. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Hezekiah warned*:—Is there any peculiar significance in the announcement? There ought not to be. All life is a warning that we are going to die. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Facing death*:—When the physician told General Grant that his disease was fatal, and might quickly do its dire work, for a little while he seemed to lose, not courage, but hope. It was like a man gazing into his open grave. He was in no way dismayed, but the sight was still appalling. The conqueror looking at his inevitable conqueror: the stern soldier to whom armies had surrendered, watching the approach of that enemy to whom even he must yield. (*H. O. Mackey.*) *Looking over the brink*:—A godly minister who was fond of visiting his sick and dying people on Saturday afternoons, was asked by a brother minister, who met him on this errand one day, why he did this, instead of staying at home and preparing his sermons. He replied, "I like to take a look over the brink." Sometimes it is a blessing to a man to be brought suddenly to the brink in his own life, to look over it seriously and prayerfully, and then to take back into life the lessons he has learned there. (*Sunday School Chronicle.*) *Death, the ringing of the curfew bell*:—William the Conqueror established the ringing of curfew bells. The meaning of that curfew bell, sounded at eventime, was, that all the fires should be put out or covered with ashes, all the lights should be extinguished, and the people should go to bed. Soon for us the curfew will sound. The fires of our life will be banked up in ashes, and we shall go into the sleep, the cool sleep, I hope the blessed sleep. But there is no gloom in that if we are ready. The safest thing that a Christian can do is to die. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *A true life the best preparation for death*:—An old slave, when told by his doctor that he was near death, said: "Bless you, doctor, don't let that bother you; that's what I've been living for." (*Sunday School Chronicle.*)

Vers. 2, 3. **Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall.**—*Hezekiah's face turned to the wall*:—The obvious meaning is the wall of the room, towards which he turned, not merely to collect his thoughts, or to conceal his tears, but as a natural expression of strong feeling. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Self-retirement*:—The sick man turns his face to the wall in order to retire into himself and God. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *A natural shrinking from death*:—The voice sounded naturally as it pleaded with the Lord. The old man wants to die; he says, I am living amongst strangers: who is he? and who is she? what are those people? what is their occupation? I do not know where I am: I will live in the sacred past. But the young man in middle life does not want to die. The child does not want to go to rest at nine o'clock in the morning. We feel as if we had a call to work. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Hezekiah's face turned to the wall*:—The place of honour in an Eastern room is an angle of the apartment, so that whichever side Hezekiah turned upon, his face would be to a wall, and screened from observation. (*E. W. Shalders, B.A.*) *A good man's plea*:—1. Holy men did sometimes make mention of their good deeds before the Lord, in their prayer to Him (Neh. xiii. 14; Jer. xv. 15-17). 2. When they did make mention of their good deeds before the Lord, they did it, for the most part, when they were in trouble. 3. They did not mention them as meritorious causes of what they prayed for (Neh. xiii. 22). 4. The reason why they mention their good deeds at such time is—(1) That they might the more incline the Lord to mercy; for the Lord is more ready to show mercy to those who endeavour to live according to His laws than to those who neglect them. (2) That they might sustain themselves against the faint-heartedness which might assail them, being prone by nature

thereto; for the testimony of a good conscience produceth boldness towards God (2 Cor. i. 12; 1 Pet. iii. 21). Besides, Hezekiah might have a special reason to move him to mention his good deeds, and it is this, because the Lord had made a promise to David (1 Kings ii. 4). At this time Hezekiah had not a child to succeed him in the throne. (*W. Day, M.A.*) **And Hezekiah wept sore.**—*Hezekiah's tears*:—In these tears we can discover—I. A DREAD OF DEATH COMMON TO HUMAN NATURE. 1. This dread of death has a moral cause. What is the cause? A consciousness of sin, and an apprehension of its consequences. On the assumption that man would have died, had he not sinned, his death, we presume, in that case, would have been free from all that is terrible. 2. This dread of death has a moral antidote. "O death, where is thy sting?" &c. Those who apply this remedy hail rather than dread mortality; they "desire to depart," &c. II. THE INABILITY OF THE WORLD TO RELIEVE HUMAN NATURE. Hezekiah was a monarch. His home was a palace, and the great men of the nation were his willing attendants. Whatever wealth could procure, he could get at his bidding; and yet with so much of the world, what could it do for him? Could it raise him from his suffering couch? Nay! Could it hush one sigh, or wipe one tear away? No! In truth, the probability is that his earthly possessions and splendour added to the awfulness of the idea of death. The world has no power to help the soul in its deepest griefs and wants. The soul weeps in palaces. III. THE POWER OF PRAYER TO HELP HUMAN NATURE. These tears were the tears of prayer as well as of fear, and his fear stimulated his prayer. And what was the result of this prayer? "I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." This is a remarkable instance of the power of prayer, and is recorded here to encourage our suffering nature to direct its cries to heaven. (*Homilist.*) *Hezekiah's distress and prayer*:—Hezekiah had tried to serve God faithfully, and had been taught to expect length of days as his reward. The very consciousness of his integrity, and of his desire to honour the Lord in the presence of his people, must have added to his distress. What had been the fatal flaw in his service that had brought upon him this unexpected doom? Life and immortality had not been brought to light. Death, for him, seemed banishment from the presence of the Lord. In the grave he could not praise Him; dead, he could not celebrate His glory (vers. 11, 18). Twice he says, "Thou wilt make an end of me." We seldom realise how much we owe to that resurrection which lifted the veil that was spread over all nations. But Hezekiah teaches us how much strength, consolation, and joy may be found in communion with God in this life. His earthly experience, which he thought was to come to an end, was, after all, part of the life eternal. The Hebrew's vivid sense of God's presence with him in this life, were it more generally ours, would make our fear more reverent, our obedience and submission more complete, and would put an end to much of that practical atheism which prevails in the world of to-day. Let us not miss the consolation of the message Isaiah brought to his king, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears." Our prayers may be ignorant and shortsighted, we may not know what to pray for as we ought, but our tears are not overlooked. When our sadness is speechless, the scalding tears that tell our heart's woe, move the Divine pity, and plead for us more eloquently than any words we can put into frame. "In all our afflictions, He is afflicted"—to believe this is to be consoled. (*E. W. Shalders, B.A.*) *Hezekiah's prayer in affliction*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THE UTTERANCE OF THIS PRAYER. 1. Hezekiah was sorely afflicted. The exact nature of his disease may be difficult to determine. There is no ground for the vague supposition that he was afflicted with the plague which destroyed the Assyrians. The malady was probably "a fever boil" (Ewald), or "a single carbuncle formed under the back of the head" (Thenius), or "fever terminating in abscess" (Meade). The word shechin, translated boil, means strictly inflammation. The crude state of medical science then would make many diseases fatal which are now easily removed. The body is subject to multifarious maladies. Few have perfect health. Doubtless better health would come from wiser habits and simpler faith. But many causes of disease are indefinable. A sick body often ministers to the growth of the soul. It casts the shadow of eternity over the life. It awakens prayer in the most callous. It brings the prayerful nearer God. 2. Hezekiah believed that his affliction would be "unto death." He probably encouraged a hope of recovery until Isaiah came; though, as Josephus informs us, "the physicians despaired of him, and expected no good issue from his sickness; as neither did his friends." Hope dies

hard in a sick man's breast. Isaiah, perhaps, did what none of Hezekiah's physicians or courtiers were prepared to do. He faithfully delivered the Divine message. It was a painful duty. The dying should be warned. Not to do so is an unkindness and a sin. All have some preparations to make when death comes unexpectedly. The house of the soul needs to be set in order as well as the estate. 3. Hezekiah met death with great reluctance. Men generally shrink from death at its first approach. Dr. Johnson held that no man met death willingly. Many doubtless have. But to meet death without reluctance is no direct proof of meetness for eternity. Remember Bunyan's "Weary of the World." The good may be unwilling to die. Hezekiah was not spiritually unprepared. He was reluctant to die—(1) From the natural disinclination which men feel towards death. He was in the prime of life. His hold of all earthly things was firm. Age loosens the grasp. He saw a time of quiet and prosperity dawning upon his kingdom, and he desired to live to enjoy it. (2) He had no heir. It is certain that Manasseh who succeeded him was not then born, for twenty years later he was but twelve years old; and the land had not yet begun to recover from the late ravages, so that his death would have left the nation in a distracted condition, and would probably have exposed it to many new calamities" (Kitto). (3) He had not that clear revelation of immortality which we as Christians possess. He would look upon death as being "cut off from the land of the living," as going down into silence. Christ had not opened the kingdom of immortality to the eyes of men. This life was all to him, and he clung to it. II. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER. 1. He does not utter the desire that was uppermost in his mind. We may not have recorded all that he prayed: probably his prayer was broken off abruptly in weeping. He knew God could interpret his broken words, his sighs, his tears. Many prayers are too elaborately expressed. They prove their shallowness by the smooth elegance of the language in which they are uttered. Strong feeling makes the tongue falter. Much in prayer may be left to God's omniscience, justice, wisdom, tenderness, and love. Like a father He interprets the heart of His child. 2. Hezekiah appeals to his past life as a reason why his life should be prolonged. Few can do this. Most lives are so marred, so imperfect, so sinful, that they can furnish no argument before God. But, it has been asked, was there not in this prayer a spirit of self-commendation contrary to the spirit of the Gospel? Not a conscious self-clothing of deceit, but a pernicious self-ignorance? We think not. Hezekiah lived under a dispensation of religious thought that led him to believe that a man's character and conduct were the grounds upon which God's favour or displeasure was bestowed. And this is true under a dispensation of grace; though we, under that dispensation, realise as Hezekiah could not that all our virtue is by the help of God's Spirit, and can merit little in His sight. The modern habit of self-analysis and eagerness to find some evil to condemn at every turn, so as to describe ourselves as the vilest of the vile, was unknown to him. Many merely attempt to descend to some imaginary standard of vileness which they suppose is the proper depth of self-humiliation to reach to secure God's favour. Much of this confession of being miserable sinners is but miserable cant. Sick-bed confessions are exposed to this danger. Such lip-service may be, as Lynch says, "most suspicious and affrighting." What God desires is an honest expression of our heart's convictions. This Hezekiah gave. This prayer was uttered with true humility. Whatever had been his sins—and he recognised them (ver. 17)—he could claim—1. Sincerity. He had walked before God in truth. He was conscious of no deceit, no inward angularities, no warping of conscience, no sophistical coverings, no histrionic attitudes. He lived out the verities of his soul. 2. Simplicity of purpose. His heart was perfect in its consecration to the Divine glory. He had no double aims. In building up the religious life of the nation he had not sought his own honour but God's. 3. That his acts had been regulated as in God's sight, and had been to increase goodness in the earth. His life was indeed his prayer. Life will have to be reviewed. A life of sin makes a death-bed terrible. III. THE EMOTIONS WITH WHICH THIS PRAYER WAS OFFERED. 1. Hezekiah was filled with grief. But while grief prostrates the mental and physical energies it often gives great potency to prayer. The gaze of Hezekiah's almost speechless soul was fixed on God with beseeching earnestness, and the poignancy of his grief arrested the Divine arm. 2. There was in Hezekiah's mind a feeling of bitter disappointment. He expected to live, and his expectation rested upon his religious belief. In his day, under the incompleted revelation of the Divine purposes, centering in human life and destiny, which was then

possessed, longevity was regarded as one of the peculiar rewards of piety (Psa. xc. 16). Hezekiah had fulfilled the conditions and he now looked for the reward. He was disappointed in God. To be disappointed in God is the direst disappointment that can fill a man's soul with bitterness. If God fail him, what is there in the universe that is firm? God sometimes permits men to think that He has not been faithful to them. This is, perhaps, the severest test that the human heart can bear. Christ descended to that "profundity of woe" when He uttered His agonising cry upon the cross. Many fail in such hours. But true faith can enable us to triumph even then. It will enable us to lie weeping before God, waiting for the explanation that it assures us God can and will give; clinging to His garments even when His face seems turned away, and His form, once so near and trusted, has changed, and seems moving steadily away from us. Thus Hezekiah waited, weeping sore. 3. There was also within him the feeling of utter helplessness. All earthly resources had failed him. When he turned his face to the wall, he felt that no power on earth could help him. His physicians, his attendants, his most trusted counsellors, could render no assistance. He had only God. Hezekiah, even in such circumstances, found God nigh to help and to save. Isaiah was speedily sent back to comfort him with the Divine message: "I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." Learn—1. That true piety will enable us to seek and find God in life's most painful extremities. 2. That in our hours of bitterest grief prayer will reach God's ear and bring us relief and deliverance. (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

Vers. 4, 5. **I have heard thy prayer.**—*Was Hezekiah's recovery an unmitigated blessing?*—Most of us who have had some experience of life, have seen instances in which a man who has set his heart too fondly upon one object, has gained that object, and with it (to use the language of St. Paul to his shipmates) "much harm and loss." He has won the position which he coveted; but perhaps he finds himself saddled with the burden of a crushing responsibility; or perhaps his health—the one condition of enjoyment—breaks up just as he grasps the prize; or perhaps he is snatched away by death, "while the meat is yet in his mouth"; and those who knew him are unpleasantly reminded of the end of Israel's lusting in the wilderness, "He gave them their desire, and sent leanness withal into their soul." And thinking men say, when they hear of this result, "Strong wishes for earthly blessings are to be avoided." The Book of God, as being the book of Truth, gives an exact echo of human experience in this matter. God acceded to Hezekiah's request, and added fifteen years to his life. But now comes the grave question, Did the fifteen years thus added prove, in the issue, a blessing to Hezekiah personally, or to the nation over which he so worthily presided? The sacred narrative gives an emphatic negative to both branches of the question. 1. Hezekiah, when God had originally proposed to take him to Himself, and had sent Isaiah with the message, "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live," was at the zenith of his spiritual prosperity. And now Hezekiah was to be gathered to his fathers, full, if not of years, yet of honours, spiritual and temporal. But by his prayers and his tears he succeeded in prolonging his span; and the first result of this, which the history brings before us, points to a spiritual decline in Hezekiah (chap. xxxix.). The sweet ointment of Hezekiah's graces was flawed and corrupted by the dead fly of vanity. Had Hezekiah died when God proposed to take him, he would have died humble; as it is, he dies after being humbled by God; and all those who read the narrative thoughtfully will surely say, "Better far he had died at first." 2. But more than personal interests are at stake in the life of princes; and we are led to inquire what, as far as it is given us to know them, may have been the effects upon the Jewish nation of the addition of fifteen years to Hezekiah's life? The answer is conveyed in these words: "Manasseh (Hezekiah's son, who succeeded to the throne) was twelve years old when he began to reign;" so that if Hezekiah had died when God intended he should, Manasseh would never have existed. Now who was Manasseh? and what part did he play in Jewish history? Manasseh, by his extraordinary wickedness, surpassing that of all who had gone before him, involved the nation which he governed in ruin. Manasseh's crimes cried to heaven for vengeance, and were heard, long after Manasseh's body had mingled with the dust, and long after Manasseh's soul had become, through Divine grace, profoundly penitent. For when the author of the Books of Kings traces up the captivity to its originating cause, thus he writes: "Surely at the commandment

of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed (for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood), which the Lord would not pardon." Possibly, then, if Manasseh had not existed, the great national degradation of the Jews by the captivity, and the demolition of the city and temple, would never have taken place. (*Dean Goulburn.*) *Ministers should have access to the sick*:—Besides its other important lessons, this history teaches the propriety of admitting the minister of God into the chamber of sickness. His soothing words and the prayer of faith, always secure to the sufferer some blessing, which he could little afford to lose. No intelligent, right-minded medical man will bar the door of the sickroom against the physician of the soul. (*J. N. Norton.*) *Hezekiah's life prolonged*:—He had an interview with the Giver of life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 7, 8. **And this shall be a sign unto thee from the Lord.**—*The shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz*:—We are not to imagine that in this miracle any effect was wrought upon the motion of the earth round its axis. A miraculous refraction of the sun's rays was effected by God on a particular sun-dial, at the prayer of King Hezekiah. It was a miracle, wrought on a particular dial, in a particular place, showing that it concerned a particular person; and it was not wrought on the solar orb, but on the solar light. (*Bp. Wordsworth.*) *The shadow reversed on the sun-dial of Ahaz*:—This astounding miracle could only have been effected by a light "brighter than the sun," rising on the other side of the sun-dial. We all know how electric light reverses the shadow of gas light. At St. Paul's conversion, "the light from heaven," the Shechinah brightness of Immanuel, outshone the splendour of the noonday sun. In the heavenly city there is no need of the sun to shine on it, nor of the moon to lighten it, for the glory of God and the Lamb is the light thereof. Unfortunately, we cannot tell on which side of the temple at Jerusalem the sun-dial of Ahaz was situated. It was probably a monolith or obelisk, resembling that on the Thames embankment, elevated on steps—translated "degrees"—and intended to regulate the hours of public worship. The setting sun had thrown the shadow across the steps; it had gone down ten degrees, when suddenly from the gate or window from the mercy-seat behind the veil of the *naos*, or temple proper, there flashed forth the majestic light of Divine glory that dwelt between the cherubim, reversing the shadow of the natural sun, and converting for Hezekiah the shadow of death into morning. (*R. Balgarnie, D.D.*) *The Light of the Mosaic past*:—To the ardent eyes of the old prophet the light that had reversed the shadow on the sun-dial was the old "Light" of the Mosaic past. It had illumined the land of Goshen in the days of supernatural darkness that overspread the rest of Egypt. It had flashed out with more than electric brightness upon the hosts of Israel as they struggled on through the night and the sea to escape the pursuing army of the Pharaoh. It had "glided" as a fiery pillar before the tribes through the rocky desert, warning off their enemies, and guiding the pilgrim army homeward to the fatherland. It had synchronised their movements with those convulsions of nature that arrested the Jordan at harvest flood, and shook down the walls of Jericho at the moment when they were prepared to cross and capture the devoted city. And it had stood over Gibeon as a sun that would not go down, and as a moon that would not withdraw, while Jehovah fought for Israel, and gave them their "crowning victory" over the idolatrous Canaanites. Isaiah knew the Light. (*Ibid.*) *Christ the glory of His people Israel*:—Was it this, I wonder, that evoked from Isaiah that unwonted outburst of enthusiasm in the chapter beginning, "Arise, shine, for thy Light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee"? "Thy sun shall no more go down . . . for Jehovah shall be unto thee an everlasting Light, and thy God thy glory"? If so, how appropriate the words to the occasion. It is easy to identify the Light of Israel with Christ, the Light of the world. (*Ibid.*) *Christ dispels and reverses life's shadows*:—I do not consider that I am putting any undue strain upon the text in applying it to Christ. The Shechinah was the recognised token to Israel of the presence of her covenant God. It led the Magi to Bethlehem. It shone around the shepherds on the night of the nativity. It overwhelmed Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus. Christ is the Light that dispels and reverses our shadows. Christ has dispelled and reversed—I. THE SHADOW OF SIN. II. THE SHADOW OF GRIEF. III. THE SHADOW OF DEATH. "If He be

in thee," wrote John Pulsford, "who is the Light of Life, very Light and very Life, then, when the candlelight of thy body's life goes out, the sunlight of thy soul's life shall be bright about thee." (*Ibid.*) *The great miracle* :—The miracle is how God Himself began. Why will men always attack the wrong point, as if it were a wonderful thing that a man should have fifteen years added to his life; and yet we omit the stupendous miracle that man ever began to live. Thus attack what mystery we may we only go backward and upward until we come to Deity Himself. That is the great mystery, and there is none other. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 9-20. **The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah.**—*Hezekiah's recovery* :—1. He was sick, and then he prayed. 2. He is recovered, and now he gives thanks. (*R. Harris, D.D.*) *Hezekiah's song* :—I. THE INSCRIPTION acquaints us—1. With the author of the song. 2. With the nature of it—a poem written. 3. With the argument of it—a song of thanksgiving for the removal of sickness, and restoring of health. II. THE DESCRIPTION presents unto us the parts of it. 1. An aggravation of Hezekiah's former misery. 2. An amplification of the present mercy. (*Ibid.*) *Hezekiah's experience* :—In the first part of this psalm, he describes the views and feelings which occupied his mind when he saw himself apparently on the brink of the grave. 1. Though he had been one of the best kings with which God ever blessed a nation, he viewed his sins as great and numerous, and felt that he was, on account of them, justly exposed to the Divine displeasure. 2. Hence death appeared dreadful to him, and his dread of it was increased by the darkness which, at that time, before Christ had brought life and immortality to light, hung over a future state. 3. Hence, too, he was assailed by fearful apprehensions of God's anger (ver. 13). 4. In consequence of these apprehensions he could neither look nor ask for help from God with confidence, as he had been accustomed to do. "My eyes," he exclaims, "fail upward;" that is, I cannot look upward, cannot look to heaven for relief and consolation, as I formerly could. 5. And when he endeavoured to pray, he found that he offered nothing which deserved the name of prayer; for unbelief and despondency prevailed. "Like a crane or a swallow," says he, "so did I chatter;" that is, my prayers were little better than the complaints of a bird entangled in the snare of the fowler. 6. Finally, he gave up all hope, and cried in bitterness of soul, "I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living." 7. But to the righteous there ariseth light in the darkness. There did in this case. And as soon as it began to dawn, faith revived, and he cried, though still with a feeble voice, "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me;" that is, be my help and deliverer, make my cause Thine own, and do all that for me which Thou seest to be necessary. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *The prayer of Hezekiah* :—It is a strain most natural and pathetic. It is the simple expression of one who has found this life beautiful and desirable, and who would fain be permitted to remain till the limit of human existence has been reached. Its very simplicity, the very honesty with which it depicts the clinging to life and the shrinking from death, has been a stumbling-block to many—has been at complete variance with their preconceived notions as to the frame of mind in which a good man would meet such an hour. He appealed to the life which he had led, to the work which he had done, to the integrity of purpose with which he had done it. He also ventured to recall, as it were, to the Hearer of his prayer, that in his removal there would be one worshipper the less. "The grave cannot praise Thee," &c. There would be—such is the daring argument which he employs—loss to God as well as to himself: if Hezekiah lost all that he had prized and hoped for, God would likewise be deprived of praise and honour which would have been His in days to come. It is a method of expostulation which we who have, through Christ, boldness to enter into the holiest, would hardly venture to employ. Then, on the other hand, the unfeigned alarm with which he contemplates the approaching change—the evident superiority which he assigns to the present life compared with what lies beyond the grave—is not in accordance with the language which would be used by one who cherished the glorious hope which Christ has enkindled. But, with all this admitted—it may even be on this very account—we find in this poem the expression of a human heart like our own, brooding over the great mystery of life and of death, uttering, without reserve, its sorrow and complaint; shrinking, yet trusting; resisting, yet submitting; delighting in life, but finding in God its only portion. The poem is but the record of what any human spirit would feel in being confronted with death, and in seeing death again withdraw.

(*P. M. Muir.*) *The fear of death*:—What are the main elements of this fear in the writing of Hezekiah? Why is his spirit oppressed and overwhelmed as the great change approaches? Some of the reasons are what we all have experienced; others of them may be only too strange to us. I. One reason is that HE MUST BID FAREWELL TO THE JOYS OF LIFE. He was deprived of the residue of his years. Life had been to him full of interest and of beauty. In this respect there were even elements of weakness in his character. His love of ease and of display showed itself in various ways. II. Another and a nobler reason for the sadness of Hezekiah, is to be found in the fact that HE WAS ABOUT TO BE CUT OFF FROM THE WORK ON WHICH HIS HEART WAS SET. That is a sorrow which is apt to overcloud a lofty mind. The idolatry which he had sought to crush might again lift up its head. The ritual which he had restored might again be suffered to decay. The bondage from which he had kept his country might lay hold upon it. Because, after his day, the hand of the spoiler might seize the wealth which he had amassed for the good of the nation, he might well desire that his day should be prolonged. III. He shrank from death as AN ENTRANCE ON AN UNKNOWN SPHERE. It is an exaggeration to say that kings and righteous men of the Old Testament had no conception of a future state. There are sayings which infer that the thought of life was not bounded by the grave, that there was a conviction of union with Him who is eternal. But the sayings are comparatively few: there is no greater difference between the Old Testament and the New than the difference of the way in which they speak of the life hereafter. So dim, so fluctuating, so uncertain are the allusions in the Old Testament, that the revelation of the New may well be called the bringing of life and immortality to light. Even with that revelation, "our knowledge of that life is small, the eye of faith is dim"; but, without it, the horror of a great darkness may naturally oppress the soul. IV. The reason which, most of all, produced the regret of Hezekiah in the thought of quitting the visible world is to us the strangest of all. It was that HE SHOULD BE MORE DISTANT FROM GOD. "I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living." This is to us a strange contradiction, an evidence of marvellous ignorance. It was exactly in that world, to the confines of which he was drawing near, that he would find God. This is true, and there is ground for our astonishment. But might not Hezekiah, in his turn, be astonished at us? Does his lamentation convey to us no lesson, no reproach? He was mournful at the prospect of seeing God no more in the land of the living, of seeing Him no more in the glories of the world around, of seeing Him no more in the worship of His temple. Were we honest with ourselves and with one another, might we not confess that our talk of seeing God hereafter is all the more voluble because we have not seen Him here? We too much forget that He is here at all. And one element of terror in our imagination of the hereafter consists too often in the reflection that He is there. (*Ibid.*) *Hezekiah's return to health*:—If we may learn something from Hezekiah even in his imperfect, hopeless mode of looking on impending death, much more may we learn from him in his joyous mode of welcoming returning health. That he should be glad is no cause for wonder. 1. There is perhaps no keener sense of enjoyment than that which attends convalescence, when simple pleasures, which may once have palled, are felt again in all their freshness, when strength is actually felt to be reanimating the enfeebled frame. For the man who has been tossing and turning in restlessness and pain, the restoration of peace and ease brings a pleasure before unknown. 2. But it was not simply this delight in outward things which inspired Hezekiah. It was that the vision of God would again be granted, that the worship which he loved could again be offered, that the work which had been interrupted might again be taken up, that his recovery was a pledge of Divine favour, of sin forgiven and forgotten, and must awake the gratitude of his heart, the service of his whole life. Whatever has been our past, whatever is to be our future, the present is ours to use, to improve, to spend in the service of God and of man. (*Ibid.*) *Hezekiah's sickness and recovery*:—I. THE AFFLICTION AND DANGER OF HEZEKIAH. This writing records his affliction. From his previous character, you perhaps expect to find that he will welcome the message which announces his release from suffering, or at least receive it with calmness and submission. But there are two principles on which we account for this emotion. 1. From that love of life which is the strongest instinct of our nature. 2. Hezekiah was engaged in a great and important work. II. THE DELIVERANCE WROUGHT ON HIS BEHALF. 1. He traces his recovery to God. 2. He desires to retain the salutary impressions he had received (ver. 15). 3. He acknowledges the beneficial influence of afflic-

tion (ver. 16). 4. He gratefully commemorates the Divine goodness (ver. 17). (*H. J. Gamble.*) *The wisdom of keeping a record of one's life* :—It is well, for the purpose of frequent review, to keep a record of the principal events of our lives, and of the thoughts which in trying circumstances have most deeply impressed us. This is the way both to multiply and prolong the advantages of experience. Such a record may be of great use also to our successors, and especially to our children. Of all the periods of life pregnant with materials for such an instructive memorial, that of sickness, for the supports attending it, the thoughts that arise out of it, and the influence to be exercised by them upon the subsequent course of our lives, seems to have a pre-eminent claim to notice. It is to a record of this kind, penned by the pious monarch of Judah, and which was probably of great service to his son Manasseh, that our text refers; and the consideration of which may serve to remind us of what we should aspire after, and what we should cautiously avoid, in a similar situation. (*J. Leifchild, D.D.*) *Sickness and recovery* :—I. THE GENERAL CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF BODILY SICKNESS. Man is much more liable to attacks of this nature than the mere animals. The peculiar organisation of the human being, and the wearing effect of mental excitement upon the corporeal system, may in part account for this. But moral causes must also be taken into consideration. Sin is the great parent of our bodily maladies. Though some conditions of human society are more exposed to disease than others, yet no station in life forms any certain security against the interruption of health. Even piety itself, though a preservative against spiritual ills, and a preventive of many bodily ailments, is far from being a shield against the shafts of disease. We have a vivid picture, in Hezekiah's complaints, of the humiliating state both of body and mind to which sickness reduces us. While much importance should not be attached to what persons in sickness think of themselves, yet we may learn the desirableness of avoiding those dispositions and practices, while in health, which would furnish just and solid occasion for uneasiness in our duller hours. We may invite God to our sick chamber with confidence, when we have not driven Him away from us by impiety and neglect in our more joyous and prosperous seasons. II. THE ANXIETIES OF A PIOUS MIND UNDER SICKNESS, AND THE GOOD EFFECTS OF PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION. The message of Isaiah to Hezekiah was indeed calculated to produce alarm and despondency as to his recovery. In this situation, his desire of life moved him to make the most earnest and passionate entreaties. The good men of that age felt a strong attachment to life, which was far more excusable in their case than in ours. III. THE SPIRITUAL AND DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS WITH WHICH DELIVERANCE FROM SICKNESS MAY BE ACCOMPANIED IN THE CASE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. The removal of the bodily ill was the least part of his deliverance; it was accompanied and followed with a sweet sense of the removal of guilt from his soul, and with the presence of the gladdening beams of the Divine favour. It is sometimes one end of God, in the case of the affliction of His people, to prepare them for such manifestations, and to prove the power of Divine principles in conferring a sublime superiority to all the impressions of the surrounding scene. IV. THE INFLUENCE WHICH THE VISITATION OF SICKNESS, THE SUPPORTS UNDER IT, AND DELIVERANCE OUT OF IT, IN THE CASE OF GOOD MEN, SHOULD HAVE UPON THEIR FUTURE CONDUCT. The beneficial effects of such visitation are too often confined to the hours of its endurance, or extended only to a short period after its termination. This arises from the influence of outward scenes and circumstances upon the mind, and the natural tendency of a change in the one to operate a similar change in the other. It is only to be prevented by a due resistance to such tendency, and a careful effort to preserve, by frequent meditation and review, the just discoveries made by us in our affliction, and the proper feelings then entertained, in reference to the character of human life, and the importance of religion. Probably the great cause of sinful relapses is to be found in a forgetfulness of our mercies. Application—1. The subject may be useful to such as have not yet been afflicted. We see in the sufferings of others how precarious is the continuance of our comforts, and our vigour and health to enjoy them. 2. Such as have been afflicted in vain, may be furnished with a salutary remonstrance. Affliction is often amongst the last resources employed by infinite wisdom and mercy for our benefit. 3. Such as are labouring under the pressure of disease may, especially if Christians, learn how to turn it, while it lasts, to good account, as well as to gain a benefit from it for the future. There are many consoling and reconciling considerations. It is fraught with a benevolent design on the part of Him who permits or causes it. (*Ibid.*) *Face to face wit-*

death :—1. However death is feared and resisted, it is most by those who are in the midst of their days. The reasons for this are worth looking into. 2. Man's most solemn words are uttered when he stands face to face with death; then, if ever, he forms a right estimate of life, and of preparation for dying. 3. Prayer is a real power. (*W. Wheeler.*) *Hezekiah's poem* :—The poem, or psalm, in which Hezekiah describes his experience, may be divided into two parts. I. How DEATH LOOKED (vers. 10–15). There is a point in the sun's daily climb of the heavens when it seems to stand still, a pause before descending the western slope. Hezekiah felt he had reached just such a meridian of his life. In the tranquillity, or noontide, of his days, he was to enter the gates of the grave. Loss of God's presence, loss of human companionships and interests—this was what death meant for him. His age, his natural term of life, was to be carried away like a shepherd's tent that had been struck—his life rolled up like a piece of cloth cut from the thrums of the weaver's loom. The dreary night of his pain, when his very bones seemed broken, and he could only moan and mourn like some lonely, crying bird, how well he remembered it, what a bitter experience it was! His eyes failed with looking upward, but he did look upward; weighed down with pain and weakness, his soul still cried, "Be Thou my surety." He knew not what to say, because God had done it all. Never, through all the respite of years allotted to him, could he forget his bitterness of soul. The memory of it would always chasten him. Some of us have never known what it is to spend hours of pain and weakness, with death apparently near at hand, and, in the absence of this experience, the sick king's account of his dreary night will be hard to understand. But anyone who has been in the shadowed valley will recognise the truthfulness of the picture, and the sincere piety of Hezekiah's looking upward to God. II. How RESTORED LIFE LOOKED (vers. 16–20). First of all, he is sensible of the preciousness of his chastisement. He had learned in those dark and terrible hours lessons never learned before. It was in deep experiences of need and of God's present help given him then, that he had found the true life of his spirit. He had discovered God's love to his soul, and obtained an assurance of forgiveness which was a joy unspeakable. Blessed is he who, looking up to God in the face of Jesus Christ, can say, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." Whoever went back of God? Life for him is an opportunity to praise God, to make known His truth, to testify before all the Lord's readiness to save. This story is a chapter out of an ancient biography, a story of a soul in close personal dealing with God. It reminds us that He is a very present help in trouble, and that none who turn to Him in trust and hope will ever be refused. (*E. W. Shalders, B.A.*)

Ver. 10. **I shall go to the gates of the grave.**—*Views of the grave*:—1. It was doubtless from veneration for the dead, that the practice first arose of depositing their ashes around the temple where the living worship. That dust, which once was tenanted by an immortal spirit,—that dust, through which once the intelligence and the feelings of an immortal spirit shone,—becomes in itself hallowed to the fancy. Collecting it around the place which most we honour, we trust that we remove it beyond the reach of profane intrusion. 2. To the Christian there appears a peculiar propriety in this simple and affecting arrangement. The dust of the departed is doubly valuable in the Christian's regard, who knows that "this mortal" is destined to "put on immortality." In placing it near the temple of our God, we seem to express our humble confidence in the promise which He hath given; we seem to leave it under His own especial protection. 3. The practice which arose from reverence for the dead, is powerfully enforced by its usefulness to the living. If we would listen to the thought, there is in it eloquence irresistible, that around the place where we assemble to worship our God, the ashes of our fathers and of our brethren sleep. We act the part of fools when we banish from our minds any theme, uninviting though its aspect be, by which our spiritual welfare might be so essentially advanced. (*A. Brunton, D.D.*) *Appeals of the grave* :—1. Come hither, ye proud! Look around you on this scene of universal stillness, and show us the trace of those distinctions in which you glory. Tell us which is noble and which is vulgar dust! 2. Come hither, ye who value yourselves upon the graces of your outward form. Have you courage to meet the aspect here of that which late was lovely? 3. Come hither, ye votaries of wealth; and show us in this receptacle of human dust, what advantages have gone down to the grave with him who preceded you in your anxious labours. The riches of this world descend not into the grave. But there are treasures of which the value outlives the tomb. 4. Children

of intemperance and folly, those who once were your associates in riot, are laid in the grave. Silent is now the wit that was to charm for ever; and quenched the smile that was never to fade! Are you prepared for a change like this? 5. Son of wisdom, and holiness, and piety, thine associates also are sleeping here. 6. Come hither, and stand by this new-formed grave. It is the grave of thine enemy. He cannot harm thee now. Thou mournest to think that the remembrance of injuries which he had done or suffered may have agonised his deathbed. Thou shudderest at the thought, either that he died execrating and abhorring thee, or suing for reconciliation and peace in vain; that the departing spirit may have gone hence, unforgiving or unforgiven. Is there, then, one to whom, at this moment, thou bearest enmity? "Go," while yet the lesson is warm upon thy heart, "leave thy gift before the altar," &c. 7. Reverence and attachment lead thee onward to the spot where the instructor of thy youth, the guide of thy childhood, lies. All the lessons of his wisdom rush upon thy remembrance, as thou standest by his grave. Improve the moment,—it is rich in usefulness. 8. The scene around may well rouse thee to self-examination. For, see, here is laid thine equal in age. He began with thee the career of life, gay and careless as thyself. The same with thine own were his pursuits. The same with thine own were his hopes. Seest thou that vacant space by his side? God only knows how soon thou mayest be called to fill it. In this land of shadows one thing is certain,—it is death; "one thing is needful," —it is an interest in Him who hath vanquished death and the grave. (*Ibid.*) *The gates of the grave:*—The region of the grave is bounded. God keeps the gates. I. ALL MEN'S DREAD. Through—1. Sin. 2. Natural fear of the unknown. 3. Want of faith. II. ALL MEN'S DESTINY. 1. Certain. 2. Men may approach these gates and return, but once passed they are passed for ever. 3. They are the portals of endless joy or woe. (*W. O. Lilley.*) **I am deprived of the residue of my years.**—*The shortening of human life:*—The words of the text naturally suggest this general observation: that God deprives many of the human race of the residue of their years. I. CONSIDER WHEN GOD DOES THIS. 1. God deprives all those of the residue of their years whom He calls out of the world before they have reached the limits of life which are to be found in Scripture. 2. Whom He calls out of the world before they have reached the bounds of life fixed by Providence. Though the Scriptures limit life to seventy or eighty years, yet Providence oftens extends it to a longer period. 3. Who die before they have reached the bounds of life which are imposed by the laws of nature. Nature sets bounds to every kind of life in this world. All, therefore, who die by sickness, or accident, or violence, or any other cause than the course of nature, are really deprived of the residue of their days. II. Inquire WHY GOD THUS SHORTENS THE LIVES OF MEN. 1. To teach the living that He is not dependent upon them in the least degree. 2. To teach mankind their constant and absolute dependence upon Himself. 3. To teach the living the necessity of being continually prepared for another life. 4. To teach the living the importance of faithfully improving life as long as they enjoy it. 5. God may sometimes cut short the days of the wicked to prevent their doing evil in time to come. 6. God may sometimes shorten the lives of His faithful servants to prevent their seeing and suffering public calamities. III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. If God does not always deprive men of the residue of their years, but allows some to reach the bounds of nature, then there is propriety in praying for the lives of the aged as well as of the young. 2. If God so often deprives men of the residue of their years, then it is extremely unreasonable and dangerous to flatter ourselves with the hopes of living a great while in the world. 3. We ought to beware of placing too much dependence upon the lives of others, as well as upon our own. 4. Long life is a great as well as distinguishing favour. 5. If God always has wise and good reasons for depriving men of the residue of their years, then it is as reasonable to submit to His providence in one instance of mortality as another. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The residue of years:*—Life has crises. Men often feel as if life were re-given. Wisdom is born in such hours. The residue of life is regarded with reverence. The residue of years—I. ARE, WITH US, UNCERTAIN. II. SHOULD BE GUIDED BY THE EXPERIENCES OF PAST YEARS. III. SHOULD BE MOST SERENE AND HAPPY. IV. SHOULD BE MOST PIOUS AND FRUITFUL IN GOOD TO OTHERS. (*W. O. Lilley.*)

Ver. 11. **I said, I shall not see the Lord.**—*Hezekiah's distress:*—I. HEZEKIAH'S DISTRESS AT THE THOUGHT OF NOT SEEING GOD. This manifested—1. True affection towards God. 2. Fervent desires for the revelation of God's glory.

3. Spiritual power to apprehend God. II. HEZEKIAH'S DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE THOUGHT OF NOT SEEING GOD ON EARTH. He would see Him—1. In deliverances wrought out for His people. 2. In Divine manifestations in the temple. 3. In Divine benediction upon himself and nation. Happy they who desire to see God. He may be seen in this land of death. In the true land of the living men ever behold Him face to face. (*W. O. Lilley.*) **I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.**—*One, and only one probation, a benevolent arrangement* (with Luke xvi. 26):—There are two facts that give death profound solemnity. 1. It separates a man for ever from his connections in this world. Hezekiah felt this now. Job felt this. "When a few years are come," &c. What living man has not been impressed with this idea! The old scene of his first impressions, anxious labours, tender friendships, and dear associations is left for ever. However trying this world may be, it contains very much that is dear to us. Here we felt the first sensations of life; here the first trains of thought arose; here we have received the elements of our character; here all our joys have been experienced, our trials endured, and our labours prosecuted. Here sleep the dust of our parents and our friends. To leave all this for ever is a sad thought. 2. It separates a man for ever from all probationary means of improvement. Abraham gave this idea to the rich man in the world of perdition: he assured him there was an impassable "gulf" fixed between him and all remedial means. After death character seems stereotyped. This is a more solemn fact than the other, though perhaps not so deeply and generally felt. To be cut off for ever, if we are wicked, from Bibles, sanctuaries, and all mediatorial influences and helps; to have an impassable gulf between all that is bright and fair in the universe and one's self;—how solemn this! This fact, which is profoundly solemn, is neither cruel nor unjust, but on the contrary highly benevolent. I. THERE IS MORE GOODNESS IN THIS ARRANGEMENT TO THE INDIVIDUAL HIMSELF. Three facts will illustrate this. 1. In case a man had a second probation, and it failed, his guilt and misery would be considerably enhanced by it. (1) Punishment will be proportioned by the privileges and opportunities abused. "He that knoweth his Master's will, and doeth it not," &c. "If I had not spoken to them," said Christ, "they had not had sin." What is the guilt of a heathen compared with a man living in Christian lands? (2) The privileges and opportunities connected with his first probation are such as to impose incalculable responsibility. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy," &c. What, then, would be the guilt of a man who had not only lived through a first probation, but a second? 2. The man who abused the first probation would be most likely to abuse the second. If a man pass through all the remedial influences of the first probation—nature, sacred literature, sanctuaries, the counsels and admonitions of the pious, the Gospel ministry—and not be saved but hardened, by all, would there not be a certainty that, if he entered upon a second probation, the second would also fail? (1) Because he would enter upon the second with hardened sensibilities. He did not so the first. We began our existence here with tender consciences. (2) He would enter on the second with confirmed habits. If it be asked, May not some new influences be brought to bear upon the soul in the second probation that did not act upon him in the first?—We ask, What new influences are possible? We can only conceive of two kinds—the penal and the merciful. Will penal sufferings convert? And as to merciful influences—can there be any more merciful power brought to bear upon the soul than now? Can God give a more moving and mighty expression of His love than in sending His only-begotten Son? 3. Man's knowledge of a second probation would tend to counteract upon his mind the saving influence of the first. (1) It would strengthen that procrastinating principle in his nature which leads him now to postpone the question of his salvation. (2) It would strengthen that presuming tendency of his nature which induces him to run the risk of the future. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 12. **As a shepherd's tent.**—*The inconstancy of earthly life*:—He saith "a shepherd's tent," because that represents the inconstancy and uncertainty of our life, more than any other tent. The soldier's tent may stand pitched long in a place, as in sieges and the like; but shepherds change the place of their tent every day, because of the opportunity of fresh pasture for their cattle. (*W. Day, M.A.*) *As a shepherd's tent*:—I. MAN'S LOT HAS NO PERMANENCE. II. IT IS EASILY REMOVED. III. IT MAY BE SPEEDILY REMOVED. IV. IT IS OFTEN REMOVED SUDDENLY. V. IT IS REMOVED TO ANOTHER PLACE. (*W. O. Lilley.*) **I have cut off like a weaver my life.**—*The art of weaving* seems to have been coeval

with the first dawn of civilisation. We do not know where or at what time it was invented; but we find that at an early age in the world's history the Egyptians manifested great skill in it. The vestures of fine linen such as Joseph wore were the product of Egyptian looms, and the existing specimens of the mummy cloth of Egypt are said to compare favourably with the finest cambric of modern times. There are various incidental references to this art in the Scriptures. We are told that the staff of Goliath's spear was like a weaver's beam. Job says that his days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. And among the experiments which Delilah tried in ascertaining the secret of Samson's strength, we find one that consisted in weaving the seven locks of his hair with the web of her loom. "She fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson; and he awaked out of his sleep, and plucked away the pin of the beam, and the web." Here we have references to some of the parts of the loom as it exists in the present day, the beam, the shuttle, the pin to which the web was attached. Indeed, we learn on reliable authority that though the introduction of machinery has made some important changes in the loom as used by the ancients, yet the essential features of it remain unaltered. (*W. V. Robinson, B.A.*) *Man as a weaver*:—We need, therefore, but a slight acquaintance with the art of weaving in its present state to enable us to understand the meaning of our text. Let us suppose that a man is standing before his loom. The warp has been supplied to him by his master, and fixed to the weaver's beam. The threads pass over the loom, and the weft is shot through by means of the shuttle. The web is then complete, and is rolled on to another beam. When the required length of cloth has been woven, the threads of the warp are cut, and if the master has no more work for the weaver, he is dismissed from his employ. (*Ibid.*) *The web of life*:—Life is like a web of which man is the weaver, and the threads may at any moment be cut by the master, and the weaver dismissed from the loom. I. LIFE IS LIKE A WEB, OF WHICH GOD SUPPLIES THE MATERIALS, AND OF WHICH MAN IS THE WEAVER. 1. God supplies the warp of life. (1) This consists partly of a man's capacities and partly of a man's circumstances. It is different in almost every case; but in each case it forms the material which lies at the basis of a man's life. No two men are exactly alike. One man enters life with a strong physical constitution. Another, perhaps his brother, enters into life a cripple. One man inherits a strong intellect, which in his boyhood puts him at the top of his school, and in his later years makes him the leader of his fellows. Another is born with a slow, dull comprehension. One man is born with tastes and tendencies which will make him an artist or a poet; another with passions which will sink him into the criminal class if they are allowed to develop. One man is weak in character, veering like the weather-cock with every breath of public opinion. Another has a strong character. He is firm and persistent, and allows no difficulty to discourage or distress him. How very different is the warp of life in these cases! (2) The warp of life comprises, moreover, a man's early surroundings, his parentage, his social position, his early education, his religious training. One man is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, another has the fiery liquid poured down his throat before he is many weeks old. One is surrounded by the sunshine of love and affluence; another enters life in the cold winds of adversity and cruel oppression. One man is born in a country village, and his early life is full of experiences of the external world in all its purity and beauty; another is born in a large town, amid the roar of traffic and the bustling excitement of city life. One is born in a land where the air is heavy with idolatry; another is surrounded with Christian influences. How different is the warp of life in all such cases! Now God supplies this; and it is not for any one of us to murmur at His arrangements. For this, at least, we know, that God requires of a man no more than he possesses. 2. The weft of life, as we conceive of it, consists of the desires and purposes and resolutions that we bring to bear upon our capacities and circumstances. There are some who weave with the coarse yarn of selfishness, who use their strong physical natures for the gratification of their bodily appetites, who allow their strong reasoning powers to lift them up in rebellion against God, who oppress and crush their weaker brethren with their firm wills and imperious natures. When a coarse thread is woven into a fine warp, the cloth is not good. Neither can that life be good which has a selfish purpose woven into the Divine plan. But there are others who weave with the fine yarn of Christian consecration, and the web of their lives cannot but be well pleasing in the sight of God. It is true that the weft of life is supplied to us as well as the warp, and yet each man possesses the power

to choose the thread that he will weave into his life. It is ours to choose either the selfish purpose or the Christ-like purpose. Any weaver may lay aside the yarn that his master has supplied to him, and substitute for it an inferior yarn and work with that. And that is exactly what many are actually doing. On the one side, the Divine Spirit is prompting him to all that is noble and good; and on the other side are the spirits of darkness, who cannot compel one single man to choose the wrong, but who can, and do tempt him to it; and if a man, either through indifference or presumption, allows himself to be influenced by that which is evil, for the life that is thus marred he is accountable to God. II. GOD KNOWS BEST OF ALL WHEN THE WEB OF LIFE IS REALLY FINISHED. The Greeks believed that the fates were spinning the web of human life, and that they determined when it should be cut off from the loom. Ours is a truer and a more comforting creed. It is no cruel fate but a loving Father that determines for us the length of life's fabric. 1. We sometimes think that some lives are ended before they are completed. What means the broken column, so frequently to be seen in our cemeteries, but that some mourning friend thinks that one life, perhaps dearer than any other life, has been cut off before it is completed. But God knows best when a life is really finished. Every life is finished when God's purpose in that life has been fulfilled. The life of Jesus only reached over thirty-three short years; but no one thinks of suggesting that it would have been better if He had lived to be sixty. His work was finished. 2. Again, are there not many who seem to us to have lived long after their work on earth was over? It may be that in the patient waiting of their lives, in the dim glory of their eventide, He has some threads for them to weave into the warp that He has supplied. 3. But after the fabric has been rolled up, it must be unrolled again. How few are there who can, without emotion, take a retrospect of their past life! To some it is a punishment greater than they can bear! And is there any man, however good, who can think of the past without regret? The memory of God's goodness, indeed, may fill him with gratitude, and joy, and wonder; but the recollection of his share in life's fabric must fill him with grief and shame. And this life must be unrolled before the searching eye of the Great Master, in the fierce light that beats about His throne. "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." How can we bear to present such imperfect and sin-stained lives to God? Let us take courage. For are there not some standing before the throne whose lives were no better than ours? How can they stand there? "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And we, too, can receive forgiveness and cleansing where they received it. The Great Master might well say that such clumsy and faithless weavers as we are should have no place in His service and in His home. But He will receive us for the sake of His dear Son. (*Ibid.*) *Two typical cases: Judas Iscariot and Paul:*—Judas Iscariot was a man of whose capacities we know little. We may infer, however, that he possessed some valuable gifts, or his brethren in the apostolate would never have assigned to him the important office of purse-bearer and almoner to the little band. His circumstances, we know, were unusually good. He was drawn, with the other apostles, to the feet of Jesus by the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. For three years he accompanied our Lord in His journeys. He heard the discourses to which He gave utterance, and he lived under the influence of His character. This was the warp of his life. But what does he weave into it? Is it avarice, or is it vindictiveness, or is it a conceited idea that he can force the triumph of his Master. or is it bitter disappointment at the spiritual character of Christ's kingdom, that forms the weft of his life? Whatever it is, it is a dark, coarse thread. Satan enters into him. He betrays his Master even with the kiss of loyalty and affection. And when he comes to look at the web that he has woven, he himself is so overwhelmed with grief and remorse, that he cuts himself off from the loom. "He went, and departed, and hanged himself." Saul of Tarsus was a very different man; a man of weak physical constitution, but of strong intellect; a man of deep conscientiousness and rousing enthusiasm. Brought up in a comfortable home and trained in the Pharisaism of his day, he weaves into his early life a simply lurid thread of persecution of the Christians. Jesus meets him on the way to Damascus, and he gives himself up completely to the influences that are brought to bear upon him. How changed his life is! He has severe physical sufferings to endure; he has persecutions innumerable to face; but inwoven into all the threads of the Divine providence is the grand purpose of consecration to Christ's service. Henceforth the motto of his life is, "To me to live is Christ." Christ is the aim of all his

labours, of all his sufferings, of all his successes. And now that that life is unrolled for us in the Scriptures it is acknowledged to be one of the noblest and best ever lived upon earth. (*Ibid.*) *The life of Jesus*:—But even that life pales before the resplendent glory that streams forth from the one perfect life upon earth, the life of Him who was at once the Son of Mary and the Son of God. Born in the stable of the inn at Bethlehem, bred in the humble home of Nazareth, pursuing the calling of a carpenter, He possessed little that men would covet. But that life was glorious, not because of its circumstances, but because of its high and holy purpose. "My Father's business," that was the aim that He set before Himself from the beginning; and that was the aim that He pursued to the close of His career. When at last the supreme moment has come, He can shout triumphantly, "It is finished." He has glorified God on the earth, He has finished the work that was given Him to do. Like His own seamless robe, His life was of one piece throughout. And He lived for us, He died for us. Trusting in Him, following in His footsteps, our lives may, in some measure, be like His. Humbler they can scarcely be; but are there any that are so full of glory? (*Ibid.*) *Human life a weaving*:—I. IT IS WORTH WHILE LOOKING AT THE WORK ITSELF. Now what is this? The formation of personal character. There are two great elements which might well correspond with the weaver's warp and woof. The first may represent the principles of scriptural trust in God; pardon, providence, hope, &c. These, like the weaver's warp, are strong and firmly fixed. The second are our own daily deeds. Each is a thread, woven into the character; both are necessary in cloth making: so are faith and works, in character weaving. Now observe about this work what it is. 1. The weaver's own. I do not mean that the materials, either before or after they are made up, belong to him, but the work itself. A thousand weavers may use the same wool in common, while the work of each will be the product of each individual workman. Now this is a solemn fact in character weaving. Every man is making, and must make, his own; nobody can make it for him, nor can God give it him. 2. It is a work of increasing progress. We have to choose, not whether the work shall go on, but only whether the work shall be good or bad. 3. It is a work of growing ease. It is difficult at first, but soon, and in proportion to the weaver's assiduity, he becomes dexterous, and may sing all day at his loom; ay, he shall have plenty to sing about too! So it is with character weaving. 4. It is a work of changeful feeling. We may be full of joy or grief, gaiety or gloom, only let the work go on. The finest cloth is often woven while we weep (Job vii. 6). Poor Job! You little thought what was in your loom then! Every age admires that work of yours! Christian weaver, do not think too much of your frames and feelings. II. IT IS WORTH WHILE LOOKING AT THE MATERIALS. These are the doctrines of truth, all the agencies of the Spirit, and particularly all the events of life, all the calls to self-denial, duty, trust and righteousness which our lot furnishes. Observe of them—1. They are like the weaver's wool, all supplied by the Master. And the Master gives that material which best suits the workman. 2. They are only materials after all. They are valuable for the cloth's sake, rather than for themselves. The man that works the worst material best, shall have the best pay and praise, and *vice versa*. Always remember that the part you play in life's drama is the choice of God, the manner of playing it alone is yours. These materials are abundant. The master never lacks them so that work should be short. Every workman has his hands full. III. IT IS WORTH WHILE LOOKING AT THE END. "I have cut off," &c. Observe—1. The fabric lasts for ever. Cloth wears out, character does not. 2. The work is over at death. The loom must then stop for ever. No unpicking bad work, finished or unfinished, bad or good. The shuttle is still, and the shears cut off the cloth, and it is delivered up. 3. The Master inspects it. Here, reputation will be nothing; character, all. It will be held up to the sun, εἰλικρίνεια. 4. The Master disposes of it according to its worth. In reviewing all this, think—(1) What a mercy it is we are spared and furnished for this work! (2) What a motive to begin the work early! (3) How soon shall we have nothing but our work left! Wealth, poverty, health, sickness, &c., all will be left behind! (*W. Wheeler.*)

Ver. 14. **I did mourn as a dove.**—"*I did mourn as a dove*":—The possessions of the world are often the means of lightening life's sorrows, and of increasing its enjoyments. What experience teaches us in this respect the Word of God allows. Prosperity is recognised by it as a subject for gratitude. But that riches in themselves are insufficient to make us happy is undeniable. At all seasons

the limitation of their power is obvious; but at no time does it appear more strikingly than when the king of terrors gives challenge to an earthly potentate, and he finds that "there is no discharge in that war." The history connected with our text will furnish us with an instance. I. THE CAUSES OF MOURNING. This image of mourning as a dove is not confined to this one passage (chap. lix. 11; Ezek. vii. 16; Nah. ii. 7). Now the plaintive mourning notes of the dove we will suppose to be descriptive of various classes of men of sorrow. 1. We will begin with those mourning from the same cause as the author of our text. It was pining sickness which wounded the monarch's spirit, and the prospect which it presented to him of certain dissolution. If, while as a dove you mourn plaintively, your mourning be dove-like because it is meek and submissive, still your mourning will be real. 2. Another source of mourning is the untowardness of worldly circumstances. 3. Other sources of sorrow are to be found in the coldness of former friends, the treachery of those whom you trusted, or persecution from those who should encourage and support. 4. Another common cause of mourning like a dove is the departure of endeared ones. 5. A further source of mourning is remembrance of iniquity. II. THEIR REMEDIES OR RELIEFS. 1. To the afflicted in body there is an obvious consolation—the possibility of their cure. The case before us is thus encouraging. Another support in bodily affliction is the conformity which it gives us to our Lord. Again, Jesus Christ hath "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." 2. What, next, is our relief in case of the wreck of worldly circumstances? The possession of wealth is no sure criterion of God's approval. If your earthly losses have brought you to reflection, and led you to a right judgment of worldly goods; if the changes and chances of this mortal life have induced you to set your affection on things above; if they have broken your proud spirit, brought you to Christ, and ensured you an interest in His "unsearchable riches," then mourn not as a dove, but sing as a lark. 3. We touch next on the grief which springs from dishonour done to us by familiar friends. We account this a curse: God may turn it into a blessing. We were wont to trust in man; we loved the creature with too ardent an attachment. Henceforth we think more of that Friend "who sticketh closer than a brother"; "who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"; concerning whom it is our privilege to exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" &c. If the ill-treatment of which we complain consists in persecution for righteousness' sake, our Lord's words in the beatitude supply all necessary consolation: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you," &c. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." 4. Separation from those we love was the fourth cause of mourning for which we were to seek for a relief. Though in lands remote, they tread the same earth. The rough ocean is kind to each of us: he bears on his bosom the swift messengers carrying the interchange of tokens that many waters cannot quench our love. The weeds of widowhood may be twined with flowers of cheerfulness; for "a defender of the widow is God in His holy habitation." The orphan's lamentation may be hushed; for God is "a Father of the fatherless." God can give "a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters." And is it a small thing that "the righteous are taken away from the evil to come"; that "they rest from their labours"; that they are "present with the Lord"? 5. The last source of mourning which we noticed was the remembrance of iniquity. Is the wound incurable? "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" (*T. W. Thompson, M.A.*) *Affliction the occasion of murmuring*:—"Like a crane," &c. I. AFFLICTIONS OFTEN LEAD TO RASH AND FOOLISH MURMURINGS. They often—1. Obscure God's goodness. 2. Lead us to forget past mercies. 3. Darken our future. II. AFFLICTIONS LEADING TO RASH AND FOOLISH MURMURINGS EXPOSE US TO GREAT MORAL DANGERS. We may, then—1. Wrongly interpret God's providence. 2. Lose the benefit which God intended. 3. Dishonour Him. 4. Bring discredit upon our religious profession. III. AFFLICTIONS HAVING LED TO RASH AND FOOLISH MURMURINGS, SUCH MURMURINGS SHOULD BE ACKNOWLEDGED. This will—1. Show our sense of the evil of our conduct. 2. Tend to repair the injury we may have done. 3. Obtain pardon from God. (*W. O. Lilley.*) **O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.**—*The oppressed soul seeking Divine interposition*:—If language was ever uttered by man, which all men ought to adopt; if a petition was ever presented by man, which all men ought to present before the mercy-seat, it is this. I. YOU ALL NEED SOME ONE TO UNDERTAKE FOR YOU. Some one to make your

cause his own, and to assist you in performing that work on the performance of which your everlasting happiness depends. You need some one to undertake—1. To support and comfort you under the trials of life, and carry you safely through them. 2. To be your guide through life. You need a guide, a counsellor, who knows not only what is in man, but what every man will prove to be in future life. But, if you need such a guide as it respects this world, how much more as it respects the world to come! 3. Still more do you need some one who will undertake to afford you effectual assistance in subduing your spiritual enemies, the enemies which oppose your salvation. 4. Most of all do you need some one who can and will undertake to plead your cause in heaven, and effect a reconciliation between you and your justly offended God. II. THERE IS NO ONE ON EARTH OR IN HEAVEN WHO IS BOTH ABLE AND WILLING TO UNDERTAKE FOR YOU, EXCEPT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *The Christian's grand resource:*—There is scarcely any feeling more painful than that of desolation. The Scriptures frequently refer to it. (Micah vii. 1, 2.) When this feeling first comes upon us, there is as it were a total prostration of strength. Consider—I. THE CHRISTIAN UNDER TRIAL. The text is applicable—1. To the young Christian just entering upon the duties of life. 2. To the young man entering upon his religious course. 3. To the Christian perplexed in the path of duty. 4. To the Christian under conviction of sin. 5. To the Christian in a state of grief for the loss of one near and dear to him. 6. To the Christian on his dying bed. 7. To the Christian as he stands before the Lord at His second advent. II. THE CHRISTIAN'S RESOURCE. The world has many resources. The Christian has but one. But that one is of infinitely greater worth than all those possessed by an unconverted and ungodly world. (*M. Villiers, M.A.*) *The burdened soul's relief:*—I. WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF YOUR OPPRESSION? 1. Is it some burden of sadness that has fallen upon you—some loss, or cross, or disappointment, that has shown you the fleeting uncertainty of all earthly treasures? 2. Is it some persecution of the ungodly? 3. Or do you stand perplexed by the foiling of some well-laid plan; or the unsuccessful issue of your efforts to remove the prejudices and enlighten the ignorance and improve the hearts of men? 4. Or do temptations beset you, almost too strong for flesh and blood to bear? 5. Is it not merely at the deceitfulness of your heart, but at its "desperate wickedness" that your heart sinks within you? II. WILL YOU NOT GO ON TO SAY, "O LORD, UNDERTAKE FOR ME"? 1. How doth God undertake for us? Is it by removing from the sinner all temptation to sin? Is it by taking from the afflicted and mourner the immediate cause of his affliction, and restoring all things according to his short-sighted wish? No, it is by a far different process. He will suggest to his heart good resolutions, and holy impulses; and if he cherish these, the spirit of Jesus will afford him measures of special grace. And as to him that is bowed down with sorrow—it is not God's way to reverse His sentence, and at once remove the cause. But He gives us such faith in Him, that we believe that "the thoughts which He thinketh towards us, are thoughts of peace, and not of evil." And in proportion as faith makes herself heard, the voice of fretting dies away. 2. What ground of confidence we have that God will undertake for us. (1) Have we not His own most sure promise? (2) Have we not the experience of all the servants of the most High? (3) But besides and beyond the Word of God and the experience of the saints—both of which the Israelites shared of old—we have the knowledge of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of all the fruits and consequences which grow out of that blessed doctrine. (*D. A. Beaufort, M.A.*) *The yearning for sympathy met in Christ:*—There is such a vast disproportion between a man and some of his own feelings—between the inner and the outer life of a man—that the wonder is, not that we should sometimes feel the burden of existence, but that there should be any man who should not be always saying, "I am oppressed." I. THERE ARE FEW MINDS WHO DO NOT LOOK OUT FOR SYMPATHY. It is an instinct of our nature, that we must lean somewhere. Almost all error, all superstition, all worldliness, resolves at last into the feeling that a man must lean; but he is leaning on a wrong base. It is upon this great principle in the man's breast that the Gospel lays hold and points it to Christ. It sets Him forth as the one great Undertaker for all His people's wants. II. WHAT ARE CHRIST'S UNDERTAKINGS FOR US? 1. He has undertaken to pay all our debts: they are very great. 2. He has undertaken that we shall never be alone. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." 3. He has undertaken that you shall never be really overcome. "My strength is made perfect in weakness." 4. He has undertaken to place you on the sunny side of everything all life through; for "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness,

but shall have the light of life." 5. He has undertaken that you shall always have a place of refuge. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour," &c. 6. He has undertaken that death shall be to you only a name, not a reality. "He that believeth on Me shall never die." (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *"Undertake for me":*—Hezekiah here represents his disease as a bailiff that had arrested him and was carrying him to the prison of the grave, and therefore prays that the Lord would bail him or rescue him out of his hands. (*J. Gill, D.D.*) *God needed in the dying hour:*—Ten days before the late Dean Burgon died he said, "Nothing but the Everlasting Arms can support me now." (*F. Harper, M.A.*) *The cry of an oppressed spirit:*—Our individuality is strong in suffering. The *ego* rises to throw off the chains that bind it. I. A CRY OF AN OPPRESSED SPIRIT. The human spirit is oppressed with—1. Sin. 2. Circumstance. 3. Trouble. 4. Mysteries of life. II. A CRY ADDRESSED TO THE TRUE HELPER. 1. God alone can undertake the cause of the soul. 2. He alone can bring true deliverance. 3. He will deliver those who seek Him. 4. His deliverances are eternal. (*W. O. Lilley.*)

Ver. 15. **What shall I say?**—*A bewildered soul:*—Such an exclamation escaped from the lips of Joshua, and it was the language of bitter disappointment, for Israel fled before their enemies (Josh. vii. 8). The same words were uttered by our adorable Lord when His soul was overwhelmed with grief in the prospect of His agonies and bloody sweat, His cross and sacrificial death (John xii. 27). Here it is the language of one who was filled with perplexity by the dispensations of Divine Providence. Such is the case with us sometimes; our circumstances are so painful, so different from what we anticipated, that in bewilderment we exclaim, "What shall I say?" We must say—1. That God's dealings are very mysterious. 2. That the words of Jesus are still true, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." 3. That some of God's promises require strong faith to believe them. 4. That God will do just as He pleases with His own children. 5. That the trial of faith is often very severe, exceedingly painful. 6. That patience and perseverance are required under our trials. 7. That when Satan hinders, none but God can effectually help; therefore we must look to Him. 8. That however rough the road, the end will more than make up for its toils and trials, for the end shall be blessed. (*James Smith.*) **I shall go softly all my years.**—*Past troubles remembered:*—The Revised Version has it: "I shall go softly all my years, because of the bitterness of my soul." The marginal reading of the Revised Version is: "I shall go in solemn procession all my years because of the bitterness of my soul." That "because of" means—since I hold in memory the bitterness of my soul. So that we may state the significance of our Scripture thus: I will walk henceforth in solemn, subdued, reverent way, remembering always and thankfully the bitterness out of which my soul has been delivered. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *Escape from death gives a new meaning to life:*—Hereafter he should walk with the step and the mien of a conqueror; or with the carefulness of a worshipper who sees at the end of his course the throne of the Most High God, and makes all his life an ascent thither. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Outlook in affliction:*—I. A WISE RESOLVE. Reckless ambition is folly. Our stage of action is polluted, insecure, and vanishing. We are weak and dying. To walk in humility, self-distrust, and holy fear is wisdom. II. ITS CAUSE. Afflictions change our views of life. They change us. Wisdom is often born out of soul-bitterness. A severe affliction should be an epoch in a man's life. It should pluck out his follies, and make his future a more tender, gentle, lovable thing. (*W. O. Lilley.*)

Ver. 16. **O Lord, by these things men live.**—*Affliction as related to life:*—The conception and quality of life as affected by the discipline of any form of trial—that is the topic. I. Take THE CONCEPTION OF LIFE AS A WHOLE, and see how that is modified or altered by experiences like those through which Hezekiah passed. They who have had no such critical experience in any form have never fully awakened to the difference which there is between mere existence and life. In sleep there is as real existence as when we are awake; but what a paltry thing life would be if it were to be a constant sleep! Yet there are those among us in whom, though their time may be busily occupied, and though their intellects may be keen and vigilant, the spirit slumbers. They are like the landowner on whose estate there is an undiscovered silver mine, who is no richer for his hidden wealth, and who cannot be said even to possess it. Nothing has come to reveal them to themselves, or to give them any vivid sense of the existence of God and their

relationship to Him. Nothing has opened their eyes to the possibilities of life that are yet undeveloped in them. One day has been to them like another; and the unbroken monotony of their experience has fostered in them the expectation that things will always continue with them as they have always been. Thus they verify the psalmist's words, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." But when something like that which came to Hezekiah comes to them, then there is a thorough, if also a rude, awakening, and they discover that they have yet to begin to live. One may easily see this exemplified in the votary of pleasure. Or take the case of him whose object in existence has been the accumulation of wealth. II. Passing to THE QUALITY OF THE LIFE. we may see how that also is affected by such experiences of affliction. Here many features of character are evoked or developed by trial. 1. There is the element of strength, whether in its passive exercise as patient endurance, or in its active manifestation as persevering energy. The poet has caught the truth when he bids his readers "learn to suffer and be strong." He who has known no affliction is easily worn out. The old sailor, who has been all but shipwrecked, is not dismayed by a summer squall. It is the same with life as a whole. You will find the strongest characters always among those who have been most sorely afflicted. We ought, then, to be reconciled to the afflictions by which alone it can be developed. 2. We can see that experiences like this of Hezekiah have a great influence in producing unselfishness in a man. When a man has been in the grip of the last enemy, and has recovered; or has been within a little of losing all he had, and has escaped, you can understand how such an experience sends him out of himself. It intensifies for him the idea of life as a stewardship for God, and he sees the folly of making all the streams of his effort run into himself. Howard's life of benevolence was the outcome of a critical illness; and of multitudes more than of him it can be said that they sloughed off their selfishness in the crucible of trial. 3. But it is only a broadening out of this remark when I affirm that sympathy is born out of such experiences as those of Hezekiah. He who would be a helper must first be a sufferer. He who would be a saviour must somewhere and somehow have been upon a cross. 4. Experiences like Hezekiah's have much to do with the usefulness of a man's life. Usefulness is not a thing which one can command at will. It is, in most cases, the result of a discipline; and is possessed by those who, in a large degree, are unconscious that they are exercising it. It depends fully more on what a man is than on what he does, or, if it is due to what he does or says, that again is owing very much to what he is, and what he is now has been determined by the history through which he has been brought. You see that in the case of a physician. His experience goes far more to the making of him than his college training has done. It is so, also, in spiritual things. The helpfulness of another to us in the prosecution of the Christian life is determined more by his personal experience than by his intellectual pre-eminence. Here is the secret of the difference between one man and another in the matter of pulpit power. I must add one word of caution. It is not every affliction that works out such results; and whether any trial will do so or not depends entirely on the spirit in which it is borne. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Luther's life enriched by trial*:—Luther was wont to say that his three great teachers were prayer, study, and trial; and any reader of his life can perceive that if he had been required in the early part of his career to face some of the dangers which menaced him at a later date he would have faltered in his course. But through the minor experience he gained strength for the severer ordeal; and so it came about that what would have appalled him at the outset made almost as little impression on him at the last as "the whistling of the idle wind that he regarded not." (*Ibid.*) *Sympathy engendered by trouble*:—Those of us who have lost little children feel a prompting within us to speak a word of comfort to every parent who is passing through a similar experience. Indeed, it was in connection with an affliction of that sort that my attention was first drawn to this text. I had just a few weeks before buried a beloved daughter, the light of the household, and had gone to attend a meeting of Synod where an honoured minister, who had been through the same trial oftener than once before, came up to me and took me by the hand, and said to me, with a reference to my sorrow, "By these things men live." That was all, but each successive year since then has given a new verification of his words, for oh! how often in the interval have I been enabled to comfort others with the comfort with which I have been comforted of God, and the efficacy of the consolation lay largely in the fact that it was offered by one who had proved its value for himself. (*Ibid.*) *The life of*

the spirit :—Whosoever is really alive, that is, has life in his spirit, the life of a man and not a beast, the only life which is worthy to be called life, then that life is kept up in him in the same way that it was kept up in Hezekiah. Let us see, then, what things they were which gave Hezekiah's spirit life. 1. Great joy, great honour, great success, wealth, health, prosperity, and pleasure? Not so! 2. Trouble upon trouble came on Hezekiah. 3. Death looked to him an ugly and an evil thing—as it is; the Lord's last enemy. He conquered death by rising from the dead: but nevertheless we die. Hezekiah lived before the Lord Jesus came to bring life and immortality to light by rising from the dead; and, therefore, he dreaded it, because he knew not what would come after death. He prayed hard not to die. 4. What was the use of his sickness and his terror if, after all, his prayer was heard, and after the Lord had told him, "Thou shalt die, and not live" —that did not come to pass; but the very contrary happened? Of this use, at least; it taught him that the Lord God would hear the prayers of mortal men. Is not that worth going through any misery to learn? Hezekiah did not pray rightly. He thought himself a better man than he was. But he did pray. And then he found that the Lord was ready to save him; that what the Lord wished was not to kill him, but to make him live more really and fully and wisely and manfully. 5. What Hezekiah saw but dimly we ought to see clearly. For the Gospel tells us that the same Lord who chastened and taught and then saved Hezekiah, was made flesh, that He might in His own person bear all our sickness and carry our infirmities; that He might understand all our temptations and be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He who made, He who lightens every man who comes into the world, He who gave you every right thought and wholesome feeling that you ever had in your lives—He counts your tears; He knows your sorrows; He is able and willing to save you to the uttermost. Therefore do not be afraid of your own afflictions. (*C. Kingsley, M.A.*) *Spoil from the fight with death* :—Hope and joy returned with restored health, and we see (vers. 16–20) what Hezekiah brought back with him from his fight with death—1. A new peace. 2. Forgiveness. 3. A new sense of the dignity of life, and of the encompassing eternal realities. 4. A joyful sense of God's personal love for him. (*E. W. Shalders, B.A.*) *Physical benefit may accrue from sickness* :—Strange as it may appear, it is no less true that life is often lengthened and health invigorated by a sharp illness. Like a ship put in dock for repairs, an illness or an accident lays a man aside for a time out of the reach of work and worry, and the rest of mind and body restores the balance of his exhausted energies. Typhus fever successfully treated often clarifies the whole system, just as a chimney is cleansed by setting it on fire; and a severe illness often acts as a solemn warning, leading men to consider their ways and their work, and to diminish the strain which is overtaxing the system, or to give up some vicious habit of self-indulgence which is laying the axe to the root of the tree. (*W. Johnston, D.D.*) *The uses of affliction* :—The allusion of our text is not to the life of the body, but to that which is far more important, the life of the soul. In what manner does severe sickness or affliction of any kind conduce, by the blessing of God, to the creation and development of our spiritual life? I. AFFLICTION TEACHES US OUR ENTIRE DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. II. AFFLICTION DISROBES US OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. Hezekiah yielded to the insidious promptings of self-righteousness and self-glorification. Affliction was the disrobing process through which he was called upon to pass, the school in which he must learn his unworthiness as well as his weakness. And in this disrobing of all self-righteousness there was the life of his spirit. III. AFFLICTION BRINGS US TO REALISE AND ENJOY THE FULNESS OF CHRIST. When Hezekiah was awakened to a sense of his want of righteousness before God, he expected to go softly in the bitterness of his soul all the years of his life. But the self-righteous idea of innocence and excellence is no longer the broken spear on which to lean and pierce his hand. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen with healing in His wings; bitterness and disquietude pass away together, and Hezekiah is made to see what he had never seen so clearly before—that in love to his soul, the Lord, his God in covenant, had afflicted his body, had thus delivered his soul from the pit of corruption, and had cast all his sins behind His back. IV. SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION STIMULATES US IN CHRISTIAN WORK. Hezekiah learned on the bed of sickness that there are but twelve hours in the day, that the night cometh when no man can work, and that the brief period of life must be diligently and devoutly improved. And it is when laid upon the bed of severe sickness, with time in the past and eternity in the near future, that we shall realise in all its solemnity the

importance and responsibility of life, and resolve, if spared like Hezekiah yet a little longer to recover strength before we go hence to be no more, that our chief end shall be to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever. (*Ibid.*) *The life of the spirit*:—Hezekiah was a rich and prosperous king. Surrounded by the dignities of rank, the refinements of elegance, and the gratifications of voluptuousness, he, doubtless, viewed these as the very end and delight of his being, and wished for nothing, knew of nothing better or beyond them. No; very different was his character; very different were the things of which he spake. These words were not uttered in "the house of his armour," but in the chamber of his sickness; not at the festive table of his royal banquets, but upon the couch of lassitude and pain. Let us endeavour, by a few examples, to verify his pensive contemplation; and this, that we may learn "so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." 1. Take the case of a professed scoffer at religion. He is arrested, we will suppose, by the arm of Omnipotence, in his profligate course; he is thrown by a stronger hand than his own upon the couch of pain and dejection; he learns for the first time to tremble; we will suppose him humbled, converted. Sanctified affliction was the first step. This softened the stony ground: this prepared the heart for holy impressions. Will not such a one be ready to exclaim with Hezekiah, "By these things men live, and by these is the life of the spirit"? 2. Imagine a man careless and indifferent to religion, though not a hardened scoffer. He is too busy with the world to spend a thought upon his eternal safety. But God brings him low. In the silence and solitude of affliction he is forced to think. What cause will such a one have for ever to bless Him who wounds that He may heal, who kills that He may make alive! 3. Let us imagine an inconsistent backsliding Christian brought into deep affliction. He returns to Him whom he had forsaken. 4. Look at the Pharisee. God brings him within sight of death and eternity. He is unmasked to himself, and begins to exclaim, "What must I do to be saved?" What a blessing has affliction been to such a character! 5. The dejected Christian. How often has such a one had reason to exclaim of afflictions, that "by these things men live"! The season of weakness and distress is often that which God selects for the brightest manifestations of His love and tenderness. (*Family Sermons.*) *The restoration of belief*:—In the especial case of Hezekiah, belief was restored by a great shock, which brought him into contact with reality. God appeared to him—not as to Adam, in the cool of the day, but as He came to Job, in the whirlwind and the eclipse—and Hezekiah knew that he had been living in a vain show. The answer of his soul was quick and sad: "By these things men live, O Lord." I. THE BLOW WHICH SOBERED HEZEKIAH WAS A COMMON ONE. It did nothing more than bring him face to face with death. The process whereby his dependence on God was restored was uncomplicated. But there are far worse shocks than this, and recovery from them into a Godlike life is long and dreadful. There are things which at first seem to annihilate belief, and change an indifferent or a happy nature into earnest, even savage bitterness. One of these is the advent of irrecoverable disease, protracted weakness, or protracted pain. God forgives our human anger then, but we speak roughly to Him at first. It is a dark anger, and may grow in intensity till faith and love are lost for this life; but it will not reach that point if we have some greatness of soul, if we are open to the touch of human love. One day the Gospel story in all its sweet simplicity attracts and softens the sufferer's heart. He reads that Christ's suffering in self-sacrifice brought redemption unto man. Surely, he seems to dream this is no isolated fact. I too, in my apparent uselessness, am at one with the Great Labourer: I bear with Christ my cross for men. This is not only the restoration of belief, it is the victory of life. II. BUT THERE ARE MORE DREADFUL THINGS THAN LONG DISEASE. There is that shipwreck which comes of dishonoured love. Many things are terrible, but none is worse than this. In some there is no remedy but death, and far beyond the immanent tenderness of God. But there are many who recover, whom God leads out of the desert into the still garden of an evening life of peace and usefulness and even joy. Lapse of time does part of the work. In the quietude of middle life we look back upon our early misery, and only remember the love we felt. Faith is restored, hope is renewed, when, like Christ, you can turn and say, Father, forgive him, forgive her, for they knew not what they did. III. There have been and are many of us who are conscious that, as we have passed into the later period of life and mingled with the world, OUR EARLY FAITH HAS ALSO PASSED AWAY. We have lost belief because our past religion was borrowed too much from others. If we wish for perfection, and are not content to die and

love no more, the restoration of belief may be attained by the personal labour of the soul. It is worth trying what one personal effort to bring ourselves into the relation of a child to a father, in all the naturalness and simplicity of that relation, will do towards restoring faith and renewing life with tenderness. (*S. A. Brooke, D.D.*)

Vers. 17–19. **Behold, for peace I had great bitterness.**—*Hezekiah's return of praise for his recovery*:—I. A SAD, HEAVY AFFLICTION. "Behold, for peace," &c. The affliction is aggravated—1. By a description of it in its own nature. (1) In the quality of it—"bitterness." (2) In the quantity of it—"great bitterness." 2. By opposition of the blessing which is removed—"peace"; a word that comprehends all temporal blessings, and more particularly is taken, in Holy Writ, for health—a blessing without which all other blessings have no relish in them. 3. By the surprise of it—"Behold!" as a strange thing. 4. And this further aggravated it, if we understand it, as we must in a spiritual sense—that, his sickness calling his sins to remembrance, and causing some distrust of God's love, instead of that peace of conscience he had had heretofore, his spirit was now troubled and greatly embittered. And "a wounded spirit, who can bear?" II. A MERCIFUL DELIVERANCE OUT OF THIS AFFLICTION. "Thou hast in love," &c. The mercy of the deliverance wants not its heightening circumstances; as—1. From the efficient cause. It was God delivered him. 2. From the motive or impulsive cause—"love." 3. From the danger he was delivered out of, and that no ordinary one—"a pit"—"the pit of corruption," even the grave. III. A BLESSED IMPROVEMENT OF THIS MERCY. "For Thou hast cast," &c. This is the crown of mercies, when temporals are thus accumulated with spirituals; this a recovery indeed, of the whole man, when health is improved unto salvation, and strength of body accompanied with pardon of sins. This is right "saving health." IV. A THANKFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THIS IMPROVED MERCY. That is set forth—1. By showing the impossibility for the dead to perform this duty. 2. And then showing, not the possibility only, but the probability, that the living will, *i.e.*, such as Divine mercy continues in life, and especially such as are by that mercy preserved from imminent danger of death. 3. Exemplified in himself. "As I do this day." (*A. Littleton, D.D.*) *The pains and pleasures attending religion*:—I. THE FELICITOUS CONDITION OF THE GOOD HEZEKIAH IN THE POSSESSION OF PEACE. Shall I speak of him as a man enjoying health in his body; as a king blessed with prosperity and tranquillity through all his dominions? These are invaluable privileges. Rather let us consider him as a sinner whose conscience has been sprinkled with the blood of Christ, by virtue of which he enjoys that peace which consists in a sweet sense of the Divine friendship. II. ATTEND HEZEKIAH WHEN HIS PEACE IS FOLLOWED BY TROUBLE. III. REFLECT ON THE LOVE OF GOD, DISPLAYED TOWARDS HEZEKIAH in lengthening out his life and pardoning all his sins. (*John Rippon.*) *The assurance of faith*:—I. THE DISTRESS Hezekiah was in before our Saviour spoke peace to him, and delivered him from his sins. II. THE ASSURANCE he had of being pardoned and accepted by his Heavenly Father and saved; and how boldly he testifies that this must be the case with all the children of God. III. THE CAUSE OF ALL, which he says was the love of Jehovah to him. (*John Cennick.*) *The purpose of God's love* is to draw us away from all pits, dejections, humiliations, prostrations, and to give us life, vigour, triumph, sense and guarantee of immortality. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Love's medicines and miracles*:—I. HEALTHFUL BITTERNESS. You have it in the first sentence, which runs in Hebrew very nearly as follows: "Behold, to peace (or to health) my bitter bitterness." This means—1. That Hezekiah underwent a great, sad, and unexpected change. Let us never boast ourselves of to-morrow, for we know not what a day may bring forth. 2. Hezekiah's condition was one of emphatic sorrow, for he says, "Behold, to peace, Marah, Marah—bitter, bitter." Marah was a notable spot in the journeys of the children of Israel, and Hezekiah had come spiritually to a double Marah. Have you ever passed that way and drank of double bitterness—the wormwood and the gall? Some of us know what it means, for we have had at the same time a body racked with pain, and a soul full of heaviness. Perhaps the double Marah has come in another form: it is a time of severe trouble, and just then the friend in whom you trusted has forsaken you. Or, peradventure, you are in temporal difficulties, and at the same time in great spiritual straits. The flying fish is pursued by a fierce enemy in the sea,

and when it flies into the air birds of prey are eager after it; in like manner, both in temporal and spiritual things we are assailed. "Deep calleth unto deep." 3. The meaning of our verse is not at all exhausted by this explanation; we find in it a better meaning by far. "Behold, to peace bitter bitterness"—that is to say, the king's double bitterness wrought his peace and health. Take the word in the sense of health first. Many a time when a man has been exceedingly ill the medicine which has met his case has been intensely disagreeable to the taste; but it has operated as a strengthening tonic, it has purged away the cause of the malady, and the man has recovered. Hezekiah bore witness that God had sanctified his bodily sickness and his mental sorrow to his spiritual health. While he lay with his face to the wall, he read a great deal upon that wall which he had seen nowhere else. The king's bitterness of soul led him to repent of his wrong-doing, as he saw wherein he had sinned. 4. This bitter bitterness made Hezekiah see the need of his God more than ever he had seen it before. II. LOVING DELIVERANCE. The original runs thus: "And Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of destruction." Taken in its first sense, the king ascribes to the love of God his deliverance from death and the grave, and praises God for his restoration to the land of the living. But the words of inspired men frequently have a deeper significance than appears upon the surface, and indeed they often conceal an inner sense which perhaps they themselves did not perceive, and hence the king's words are as dark sayings upon a harp full of meaning within meaning. At any rate, taking the language out of the mouth of Hezekiah, we will use it for expressing our own emotions, and give to it a wider sense if such be not the original range of its meaning. Let us notice three things. 1. The deed of grace: "Thou hast brought my soul from the pit of corruption." (1) From the pit of hell. (2) Of sinfulness, as horrible a pit as hell itself; indeed, under some aspects it is the same thing, for sinfulness is hell, and to live under the power of sin is to be condemned. (3) From the awful consciousness of wrath under which we once groaned. 2. The power which performed it. Love. Divine love is a *catholicon*, a universal medicine. No spiritual disease can resist its healing power. 3. The *modus operandi* of this love. "Thou hast embraced my soul out of the pit of corruption." Yonder is the child in the pit, and the father, wishing to save it, goes down into the pit and embraces his beloved one, and so brings him up to life and safety again. After this manner did Jesus save us. He embraced us by taking our nature, and so becoming one with us. All our lives He communes with us, and embraces us with arms of mighty love, and so uplifts us from the pit of corruption. III. ABSOLUTE PARDON. "For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." This King Hezekiah mentions as the cause of his restored peace and health. Sin was the foreign element in his spiritual constitution, and as long as it was there it caused fret and worry and spiritual disease. Notice—1. The burden. Sins. 2. The owner of this burden. "My sins." 3. The comprehensiveness of the burden. "All my sins." The Lord comes to deal with them. He casts them behind His back. Where can that be? It means annihilation, non-existence. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it.**—*Miracles of love*:—"Thou hast loved my soul out of the pit of corruption" (margin). I. We were in the beginning LOVED INTO GRACE. 1. The love of Christ to sinners was the topic which arrested our solemn attention to the Gospel. 2. We sat in the region of the shadow of death, and would have remained there had we not been loved into faith. 3. At the time when faith came into our hearts, there came with it the sister grace, namely, repentance. II. We have been LOVED INTO GROWTH IN GRACE. The great motive power urging us onward has always been the self-same love of God. The Lord loves us out of love to sin. He loves us out of the pit of idolatry. There is another pit of corruption into which children of God sometimes fall, namely, that of sluggishness. The only effectual cure for a slumbering Christian is to let him have the love of Christ shed abroad in his heart. The same is true of that abominable pit of selfishness and self-esteem and pride and self-seeking, into which our feet so easily glide. The love of Christ is equally a cure for despondency and unbelief. Many a child of God can bear witness that the Lord has loved him out of his impatience. III. The Lord will LOVE US OUT OF GRACE INTO GLORY. (*Ibid.*) *Deliverance from destruction*:—I have heard a story of a man, who, travelling late and being in drink, rode over a narrow footbridge where there was a great, deep water underneath, that the least trip of the horse's foot would have posted the rider to his long home. Next morning, when he came to himself,

being asked which way he came, and brought to the place, the apprehension of his last night's adventure did so astonish his sober thoughts, that he fell down dead in the very place at the sight of it. And when we look back upon the follies and vanities of our past lives, how can we but be justly startled, when almost every step we have trod has been upon the brink of destruction! (*A. Littleton, D.D.*) *Soul-pits* abound. I. THE PIT. 1. Horrible. 2. Nigh to every man. 3. Treacherous at its edge. 4. Bottomless. II. ONE CONSCIOUS OF DELIVERANCE FROM IT. 1. He attributes his deliverance to God. 2. That it was God's love, and not his merit, that originated his deliverance. 3. That all may possess this consciousness of deliverance. 4. That unless the soul is delivered it will sink into this pit eternally. (*W. O. Lilley.*) **Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.**—*A sense of pardoned sin*:—I. A SENSE OF PARDON AS GIVEN BY GOD TO THE SINNER. 1. We are not to wait for this sense of pardon before we come to Christ. 2. This consciousness of pardon includes many things, although it is not alike comprehensive in all souls. 3. But, saith one, "How does this sense of pardon come?" It comes in different ways and forms. Many men receive their consciousness of pardon in an instant. With others it is of slower growth. This conviction is sometimes conveyed to us in the most extraordinary manner. I have known it brought home to the soul by some singular saying of a minister. At other times, some strange providence has been the singular means of giving joy and relief. 4. Permit me to dwell upon the joy which this sense of pardon creates. It is but taking God at His word, when the soul knows that as a necessary consequence of its faith it is saved. But, besides that, the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are born of God. II. A SENSE OF FORGIVENESS ENJOYED BY MAN, NOT AS A SINNER, BUT AS A PARDONED CHILD. I have sometimes heard uninstructed Christians ask how it is that when a man is once pardoned he has nevertheless to ask every day that his sins may be forgiven. The difficulty lies in a forgetfulness of the relationship which Christians sustain to God. As a sinner I come to Christ and trust Him. God is then a Judge; He takes the great book of the court, strikes out my sins, and acquits me. At the same moment, out of His great love, He adopts me into His family. Now I stand in quite a different relationship to Him. I am not so much His subject as His child. He is no longer to me a Judge, but has become a Father. And now I have new laws, a new discipline, new treatment; now I have new obedience. I go and do wrong. What then? Does the Judge come and at once summon me before His throne? No! He is a Father, and that Father brings me up before His face, and frowns on me—nay, takes the rod and begins to scourge me. He never scourged me when He was a Judge. Then, He only threatened to use the axe. If I do that which is wrong, I am bound to go to Him as on a child's knees, and say, "Our Father which art in heaven, forgive me these trespasses, as I forgive them that trespass against me." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Pardon realised*:—The strangest story I ever remember to have read, with regard to peace given after a long season of despondency, is the case of Mrs. Honeywood. Living in puritanic times, she had been accustomed to hear the most thundering of its preachers. She became so thoroughly broken in peace with the consciousness of sin, that for, I think, some ten years, if not twenty years, the poor woman was given up to despair. It seemed that in this case, a kind of miracle must be wrought to give her peace of mind. One day, an eminent minister of Christ, conversing with her, told her there yet was hope. Grasping a Venice glass that stood on the table, made of the thinnest material that can be conceived, the woman dashed it down on the ground, and said—"I am lost, as sure as that glass is broken into a thousand pieces." To her infinite surprise, the glass suffered no damage whatever, but remained without a crack. From that instant she believed that God had spoken to her. She opened her ears to hear the words of the minister, and peace poured into her spirit. (*Ibid.*) *Sins behind God's back*:—The back of God! Where is that? I. A MAN'S SINS. May be—1. Many. 2. Various. 3. Heinous. (1) They are his curse. (2) He cannot cast them away. (3) He must own them for ever unless Divine mercy interpose. II. THEIR DIVINE REMOVAL. 1. God alone has the right to cast them away. 2. God alone can. 3. He removes them so as to see them no more for ever. 4. He casts all sin away that is repented of. (*W. O. Lilley.*)

Vers. 18, 19. **For the grave cannot praise Thee.**—*The praiseful life*:—

Bacon says, "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity is the blessing of the New." He would have been nearer the truth had he said, that temporal blessings were the promise of the Old Testament, spiritual blessings the promise of the New. The remark, however, suggests thoughts introductory to the consideration of our text from a Christian standpoint. 1. The Jews were for the most part influenced by the prospect of temporal rewards and punishments. Hezekiah in this place seems to have no thought of a future life, and to be moved only by the prospect of leaving this. There is a development in revelation, in this as in other matters. 2. When our Lord came, the germ of the doctrine of the future life, only dimly discernible to the spiritual mind, was developed. I. THE DEAD CANNOT PRAISE GOD. 1. This is true of natural death. The hands once strong to labour are now nerveless and still, there is no "disquisition" in the eyes, and the heart is unmoved by the things of joy and grief that thrilled it in life. 2. It is true of spiritual death, of which natural is in the New Testament the constant type. II. THE LIVING MUST PRAISE GOD. 1. The natural duty of praising God is recognised by Hezekiah; and it would be strange if it were not so, for we have a loathing of ingratitude from man to man. (1) The pagans would shame us if we did not praise God; for they gave the first fruits of their corn and the best of the prey taken in hunting as offerings to their gods, and before a feast made libations to them. (2) The Psalmist is an eminent example of a praiseful spirit. 2. But those who have been partakers of the spiritual resurrection can alone truly praise God, for they alone can fully realise all His bounty. (1) God has designed all things to His praise, and looks for it in His people. (2) We must thank Him for all things, for "the blessings of this life, but above all for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world." Nay, for miseries as well as for mercies. (3) A stimulus to praise will be found in the remembrance of God's bounty. In the Greek mythology, Mnemosyne was the mother of the Muses; memory is the mother of praise. 3. But the most perfect praise will be in the spiritual body after the resurrection. (*J. G. Pilkington, M.A.*) *Hezekiah in prospect of death*:—Hezekiah was, in the full sense of the word, a good king. His piety is shown—(1) In his conduct with reference to idolatry. (2) In his conduct in the matter of the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib. But there are two passages in his life which show the weak side of his character. One is his parading his treasures before the ambassadors of the king of Babylon; the other is his conduct in the matter of his severe illness. I. The essence of the history is this, that IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH HEZEKIAH'S STRENGTH OF MIND QUITE BROKE DOWN. He looks upon death as a thing to be dreaded and shunned; he speaks of it in a way in which no Christian who has learned the Lord's prayer could ever venture or even wish to speak of it. Hezekiah knew that he must serve God while life lasted; he had manifestly no express revelation beyond, and therefore he looked upon the grave with dismay. II. WE HAVE GREATER SPIRITUAL HELP THAN HEZEKIAH, and brighter light, and clearer grounds of hope, and it is incumbent on us to act, not like those who groped their way in the twilight of the old dispensation, but like those upon whom the brightness of the knowledge of the glory of God has shined in the face of Jesus Christ. (*Bp. Harvey Goodwin, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. **The living, the living, he shall praise Thee.**—*The right life*:—The right life is a praise-giving life. Such a life is—I. THE MOST HONOURABLE. II. THE MOST BENEFICIAL TO THE MAN HIMSELF. III. THE MOST BENEFICIAL TO OTHERS. "The father to the children shall make known Thy truth." IV. THE CONSIDERATION OF THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE OUGHT TO INDUCE US TO SPEND OUR TIME IN PRAISING GOD. Hezekiah felt that the years given him to live on the earth would soon come to an end, hence the emphasis placed on "the living, the living." (*Homilist.*) *The praise of the living*:—I. THE WORSHIPPER. "The living." II. THE OBJECT AND NATURE OF THE PRAISE RENDERED. The prolongation of life is a legitimate cause for Christian thanksgiving. It is only in our state as "the living" that we have an opportunity of uttering that which we may term practical and generative praise—a praise which induces others to join us in our work—a praise which begets praise, and tends to propagate itself, by God's blessing, throughout the length and breadth of an ungrateful world. It is evident that Hezekiah referred to such praise as this; for he says, "The father to the children shall make known Thy truth." (*D. F. Jarman, B.A.*) *The value and use of life*:—I. THE DUTY OF SERIOUSLY MEDITATING ON OUR BEING MERCI-

FULLY SPARED among the living. It is right and rational to rejoice in this prolongation of your life; but such rejoicing is useless, unless it be founded on a serious thought of the blessing received. To rejoice in being alive, for the sole selfish enjoyment which you hope to derive from life, is nothing better than the natural instinct of a mere animal. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF SUCH A BLESSING. There is nothing in creation more amazing than what is called life; a miracle, indeed, perpetually witnessed, and therefore generally overlooked; but curious to be contemplated, and most difficult to be comprehended in its various attendant circumstances. 1. As a mere object of curiosity, a mere piece of machinery, the lowest living creature is above the utmost reach of human intelligence. 2. But how much more important is life when considered as a means of enjoyment. 3. How much higher still does life rise in its interest and importance when considered in connection with an understanding mind. 4. Yet all this is the least of the matter; and if the life of man were nothing more than what we see of it here, wonderful as it is, it would be only as an empty show, or as a fleeting meteor, bursting on the view and gazed at for a moment, but gone for ever, even before it could be understood. 5. But this very fleeting nature of life imparts an additional value to its possession, when viewed in its true light, namely, as connected with an eternal state. 6. How much more exalted still does our idea of life become, when it is connected with salvation! III. THE WAY IN WHICH YOU SHOULD EXPRESS THIS THANKFULNESS AND USE THIS BLESSING. "He shall praise Thee." 1. Nothing can possibly be more clearly right and reasonable than this, that we are bound to live to the praise of that gracious Being by whose power and providence we do live. 2. This, indeed, is the great, the express end for which you were brought into the number of "the living"; the only occupation also in which you will find any solid happiness in life, namely, to praise or glorify God; to make His will the rule of your life, to make His glory the aim of your life. 3. But these words do evidently express something more than merely the duty of living to the praise of God, and of praising Him the more fervently the longer that He spares us among the living. They seem particularly to proclaim the importance of life on this account alone, that it affords us an opportunity of showing forth the praises of God. So the devout believer feels a relish in life, altogether distinct from his natural instincts or personal enjoyments; namely, in the power which it puts into his hands of praising the gracious Author of his spiritual privileges and eternal hopes. Nor is it enough to say, that he might still better praise God in the heavenly courts. There are calls for this praise more urgent, and opportunities of this praise more direct, even in this mortal scene, than in the eternal state; occasions for bearing your testimony to God's perfections, which are not required in heaven above; occasions for exercising your great Christian graces of faith and charity, which are not afforded, and which cannot be afforded in a state of perfect holiness and felicity. (*J. Brewster.*) *The Jew valued the present life*:—The Jew, in all his thought and religion, showed a keen sense of the value of the present life. The very deficiencies in his religious conceptions seem to arise from this cause. The presence of God in this world seemed to obscure the future from his eyes, just as in later ages the bright vision of the future has thrown the present into the shade. But as the Jewish spirit became saddened by experience the sense of the presence of God in the world became weaker. The Jew did not relax his hold on practical righteousness, but the faith of childhood began to lose its simplicity. His thoughts took a wider range, and began to be directed to the future. The revelation of Christ completed the change for which other influences had helped to prepare the way; and the new faith stood opposed to the old, as the spiritual to the carnal. (*W. W. Jackson, M.A.*) *The importance of the present life*:—But has the central conception of early Jewish religion disappeared, or has it only been matured and purified? Is not human life, as we have experience of it here, in the present, with all its cares, and joys, and sorrows, still the great concern of religion? Does it not still afford us the best means of drawing near to God, and realising His presence? Does not Christ Himself teach us that our first business is in this life, when He prays to the Father that He should not take the disciples out of the world, but that He should keep them from the evil? (*Ibid.*) *The Christian view of life*:—1. The feeling which the Jew had entertained on the subject of death differs as widely as possible from that entertained by St. Paul. The change of sentiment had been consummated by Christ, who had "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." The life of the Christian

was thenceforth "hid with Christ in God." The affections were thenceforth to be "set on things above." The opposition between the things of the world and the things of God had been declared. But as soon as the Christian asked himself what was the means by which he could make this view his own, there could be only one reply. He must live after it. He must take the spirit of Christ into the world. But he could rise to the height of his duty here, only by keeping his eye fixed on the pattern in the heavens. 2. This conception of Christian life suggests reflections of two different kinds—(1) If religion brings harmony and law into human life, then the life which aspires after the ideal of religion is the most complete. (2) On the other hand, do we always fully accept the human revelation which the teaching of life itself offers to us? Do we recognise the divinity which resides in the pursuits and institutions of secular life? (*Ibid.*) *The peculiar mercy and business of life* :—I. THE MERCY OF LIFE. "The living, the living, he shall praise Thee," &c. II. WHEREIN THE PECULIAR MERCY OF IT CONSISTS. 1. Ask the carnal man where lies the mercy of life. And—(1) If he is in prosperity, he reckons the mercy of life lies in that the living man may enjoy the pleasures of sense, mirth, and jollity, and may lay up wealth for him and his; all which stern death robs a man of. But there is not one word of this here. (2) If he is in adversity, poverty, and sore sickness, he cannot see the mercy of life at all, but thinks they are well that are away, that are out of poverty and pain, and lie at ease in the dust. So crosses make him wish to be away. At best, he reckons it the mercy of life, that he is not where it may be he would be worse, namely, in hell. But there is not a word of all this either in the text. 2. Ask the renewed man in an ill frame of spirit, where lies the mercy of life. If he is in outward prosperity he will be ready to reckon it lies in the comforts of this life. If he is in adversity, the troubles of life are so great, that the mercy of it is small in his view; only heaven bulks in his eyes, and that as a place of rest from trouble. But there is nothing of this either in the text. 3. The decision is, the mercy of life lies in the business of life, to wit, being serviceable for God in the world. "The living, the living, he shall praise Thee," &c. Which speaks a high esteem of God and His service, as men count it a favour to serve their prince; and an ardent love to Him, as men delight to serve the interests of those they dearly love. Now, the business of life for which it is desirable, is twofold. (1) To praise or glorify God in the world. (2) To propagate His name and praise: "The father to the children shall make known Thy truth." It is the special business of life to endeavour that the name of God may live and be glorified in the world when we are dead. Consider—(*a*) What he has access to do for that end; namely, to praise God to the younger sort, that are likely to live after he is gone; especially to his own children. (*b*) How he may do it, namely, by making Him known to them as an object worthy of their faith. "Shall make known Thy truth." (*T. Boston.*) *Praising God* :—I. WHAT PRAISING GOD IS. It is the acknowledging and declaring the glorious excellencies of God, as He has manifested Himself in His word and works, and imports—1. Belief of the Being of God. 2. The knowledge of God. (1) Of who He is—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God. (2) Of what He is. (3) Of what He has done. 3. The love of God. Love is the mother of praise. 4. The admiration of God, which is love and esteem raised to a high pitch. 5. Expressing that love and admiration to Him. This is twofold—(1) Vocal. (2) Real, by actions, though not accompanied with words. II. WHAT ARE THE PECULIARITIES OF THE PRAISES OF THE LIVING. 1. They are the praises of the whole man, in soul and body too (1 Cor. vi. 20). 2. They are praises which may spread among the living (Col. iii. 16). 3. They are praises raised by the way to the heavenly kingdom. 4. They are praises of faith, not of sight. 5. They are praises to God amidst much dishonour done to Him. (*Ibid.*) *Motives* :—1. God is the Author of thy life. 2. The Preserver of thy life. 3. The Giver of all thou hast, whereby thou mayest honour Him. 4. God puts opportunities in thine hand for honouring Him. 5. There are some who are deprived of those abilities or occasions ye have to honour God. The pagan world, &c. 6. Ye have forfeited by sin all your abilities, opportunities, and your very life. His patience has suffered us long, &c. Should not this engage us to live to His honour? 7. This was the design of the redemption purchased by Christ (Tit. ii. 14). 8. It is the design of the sanctification of the Spirit (1 Pet. ii. 9). 9. It is a lost life that is not lived to the honour of God. (*Ibid.*) *Thanksgiving and thanksliving* :—Thanksgiving is good, but thanksliving is better. (*M. Henry.*) *Ingratitude common* :—A lady who

had heard a great many prayers offered for sick people, in a large city church, said to her husband, "Do all the sick people who are prayed for in our church die?" "Why, no," he answered, "of course not; but why do you ask?" "I supposed that they all died," she said, "because I hardly ever heard of one who had got well enough to give thanks!" (*J. N. Norton.*) **The father to the children.**—*Propagating religion:*—What is it to propagate religion, God's name and praise, to the rising generation? It implies—1. The having religion ourselves. 2. The profession of religion. 3. A desire to continue and spread religion in the world. 4. Contributing our endeavours to bring others, and particularly the rising generation, to the knowledge and practice of religion. (*T. Boston.*) "*The father to the children*":—1. Fathers of the State, to their political children (Isa. xlix. 23). 2. Fathers in the Church, ministers, and other Church officers, to their ecclesiastical children. 3. Fathers of families, to their children, servants, &c. 4. Fathers in gifts or graces to those who are children in these respects in comparison of them (1 John ii. 12, 13). 5. Fathers in years to those who are children in respect of age to them (1 Tim. v. 1, 2). (*Ibid.*) *The obligation to propagate religion:*—1. Divine authority (Deut. iv. 10, xi. 19). 2. Gratitude to God. 3. Justice to former generations, who have propagated religion to us. 4. Our own interest. 5. Charity to the rising generation. (*Ibid.*) *Claims of children:*—Socrates once said, "Could I climb to the highest place in Athens, I would lift my voice and proclaim, Fellow-citizens, why do ye turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth, and take so little care of your children, to whom one day you must relinquish it all?" (*Family Circle.*) *Parental relationship a medium of Divine revelation:*—Revelations of God's faithfulness are precious. They are the ground of human hope. Every life has some peculiar revelation of God's truth in it. The parental relationship, with its tender solicitudes and loves, furnishes a means of transmission. This duty should be conscientiously performed—I. THAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD MAY INCREASE FROM AGE TO AGE. II. THAT THE GRATITUDE OF ONE GENERATION SHOULD GLORIFY GOD BY MINISTERING TO THE MORAL LIFE OF THE NEXT. III. THAT THE GENERATION FOLLOWING MAY HAVE A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND TRUST IN HIM. (*W. O. Lilley.*)

Ver. 21. **He shall recover.**—*Christ in the sick room:*—I. The Holy Ghost shows us a king and ruler of men, a dweller in palaces, a possessor of all that money can obtain, a good man, a friend of God, laid low by disease like the poorest man in the kingdom. 1. This is the old story. After all there is nothing wonderful in this. The tabernacle in which our soul lives is a most frail and complicated machine. I do not wonder so much that we die as that we live so long. 2. But whence comes this liability to sickness, disease, and death? There is only one book that supplies an answer to this question. That book is the Bible. The fall of man at the beginning has brought sin into the world, and sin has brought with it the curse of sickness, suffering, and pain. Here lies one among many proofs that the Bible is given by inspiration of God. It accounts for many things which the Deist cannot explain. II. Learn from this chapter that sickness is not an unmixed evil. Hezekiah received spiritual benefit from his illness. Sickness ought to do us good. And God sends it in order to do us good. 1. Sickness is meant to make us think, to remind us that we have an immortal soul; and that if this soul is not saved we had better never have been born. 2. Sickness is meant to teach us that there is a world beyond the grave, and that the world we now live in is only a training-place for another dwelling, where there will be no decay, no sorrow, no tears, no misery, and no sin. 3. Sickness is meant to make us look at our past lives honestly, fairly, and conscientiously. 4. Sickness is meant to make us see the emptiness of the world, and its utter inability to satisfy the highest and deepest wants of the soul. 5. Sickness is meant to send us to our Bibles. 6. Sickness is meant to make us pray. 7. Sickness is meant to make us repent and break off our sins. 8. Sickness is meant to draw us to Christ. 9. Sickness is meant to make us sympathising towards others. (*Anon.*) *A fig-plaster:*—The application of figs leaves it uncertain whether a boil (*bubon*) or a carbuncle (*charbon*) is to be supposed. Figs were a popular *emolliens* or *maturans;* they were used to hasten the rising of the swelling, and therefore the mattering-process. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*)

Ver. 22. **What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?**—*Seeking a sign:*—Real religion is the same in every country and every age. Hence we have

so much of the history and experience of the people of God recorded in the Scriptures of truth, that we may compare our experience with theirs. Let us take these words and consider them four ways—I. AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN DESIROUS OF LIFE. There are persons who can talk lightly of death; but it is a solemn thing to die. What was the fortitude of Hume when dying, joking of Charon and his boat, but like "whistling aloud to keep his courage up"? But we have to observe that death is not always inviting even to a good man. 1. We live under a blessed dispensation; but, though the revelation of God's will is complete, there are those who are not yet led into all its truths. 2. Sometimes a good man's connections draw him back and attach him still to life. A minister may wish "to depart and be with Christ," but he sees a congregation which hang upon his lips; a husband and father may be looking for that blessed hope, and rejoicing in it, but he knows that his death will make the wife a widow and the children fatherless. You talk of self-denial! Who is it that denies himself like that man who is assured of heaven, and yet is willing to forego the blessedness from year to year, who is willing to weep on and war on for the sake of usefulness to others? 3. A good man's evidences of glory are not always clear; this will affect his experience. 4. There may be an event to which the believer may attach some importance, that has not taken place, and which may produce some hesitation in his mind. There was something of this kind, surely, in regard to David; he therefore pleaded for sparing mercy—"O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more seen." Simeon, too, had the assurance that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ. 5. There is also a constitutional timidity in some. If they are not afraid of death itself, they are afraid of dying. The very apostles wished to enter heaven, if possible, without being unclothed, and therefore said, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life." The fear of death is not sinful. Nature must abhor its own destruction, and if there be anything that can reconcile us to it, it must be supernatural. II. AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN ATTACHED TO THE HOUSE OF GOD: for he does not inquire, "What is the sign that I shall ascend my throne?" or "that I shall give audience to ambassadors, or commands to generals? What is the sign that I shall head my army, or that I shall travel through my country?" No, but "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" What is it that attaches a good man so much to the house of God? 1. Perhaps 'tis his birthplace: we refer to his second birth; and if you are not born twice before you die once, it would have been well if you had never been born at all. 2. It is a place of intercourse. 3. It is a place of instruction. 4. It is also a place of devotion. "My house shall be called the house of prayer." If Hezekiah loved the house of God before, you may be sure he did not love it less now, having been detained so long from it by sickness. We commonly know best the worth of our mercies by the want of them. How pleasing is the morning after the darkness of the night! How alluring is the spring after the dreary winter! How health is sweetened after the bitterness of pain! and how is liberty endeared by the sufferings of bondage! III. AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN CONCERNED TO SHOW HIS GRATITUDE FOR MERCIES RECEIVED. He wished this, not only for the enjoyment of a privilege, but for the performance of a duty. Having experienced delivering mercy, he knew he ought to praise God, by acknowledging His goodness publicly, and dedicating himself afresh to His glory. So did David (Psa. lxvi. 13, &c.). This is not always the case. There are many whose only concern when in affliction is to escape from it: whereas, a good man dreads the removal of it, unless it be sanctified, and the end of God be answered in bringing him nearer to Himself. A proper improvement of deliverance from sickness does not lie simply in the offering up of a single thanksgiving: it requires a great deal more than this, which will be mere formality and mockery in the sight of God, unless accompanied with real gratitude, and thankful views and feelings; and unless the actions and the life correspond therewith. Hezekiah had a sad falling off. "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." IV. AS THE LANGUAGE OF A MAN WHOSE FAITH REQUIRES CONFIRMATION. "What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" Why? Had he not been assured of this by good Isaiah? He ought to have been satisfied. He did not believe it, and he did believe it. Ah, Christians! you know how to explain such an experience as this. (*W. Jay, M.A.*) *Fear of dying:*—The excellent Dr. Conyers often said, "I am not afraid of death, but I am afraid of dying; I am not afraid of the end, but of the passage." He therefore often said in prayer, "O Lord,

if it be Thy blessed will, let me die in Thy blessed service!" And his wish was granted, for he sank down in the church, and even in the pulpit. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VERS. 1–8. **Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, King of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah.**—*Merodach-baladan*:—Marduk-apal-iddina, son of Yakin, is the Chaldean ruler who more than any other vassal embittered the life of the Assyrian suzerain, because as a rival suzerain he was always renouncing obedience to one whom he felt to be a disgrace to the ancient renown of his country. Lenormant, in his *Anfängen der Cultur*, has devoted a beautiful essay to him under the title, "A Babylonian Patriot of the Eighth Century B.C." The chief matter told about him by the monuments is this: In the year 731 he did homage at Sapiya to the Assyrian ruler Tiglath-pileser IV. In Sargon's first year (721) he, who was properly king of South Babylonia only, brought also North Chaldea into the range of his rule; war ensued, but although beaten, he still maintained himself on the throne, and from that time count the twelve years given to him by the Ptolemaic canon as king of Babylon. In Sargon's twelfth year (710) he shook off the Assyrian yoke; only a year afterwards (709) Sargon succeeded in capturing and burning to ashes the fort Dur-Yakin, into which he had thrown himself; he himself, being required to surrender unconditionally, vanished. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Marduk-apal-iddina*:—The name means: *Marduk* (written also *Maruduk*) has given a son. (*Ibid.*) *The embassy to Hezekiah* was in all probability one of those undertaken by Merodach-Baladan for the purpose of providing himself with allies. Inasmuch now as there was at this time in Judah a party straining its utmost to combine all elements antagonistic to Assyria, there is nothing unreasonable in supposing that some understanding was arrived at between the ambassadors from Babylon and Judah. Upon this view of the circumstances of the occasion, Hezekiah's motive in displaying his treasures will have been to satisfy the embassy that he had resources at his disposal; and Isaiah's rebuke gains in significance and force. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *Hezekiah and the embassy from Babylon*:—I. AFFLICTION OF BODY AND SORROW OF MIND ARE PRONE TO BE FORGOTTEN AND UNIMPROVED BY THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THEM (2 Chron. xxxii. 25). The historian says of Hezekiah, that "his heart was lifted up." The very deliverances which God wrought for him worked upon his vanity—the special mercies he had received elated his mind. What are we without grace? II. HEZEKIAH AT THIS TIME WAS ASSAILED BY PECULIAR TEMPTATIONS TO VANITY AND AMBITION (2 Chron. xxxii. 31). III. HEZEKIAH PRESENTS AN INSTANCE OF STRANGE FORGETFULNESS OF DUTY TO OTHERS BY NOT IMPARTING TO THEM RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE. IV. HEZEKIAH WAS CONVINCED OF HIS SIN BY THE SPECIAL MESSAGE SENT TO HIM BY GOD THROUGH THE PROPHET. V. ALMIGHTY GOD, IN THE MIDST OF ALL HUMAN AFFAIRS AND DESPITE THE CONDUCT OF INDIVIDUALS, IS CARRYING OUT HIS OWN INFINITE COUNSELS OF WISDOM AND OF LOVE. (*D. K. Shoebotham.*)

Ver. 2. **And Hezekiah was glad of them.**—*Hezekiah's great mistake*:—Look at Hezekiah; as he takes the men round he says in effect, What an ally I would make if Babylon should ever be in trouble! Or, What an opponent I would make if ever Babylon should be insolent! Or, You see I am one of the great powers of the world. We want large quotation marks for "great powers"! This is the danger of all uncontrolled and unsanctified power, or position, or possibility of dominion: much would be more, more would be most, and most would explode because of its own dissatisfaction. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Character superior to material good*:—Was this all Hezekiah had to show? There is nothing in it then. All these things can be stolen. A half-educated thief could take away the silver and the gold; a very young felon could take away the spices and the precious ointment; a man with very poor resources could carry off the armour. Hezekiah laid up his riches where thieves could break through and steal. Ah me, how like us all this is! What should he have shown to the men from Babylon? What we ought to show to every inquirer into our method of life—individual, domestic, municipal, and national: he should have shown them character, high citizenship,

large education, self-control developed to its highest point of discipline,—these are things which no king of Babylon can take away. (*Ibid.*) *A misimproved opportunity*:—What a missionary Hezekiah might have been! How he would have astounded the Babylonian delegates had he said to them: I receive you with respect, courtesy, and thankfulness, but I must tell you of this miracle; come within, and you shall hear how it was, how it began, continued, culminated; this will be something for you to tell when you go home again. In this way every man might create a home missionary field for himself. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." (*Ibid.*) *What a city to plunder!*—The Babylonian ambassadors had probably somewhat of the feeling which led Blucher to say, as he walked through the streets of London, "*Himmel!* what a city to plunder!" (*E. H. Plumptre, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Then came Isaiah the prophet unto King Hezekiah.**—*The prophet higher than the king*:—It is well to have Isaiahs in society, for Hezekiahs could never keep it together. This is the tone we want. The prophet should be higher than the king. The Christian teacher should stand upon the topmost place. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **What have they seen in thine house?**—*The disciple at home*:—1. The parties of whom the prophet inquired, "What have they seen?" were Babylonians. Foreigners, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, ignorant of the true God, and, therefore, parties before whom it was specially important to exhibit nothing which was calculated to bring dishonour upon God. These strangers might have been greatly edified had they remarked a deeply chastened and humble spirit in the king. There is nothing so greatly hinders the propagation of the Christianity of England among foreigners as that practical irreligion which they observe among the English. 2. The subject may suggest to us some general reflections upon the kind of aspect which the house of a professing Christian should present to any stranger as a man of the world. What would such a man naturally expect to see in a Christian's house? Clearly that which he looks for in other houses—namely, a general style and conformity with the particular profession or character of the inmates. He would reckon upon finding there, what St. Paul calls "the Church that is in thy house"—the pervading air of heavenly-mindedness, and the symptoms of devotional exercises in all its sanctified "chambers of imagery"—"the treasures" of parental piety, of filial obedience and decorum; a well-ordered household extending its influence and sanction, like the sacred comprehensions of the law of the Sabbath, from the man himself, to his son and daughter, manservant and maid-servant, and even cattle and stranger. Night and morning, it would seem to him to be the natural and consistent rule, that the offering of prayer and reading of the Word should be there presented to "the God of all the families of the earth." In every room and chamber of the house, the ready Bible should suggest by its silent presence the privilege of secret study of the Holy Scriptures; some good books, to the use of edifying, should strew the tables, like little trophies, in incidental evidence of the triumph of religion in that place; the peace, and cheerfulness, and mutual harmony of Christian influence should breathe its airs from Heaven on every happy, thankful heart; the music of habitual concord should sound, like an Æolian psalm, in every aisle of that homely church; and family love, the instinctive antepast of the universal love of Heaven, should spread the sweet odour of its charity, like Aaron's oil, from the head of the house down to the very skirts of the living garment with which his blessed heart is clothed. This is what the worldly man should see in the house of the Christian; but, alas! is it always to be seen there? 1. "What have they seen in thine house?" Have they seen there the spirit of the world, in the shape of expensive apparel, or costly furniture, or ornaments beyond your means or your station in society? A Christian man may adorn his house or apparel his person in moderation with the accustomed decencies of life and even the beautiful things of art, for Christianity is no enemy of taste nor patron of vulgarity. But when a man of the world observes in a Christian professor that inordinate affectation of style and sumptuousness in furniture and dress, which leaves no external mark of difference between "him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not," then such a professing Christian may well tremble for the stability of his principles. The ambassadors of the spiritual Babylon are visiting him, and they will have to report to their dark master that there is something to seize in the household of his divided heart. The remark

is equally applicable to the humbler classes. Sin is sin, and vanity is vanity, whether it assume a vulgar or a refined shape. 2. "What have they seen in thine house?" Have they seen the continual eagerness to grasp and hoard up money, the absorption of every abused faculty of the mind and every overstrained energy of the body to extend business, increase capital, and multiply speculations, though at the expense of a neglected soul and a forsaken God? And is this done in the face of better convictions of duty and responsibility? Is the heart becoming hardened as the very metal it grasps so eagerly? There is much in the proper and becoming habits of Christian men which is calculated to aid their success in life, but this success should not be permitted to become a snare to them. 3. "What have they seen in thine house?" Have they marked the professing disciple of the self-denying religion of Jesus yielding to a habitual fretfulness and irritability at every trifling trial of temper, keeping wife, children, and servants in a perpetual ferment tending to the ultimate exacerbation of every temper in the household? Have they seen the man at one time discoursing in quiet tone and serious terms on the meek and lowly one, "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again," at another time terrifying all around him with unrighteous ebullitions of anger? The Babylonians, the strangers, see it, and shake their heads, saying, "Deliver me from that man's religion, if it cannot even curb his temper"; and thus a stumbling-block is cast in the way, that offends some poor, "weak brother for whom Christ died." The children in such a house learn to despise a religion with the remembrance of their early terrors and discomforts; and the servants, or others employed about it, thank God that they have escaped their poor master's supposed hypocrisy, even at the sacrifice of his real Christianity. Whereas if, on the other hand, the irascible spirit were to be seen only to be subdued before them; if its occasional outbreak is timely checked, and obviously striven against, and candidly mourned over, if they mark the man struggling against the buffetings of his infirmity, and honestly and earnestly doing painful violence to his besetment, there is a natural sympathy kindled in their hearts which God may vouchsafe to deepen into the conviction that the religion must be real which could generate such an inward contest, and must be influential, too, which could obtain such a victory. 4. "What have they seen in thine house?" Have they seen the immoderate "banqueting, excess of wine, revellings, and such like"? 5. "What have they seen in thine house?" Perhaps some of you have been mercifully restored from a serious illness: what did those about you see as the effect of your being spared? Did they see a thankful man, a subdued man, a man bearing the spiritual marks of the stripes of the rod of chastisement, more in earnest for God, less inclined to murmur at his lot, to cavil at religious obligations, or depreciate spiritual privileges, or to lower the personal standard of Christian life and conversation? If the world saw this in your house, you have got good yourself and done the world good; if they saw it not, in whatever degree it was not the visible effect upon you, in that proportion you have yourself forfeited the grace of your personal dispensation, missed and abused an ordinance of the Lord, and wronged your brotherhood. 6. And you, heads of families, who make no profession of religion, who have no particular anxieties at stake either way, "what have they seen in your houses?" Have they marked no family prayer, no godly conversation, no effort with the means of moral and evangelical influence? Have they seen children growing up in carelessness and irreligion, whose parental indulgence provoked that destructive judgment which the real love and tenderness of a timely discipline might have averted? If so, consider, you who have the solemn responsibility of a family of immortal souls laid upon you, how Hezekiah's folly was visited upon his children, and tremble at the prospect of the heartrending anguish you may be laying up in store for yourselves in the spectacle of an ungodly and abandoned household. 7. "What have they seen in thine house?" Well, no matter what they have seen; be resolved by the grace of God as to what shall be seen for the time to come. (*J. B. Owen, M.A.*)

Vers. 5-7. **Hear the word of the Lord of hosts.**—*Isaiah's prophecy of the Babylonian captivity*:—Jarchi directs attention to the exact correspondence of the punishment with the offence. As the Babylonians had seen all, they should one day take all; as nothing had been withheld from them now, so nothing should be withheld from them hereafter. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *A costly gratification*:—Benjamin Franklin, when a lad, was greatly enamoured of a whistle he saw for sale. Swept away by the desire to possess the toy, he

gathered all his money and offered it to the vendor, who at once took it and handed over the whistle to the eager boy. For a time the sense of a craving gratified shut out all other consideration. Then, gradually, the lad realised how he had been fooled; and in after-days the wise man, as he observed men and their foolish ways, would remember his own early experience, and say of this man and of that, "He has paid too dear for his whistle." (*W. C. Bonner.*)

Ver. 8. **Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.**—"*Good*":—The word "good" is here used, neither in the sense of "gracious" nor in that of "just" exclusively, but in that of "right" as comprehending both. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Hezekiah's acceptance of his punishment*:—Hezekiah's reply expressed neither the highest magnanimity nor the mere selfish egotism which some commentators have seen in it; but a mixture of feelings in accordance with all that we know of his character. His appreciation of his position and duties as a king is shown in his restoration of the national worship, and his final resistance to Sennacherib, as well as in his general and successful care for the prosperity of his country. But though a religious sense of duty, or the pressure of necessity, could occasionally stir him to master circumstances by a great effort, we may infer from the domination of Shebna, and from his own demeanour and language when supplicating Sennacherib's pardon, after the receipt of Rab-shakeh's message and Sennacherib's letter, in the time of his own sickness, and on the present occasion, that his natural and habitual disposition was rather to submit to the guidance of circumstances, with a gentle and pious confession that this weakness of his character was beyond cure, and to accept the consequences with pious and affectionate resignation to God's will, and thankful acknowledgment of any mitigation of them. He could enter into the meaning of the Psalmist's words, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance on their inventions." And though he had not, like Moses or Paul, the stern courage which could ask that the punishment might be to himself, and the forgiveness to his people; but on the contrary was thankful to learn that there should "be peace and truth in his days"; it must not be overlooked that it was peace and truth to his country as well as himself, and not merely selfish security that he was thankful for. (*Sir E. Strachey, Bart.*) *A contrast: Hezekiah and St. Paul*:—There is certainly submission here, resignation to the Supreme will, readiness to accept the sentence of chastisement by this will. The sentiment thus far is that of Eli when he heard the doom of his house from the lips of the child-prophet: "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good." But the reason given by Hezekiah in the text itself is deeply disappointing in two ways—first, the selfishness, and, secondly, the earthliness of the consolation. Enough for him if he is spared the personal experience of the retribution; enough if he may live out his fifteen added years in the peace of an outward tranquillity, and in the truth, or, as it is otherwise given, in the continuance of an accustomed and unbroken prosperity. "There shall be peace and truth in my days," would have had no meaning for St. Paul. All days were his days; days of time and days of eternity—all were his. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

CHAPTER XL.

VER. 1. **Comfort ye, comfort ye My people.**—*The great prophecy of Israel's restoration*:—In passing from chaps. xxxvi.-xxxix. to chap. xl. we find ourselves introduced into a new world. The persons whom the prophet addresses, the people amongst whom he lives and moves, whose feelings he portrays, whose doubts he dispels, whose faith he confirms, are not the inhabitants of Jerusalem under Ahaz, or Hezekiah, or Manasseh, but the Jewish exiles in Babylonia. Jerusalem and the Temple are in ruins (lxiv. 10), and have been so for long (lviii. 12, lxi. 4—the "old waste places"): the proud and imposing Babylonian empire is to all appearance as secure as ever; the exiles are in despair or indifferent; they think that God has forgotten them, and have ceased to expect, or desire, their release (xl. 27, xlix. 14, 24). To arouse the indifferent, to reassure the wavering, to expostulate with the doubting, to announce with triumphant confidence the certainty of the approaching restoration, is the aim of the great prophecy

which now occupies the last twenty-seven chapters of the Book of Isaiah. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *The Gospel of Isaiah*:—Here beginneth the Gospel of the prophet Isaiah, and holdeth on to the end of the book. (*J. Trapp.*) *Does Isaiah xl. treat of the return from Babylon?*—The specific application of this chapter to the return from Babylon is without the least foundation in the text itself. The promise is a general one of consolation, protection, and change for the better, to be wrought by the power and wisdom of Jehovah, which are contrasted, first, with those of men, of nations, and of rulers, then with the utter impotence of idols. That the ultimate fulfilment of the promise was still distant, is implied in the exhortation to faith and patience. The reference to idolatry proves nothing with respect to the date of the prediction, although more appropriate in the writings of Isaiah than of a prophet in the Babylonish Exile. It is evidently meant, however, to condemn idolatry in general, and more particularly all the idolatrous defections of the Israelites under the old economy. (*J. A. Alexander, D.D.*) *A comforting message*:—There is evident allusion to the threatening in chap. xxxix. 7. Having there predicted the captivity in Babylon, as one of the successive strokes by which the fate of Israel as a nation and the total loss of its peculiar privileges should be brought about, the prophet is now sent to assure the spiritual Israel, the true people of Jehovah, that although the Jewish nation should not cease to be externally identified with the Church, the Church itself should not only continue to exist, but in a far more glorious state than ever. (*Ibid.*) *God's return to a pardoned people*:—The beginning of the good tidings is Israel's pardon; yet it seems not to be the people's return to Palestine which is announced in consequence of this, so much as their God's return to them. "Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight a highway for our God." "Behold, the Lord Jehovah will come." (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) "*My*" *people*; "*your*" *God*:—All the prophecy we are about to study may be said to hang from these pronouns. They are the hinges on which the door of this new temple of revelation swings open before the long-expectant people. (*Ibid.*) *A storehouse of Divine promise*:—This portion (chaps. xl.-lxvi.) of the great prophet's writings may well be regarded as the Old Testament Storehouse and Repertory of "exceeding great and precious promises," in which Jehovah would seem to anticipate His own special Gospel name as "the God of all comfort." (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Jehovah and His Church*:—1. A glorious change awaits the Church, consisting in a new and gracious manifestation of Jehovah's presence, for which His people are exhorted to prepare (vers. 1–5). 2. Though one generation perish after another, this promise shall eventually be fulfilled, because it rests not upon human but Divine authority (vers. 6–8). 3. Zion may even now see Him approaching as the conqueror of His enemies, and at the same time as the Shepherd of His people (vers. 9–11). 4. The fulfilment of these pledges is insured by His infinite wisdom, His almighty power, and His independence both of individuals and nations (vers. 12–17). 5. How much more is He superior to material images, by which men represent Him or supply His place (vers. 18–25). 6. The same power which sustains the heavens is pledged for the support of Israel (vers. 26–31). (*J. A. Alexander.*) "*Comfort ye, comfort ye*":—The double utterance of the "Comfort ye," is the well-known Hebrew expression of emphasis, abundance, intensity;—"Great comfort, saith your God." (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *God's great comfort*:—At the close of the prophecy, the prophet tells us what the strength and abundance of that comfort is. Earth's best picture of strong consolation is that of the mother bending over the couch of her suffering and sorrowing child (chap. lxvi. 13). (*Ibid.*) *A Divine art*:—When the soul is in the period of its exile and bitter pain, it should do three things. I. LOOK OUT FOR COMFORT. 1. It will come certainly. Wherever the nettle grows, beside it grows the dock-leaf; and wherever there is severe trial, there is, somewhere at hand, a sufficient store of comfort, though our eyes, like Hagar's, are often holden that we cannot see it. It is as sure as the faithfulness of God. "I never had," says Bunyan, writing of his twelve years' imprisonment, "in all my life, so great an insight into the Word of God as now; insomuch that I have often said, Were it lawful, I could pray for greater trouble, for the greater comforts' sake." God cannot forget His child. 2. It will come proportionately. Thy Father holds a pair of scales. This on the right is called As, and is for thine afflictions; this on the left is called So, and is for thy comforts. And the beam is always kept level. The more thy trial, the more thy comfort. As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth through Christ. 3. It

will come Divinely. God reserves to Himself the prerogative of comfort. It is a Divine art. 4. It will come mediately. What the prophet was as the spokesman of Jehovah, uttering to the people in human tones the inspirations that came to him from God, so to us is the great prophet, whose shoe-latchet the noblest of the prophetic band was not worthy to unloose; and our comfort is the sweeter because it reaches us through Him. 5. It will come variously. Sometimes by the coming of a beloved Titus; a bouquet; a bunch of grapes; a letter; a message; a card. There are many strings in the dulcimer of consolation. In sore sorrow it is not what a friend says, but what he is, that helps us. He comforts best who says least, but simply draws near, takes the sufferer's hand, and sits silent in his sympathy. This is God's method. II. STORE UP COMFORT. This was the prophet's mission. He had to receive before he could impart. Thy own life becomes the hospital ward where thou art taught the Divine art of comfort. Thou art wounded, that in the binding up of thy wounds by the Great Physician thou mayest learn how to render first-aid to the wounded everywhere. III. PASS ON COMFORT. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The Divine ministry of comfort*:—There are ministries in the world. 1. There is the Divine ministry of instruction. In this ministry nature, history, and the Bible are constantly employed. 2. There is the Divine ministry of Justice. Nemesis is always and everywhere at work, treading on the heels of wrong, and inflicting penalties. 3. In the text we have the Divine ministry of comfort. The words suggest three thoughts concerning this ministry. I. It implies the existence of DISTRESS. Bright and fair as the material world often appears, a sea of sorrow rolls through human souls. The distress is of various kinds. 1. Physical suffering. 2. Social bereavement. 3. Secular anxieties. 4. Moral compunction. II. It implies the existence of SPECIAL MEANS. All this distress is an abnormal state of things. Misery is not an institution of nature, and the creation of God, but the production of the creature. To meet this abnormal state something more than natural instrumentality is required. 1. There must be special provisions. Those provisions are to be found in the Gospel. To the physically afflicted there are presented considerations fitted to energise the soul, endow it with magnanimity, fill it with sentiments and hopes that will raise it, if not above the sense of physical suffering, above its depressing influence. To the socially bereaved it brings the glorious doctrine of a future life. To the secularly distressed it unfolds the doctrine of eternal providence. In secular disappointments and anxieties it says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." 2. There must be special agency. A physician may know the disease of his patient, but if he does not know the precise mode of application he will not succeed. So it is with the Gospel. A man to give comfort to another requires a special qualification. The comforting elements must be administered—(1) Not officially, but humanly. (2) Not verbosely, but sympathetically. III. It implies a LIMITED SPHERE. "My people." The whole human family is in distress, but there is only a certain class qualified to receive comfort, those who are here called God's "people," and who are they? Those who have surrendered themselves to His will, yielded to His claims, and dedicated themselves to His service. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Comfort for God's people*:—I. THE SPEAKER. It is the God of comfort, the God of all comfort that here speaks comfortably to His people. There is a danger of our thinking too much of comfort, and one may only value the word preached as it administers comfort; this is a great error, because all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, and reproof, as well as for comfort. One great end which even the Scriptures have in view, is not only to lead us to patience in suffering, but to comfort us under suffering. It is one thing for man to speak comfort, it is another thing for God to speak comfort. II. THE PERSONS THAT ARE HERE SPOKEN TO. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people." 1. The Lord has a people upon earth—He has never been without a people. 2. The Lord has a people; and if He has a people He will try them, and they shall not be found summer flies just resting on the surface of things, but they shall be found to be those that know the truth in the power of it, and they shall be made to feel and experience the worth of it. It shall not be enough for them to say, I am a sinner, but they shall feel the wretchedness of being a sinner, they shall not only confess that Christ is precious, but they shall be placed where they shall know Him to be precious. 3. The Lord has a people; and it is a most blessed consideration to reflect that while He has a people, He is their God. Talk not of your wretchedness and your poverty and your disease, of your weakness; if God be your God, not only heaven is your home,

but you have that without which heaven would not be worth the having. 4. God has a people; no wonder then He comforts them—His eye is upon them from the beginning to the end of the year. They are the salt of the earth to Him, and he that touches them touches the apple of His eye. III. THE LORD'S MESSAGE UNTO HIS MINISTERS. "Comfort ye," &c. The great cause of comfort to a child of God may be summed up in a little sentence—through eternity he never shall come to the close of it. Let me point out some few of those great mercies that flow to a child of God in consequence of his having Christ as his portion. 1. He has that which made David glad (Psa. xxxii. 1, 2). The great contest Satan has with our consciences is about the pardon of our sins. Well might the people of God then be comforted by this truth, that their sins have all been blotted out as a cloud. 2. Do you ask for another ground of comfort? See it in a covenant, ordered in all things (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). 3. But the Psalmist found another source of comfort. "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Psa. lxxiii.). There is no mercy on earth greater than to have a God in heaven, to have an Intercessor at the right hand; to have the heart of God; to have the promise of God; to have Jehovah Himself as my portion. 4. One comfort more is the bright prospect that is before the child of God. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Comfort for Zion*:—It was once said by Vinet, that the three great objects of the preacher were the illumination, consolation, and regeneration of men. The work of comforting is surely an important one, but it is God's people whom we are to comfort. We are not to say, Peace, peace! where there is no peace. Stoical indifference is not real comfort, but peace alone is found in God. I. Notice what a discovery is made in the text of GOD'S NATURE. He has not hidden away from men; He is not asleep or tied down by law, but His tender mercies are over all His works. He is near to every one of us, seeking our love and confidence. II. HUMAN SOULS NEED COMFORT. Constitutional characteristics render us susceptible to consolatory truths. Even those hardened in sin have been melted by a woman's tears, or have yielded to the persuasiveness of a child. III. Look at the GROUNDS ON WHICH THIS COMFORT IS ADMINISTERED. Not those of philosophy. When the Greeks, under Xenophon, caught sight of the Euxine, they jubilantly cried, "The sea, the sea!" The discoveries of Divine grace—a sea without a bottom or a shore—elicit profounder joy. (*G. Norcross, D.D.*) *"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people"*:—The words of this passage (1–11) look on to the captivity. The people, afflicted, chastened, broken in spirit, are called upon to listen to the strains of consolation which God had breathed for them in His word. I venture to think that they were laden with a richer consolation in that they came down a vista of nearly two hundred years. Old words are precious to mourners. That which is spoken at the moment is apt to be coloured by the thoughts and the doubts of the moment; an old word spoken out of the region of these present sorrows has double force. It seems to bring that which is absolute and universal to bear on that which is present and passing. This is why the Scripture is so precious to mourners. It belongs to all time. And these words rule all its declarations. It is comfort throughout and to the end. The mercies of judgment is a subject we too little study. Yet mercy is the deepest element in every judgment with which God afflicts mankind. Stern, hard, unfaltering to the eye, but full of rich mercy to the heart. It was in tender mercy that man, the sinner, was sent forth to labour. In society we see on a large scale how God's judgments are blessings in disguise. Great epidemics are healing ordinances. They purify the vital springs. They leave a purer, stronger health when their dread shadow has passed by. Catastrophes in history are like thunderstorms; they leave a fresher, brighter atmosphere. Reigns of terror are the gates through which man passes out into a wider world. May we pray, then, in calamities for deliverance, when they are so likely to be blessings? Yes, for prayer is the blessed refuge of our ignorance and dread. But Isaiah had the profoundest right to speak of comfort, because he could speak of the advent of the Redeemer to the world. He not only preaches comfort, but discloses the source from which it springs—"Emmanuel, God with us." (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*) *Divine comfort*:—1. Living in the midst of sorrow, and himself personally its victim, the Christian has need of comfort. Whatever form the affliction may take, it is hard for flesh and blood to bear; it runs contrary to all the tastes and desires of the natural man. Often under its pressure, especially when long continued and severe, is he tempted to faint and despond; it may be, even to repine and murmur; to doubt the faithfulness of God; to ask, in bitterness of heart, why such woe is appointed to man?

2. With what power, then, do words like these reach him in the midst of his sorrow, coming from God Himself, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people!" No sooner are they heard than hope revives, and the assurance of Divine sympathy at once soothes his trouble, and allays his fears. (1) Here is the first light from heaven which breaks upon human sorrow, and which removes from it, for the Christian, its keenest sting. God knows your suffering and thinks of it, and seeks to comfort you under it. You are not the sport of inexorable fate, or blind and reckless chance; still less are your afflictions proof that God has abandoned you in wrath. (2) How sweet is the solace of human sympathy! But here we have Divine sympathy; sympathy from One both able and willing to deliver,—from the God of all comfort. (3) Not afar off, does the voice of God reach us, from an inaccessible heaven, telling us we are His people and that He cares for us. He has come and made us His people, by taking our nature, and being born and living as a man. (*J. N. Bennie, LL.B.*) *The Lord's people comforted*:—I. GOD HAS A PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. II. I proceed TO COMPLY WITH THE INJUNCTION IN THE TEXT. To this end, I will endeavour to obviate some few of the most common causes of that want of comfort to which the people of God are liable. 1. One cause is their misunderstanding the nature and extent of that pardon of sin, which the Gospel provides. 2. Another cause arises from their seeking comfort where it is not to be found. You can never find it from poring into your own hearts. Look in faith to Jesus Christ—His glorious person and gracious offices, &c. 3. Another cause arises from their mistaking the proofs and marks of a really religious state. They suppose that it consists in warm and rapturous feelings. Your salvation is grounded on the faithfulness of Him who cannot lie. (*E. Cooper.*) *The trials of business men*:—These words came to the prophet in the olden time, but they come just as forcibly to any man who stands to-day in any one of the pulpits of our great cities. A preacher has no more right to ignore commercial sorrows than any other kind of sorrow. I. A great many of our business men feel ruinous trials and temptations coming to them FROM SMALL AND LIMITED CAPITAL IN BUSINESS. This temptation of limited capital has ruined men in two ways. Despondency has blasted them. Others have said, "Here I have been trudging along. I have been trying to be honest all these years. I find it is of no use. Now it is make or break." II. A great many of our business men are tempted to OVER-ANXIETY AND CARE. God manages all the affairs of your life, and He manages them for the best. III. Many of our business men are tempted TO NEGLECT THEIR HOME DUTIES. How often it is that the store and the home seem to clash, but there ought not to be any collision. If you want to keep your children away from places of sin, you can only do it by making your home attractive. We need more happy, consecrated, cheerful Christian homes. IV. A great many of our business men are tempted to PUT THE ATTAINMENT OF MONEY ABOVE THE VALUE OF THE SOUL. The more money you get, the better if it come honestly and go usefully. But money cannot satisfy a man's soul; it cannot glitter in the dark valley; it cannot pay our fare across the Jordan of death; it cannot unlock the gate of heaven. Treasures in heaven are the only uncorruptible treasures. Have you ever ciphered out in the rule of Loss and Gain the sum, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Seek after God; find His righteousness, and all shall be well here and hereafter. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Religious comfort*:—I. SHOW WHAT THE COMFORT IS which the Gospel of our Lord conveys to mankind. Whenever we speak of comforting another, the very expression implies that he is in tribulation and distress. Without the Gospel of Christ the condition of men must be wretched. II. DESCRIBE THE PERSONS WHO ARE AUTHORISED TO TAKE THAT COMFORT TO THEMSELVES. Evangelical obedience is to be the foundation of evangelical comfort. (*T. Gisborne.*) *Comfort for God's people*:—"Comfort ye My people"—1. By reminding them that I am their God. 2. By reminding them that their captivity in this world is nearly over, and that they will soon be home. 3. The Saviour is coming to this world, and is on His way to show His glory here. He will come and fill the world with His victories. (*C. Stanford, D.D.*) *Comfort proclaimed*:—What a sweet title: "My people!" What a cheering revelation: "Your God!" How much of meaning is couched in those two words, "My people!" Here is speciality. The whole world is God's. But He saith of a certain number, "My people." While nations and kindreds are passed by as being simply nations, He says of them "My people." In this word there is the idea of proprietorship. In some special manner the "Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of

His inheritance." He has done more for them than others; He has brought them nigh to Himself. How careful God is of His people; mark how anxious He is concerning them, not only for their life, but for their comfort. He would not only have us His living people, His preserved people, but He would have us be His happy people too. He likes His people to be fed, but what is more, He likes to give them "wines on the lees well refined," to make glad their hearts. I. To WHOM IS THIS COMMAND ADDRESSED? The Holy Spirit is the great Comforter, and He it is who alone can solace the saints; but He uses instruments to relieve His children in their distress and to lift up their hearts from desperation. To whom, then, is this command addressed? 1. To angels, first of all. You often talk about the insinuations of the devil. Allow me to remind you that there is another side of that question, for if evil spirits assault us, doubtless good spirits guard us. It is my firm belief that angels are often employed by God to throw into the hearts of His people comforting thoughts. 2. But on earth this is more especially addressed to the Lord's ministers. The minister should ask of God the Spirit, that he may be filled with His influence as a comforter. 3. But do not support your ministers as an excuse for the discharge of your own duties; many do so. When God said, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people," He spake to all His people to comfort one another. II. WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR THIS COMMAND? 1. Because God loves to see His people look happy. The Roman Catholic supposes that God is pleased with a man if he whips himself, walks barefooted for many miles, and torments his body. When I am by the seaside, and the tide is coming in, I see what appears to be a little fringe, looking almost like a mist; and I ask a fisherman what it is. He tells me there is no mist there; and that what I see are all little shrimps dancing in ecstasy, throwing themselves in convulsions and contortions of delight. I think within myself, "Does God make those creatures happy, and did He make me to be miserable? Can it ever be a religious thing to be unhappy?" No; true religion is in harmony with the whole world; it is in harmony with the whole sun and moon and stars, and the sun shines and the stars twinkle; the world has flowers in it and leaping hills and carolling birds; it has joys in it; and I hold it to be an irreligious thing to go moping miserably through God's creation. 2. Because uncomfortable Christians dishonour religion. 3. Because a Christian in an uncomfortable state cannot work for God much. It is when the mind is happy that it can be laborious. 4. Again, "Comfort ye" God's people, because ye profess to love them. III. God never gives His children a duty without giving them THE MEANS TO DO IT. Let me just hint at those things in the everlasting Gospel which have a tendency to comfort the saints. Whisper in the mourner's ear electing grace, and redeeming mercy, and dying love. Tell him that God watcheth the furnace as the goldsmith the refining pot. If that does not suffice, tell him of his present mercies; tell him that he has much left, though much is gone. Tell him that Jesus is above, wearing the breast-plate, or pleading his cause. Tell him that though earth's pillars shake, God is a refuge for us; tell the mourner that the everlasting God faileth not, neither is weary. Let present facts suffice thee to cheer him. But if this is not enough, tell him of the future; whisper to him that there is a heaven with pearly gates and golden streets. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Comfort for England:*— I will make one little change in the translation, taking the words of Dr. George Adam Smith, "Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem." "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God! Speak ye to the heart of England, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished." Had the Hebrew prophets no other claim upon our regard we ought to hold them in everlasting respect for their patriotism. For Israel the prophet thought a man might well die. Israel was also God's people. The strength of Israel in every time of trouble was the Lord of hosts. And the prophet's interest was not confined to the sacrifices of the temple, nor to the coteries of pious people, but swept into its heart everything that concerned the welfare of the community. 1. Why should not our faith go farther afield and have a more generous range? We also carry in our hearts, not only as citizens, but also as Christians, this England which God gave to our fathers, and has continued in its glory unto their children. Why should we not take our courage in both our hands and, looking at the history of the past and comparing it with the history of the present, recognise in our own people another Israel called of God in a special manner, set apart by God for a special mission, and gather into our soul all the promises of God, and also make our boast in Him as the prophets did? What did they depend on, the Hebrew prophets, for this great conception

that God had called the nation, and had a great work for that nation to do? They depended on the facts of history behind them creating in their soul an irresistible conviction. And I ask you whether the right arm of the Most High has not been as conspicuous in English history? From what perils in past centuries has He not delivered this country when the whole world was against us and was put to confusion! Have not we been surrounded by the sea, our national character formed, for purposes that we can recognise? What nation has ever planted so many colonies, explored so many unknown lands, made such practical contributions to civilisation, set such an illustrious example of liberty? Within our blood is the genius for government, the passion for justice, the love of adventure, and the intelligence of pure faith. Our Lord came of the Jewish stock, and therefore that people must have a lonely place, but when it comes to the carrying out of those great blessings, physical, political, social, and religious, which have been conferred upon the world by the Cross and the pierced hand of the Lord, I challenge anyone to say whether any nation has so extended them within her own borders, or been so willing to give them to the ends of the earth as God's England. 2. I do not forget England's sins, for we have sinned in our own generation by inordinate love of material possessions, by discord between the classes of the commonwealth, by a certain insolence which has offended foreign peoples, and also by hideous sins of the flesh. Our sins have been great, and it becomes us to acknowledge them. Does our sin destroy our calling? Does our sin break the Covenant which the Eternal made with our fathers? No people ever sinned against God like Israel. And between the sin of Israel and the sin of England, God's chosen people of ancient and modern times, there has been the similarity which arises from the sin of people in the same position. Both boasted themselves over-much against other peoples. Both were intoxicated with prosperity. Both depended upon it instead of utilising and conserving the favour of the Most High. When we desire to confess our sins where do we go? We go to the confessions of the Hebrew prophets. And when we ask mercy for our sins, what are the promises we plead? The great promise of mercy declared by the evangelical prophet and now sealed by the life and death and resurrection of our Lord! Because the Hebrew prophet believed that his people were God's people, he had the courage to speak plainly to them. He is not a traitor to his country who on occasions points out his country's sins. When Israel sinned there was no voice so loud as that of Isaiah or Amos, but they delighted not in the work, any more than their God delighted in judgment. If God sent them with a rod they took the rod and gave the stroke, but the stroke fell also on the prophet's own heart, and he suffered most of all the people. When the people repented and turned again to God, when they brought forth works meet for repentance and showed humility, there was no man so glad as the prophet. 3. When the prophet takes up the work of consolation he has no bounds, he makes the comfort of God to run down the streets like a river. It is not enough to say it once, but twice must he sound it, till the comfort of God shall run like lightning through Jerusalem. And when he takes to comforting he is not to be bound by theories of theology or arguments of the schools. He is not going to ask questions—whether a man can expiate his sins, or whether a nation can win repentance. He flings all this kind of argument to the wind, for he has come out from the presence of the Eternal, who does not keep accounts like that, and he cries, "Speak ye home to Jerusalem; her warfare is accomplished." Accomplished! More than that! God hath now repented! It was His people repented first, now He is repenting. They repented of their sins; behold, God has begun to repent of His judgment! "I have," he makes the Eternal say—"I have been over-hard with these people, and I have punished them more than they have deserved. Go and comfort them. Comfort them royally. Give it out with a lavish hand—they have received double for all their sins." When the prophet speaks in this fashion he is not referring to material prosperity, for the words were spoken to the exiles in Babylon. He comforted the exiles because they had repented and been reconciled unto God. The comfort I preach is not based on arms. It is based on the nobler spirit which God has given England during the progress of the war in South Africa. We sinned, and according to our sin was our punishment. We have repented. Through our churches and through our homes, and individually, we have laid the lessons of the Eternal to heart; and according to our repentance shall be the blessing of God. (*J. Watson, M.A.*) "*Comfort ye My people*":—This command is adapted to the needs of the country in which we live. There is a good deal of weariness and depression in modern life. If the blessings of an advanced civilisation

can make people happy, there are multitudes who ought to be enraptured, for they are surrounded by material comfort. The gospel of recreation is preached to them. Outward nature is enjoyed and reverenced. Music and painting are filling them with sensibility; literature is contributing to their intellectual gratification; and church privileges abound. Worship to-day gratifies the artistic faculty, without putting a very great strain on the spiritual nature of man. There never was so much ingenuity displayed as now in the manufacture of forms of enjoyment. People never waged such a successful war as to-day against physical and social discomfort. And yet, if you watch them closely, you can see that they are not really satisfied. Affection to-day is not at rest, intellect is not at rest, conscience is not at rest, faith is not at rest. Thank God, there is sweet satisfaction of soul to be found. "Comfort ye," &c. I. There is a message in this text for ALL WHO ARE UNDER DISCIPLINE ON ACCOUNT OF SIN. The connection between sin and punishment is never really broken. Men were never so clever as they are to-day in the efforts they have put forth to evade the penalties of wrong-doing, and they very often succeed so far as outward effects are concerned, But the inward penalty is always sure. Loss of self-respect, loss of faculty, and deterioration of nature itself. "Thy warfare is accomplished," thy discipline may come to an end. It is the spirit of rebellion which lengthens the period of discipline. Lay down your weapons, give up fighting against God, and He will forgive you now, and the consequences of your wrong-doing shall inwardly be done away. Further, your pardon will tell at once on the outward consequences of your wrong-doing. You forfeited the confidence of your friends by your sin; that will come back to you. You damaged your health; that will improve. You injured your social position; that will be retrieved. Just as there is no decree in God's mind as to the length of time during which a man's discipline shall be continued, so there is no decree as to the amount of suffering man can endure. The suffering, like the time, may be relieved by speedy submission and penitence. II. There is a message in this text for ALL WHO IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE HAVE NEVER GOT BEYOND CONVICTION. Beyond conviction there is the forgiveness of God. Beyond the sin there is purity. Beyond doubt there is faith; and beyond all this miserable weariness of spirit there is rest. III. There is a message here, also, for ALL TIMID CHRISTIANS. They feel it would be presumption to expect conscious pardon and Christian perfection. Cultivate your capacity to take in the comfort of God. IV. There is a message here for ALL DISCONSOLATE CHRISTIANS. You want new ideas, the old ones are about worn out. Thy warfare with weariness is accomplished. V. There is a message here for DISCONSOLATE CHURCHES. The Jewish Church was disconsolate at the time of the captivity, and there are Churches to-day which are in a sort of captivity. They have made exceptional provision for the needs of the people, yet they are declining. The declension of Churches in great populations is due to many causes, but due to one cause that is a great deal overlooked, and that is the very peculiar temperament of the generation in which your lot has been cast. Competition, in particular, has led to a vast amount of advertising. But disconsolate Churches may be comforted. We are coming out of the captivity of those habits and conditions which have come down from the restrictive ages of society. Modern evangelism has grown steadily in the elements of truth and spiritual intelligence. It is resulting to-day in the deepening of spiritual life, and in the expansion of the kingdom of God. VI. There is a message here for THE NATION AND THE EMPIRE. The return from captivity was the beginning of a new spiritual movement, which was destined to extend over many countries. The classical period of human history was about to begin. My text is the new strain with which the prophet greets the expanding prospect. As one has said, It is the keynote of the revived and purified Israel, and the reason of the hold of Christendom on Europe and on modern times. There is a wonderful correspondence between that period and ours. England is the centre to-day. Judaism at the time referred to was rationalised by being brought into contact with forms of Roman and Greek thought. Christianity is being rationalised by contact with natural religion. But who is the leader of the improvement of the modern world? "Who is this that cometh from Edom?" &c. (chap. lxiii. 1). Was it some king ruling the nations with a rod of iron? No. Some soldier with a two-edged sword? No. Some philosopher ruling the intellect of the race? No. Jehovah's righteous servant and witness it was: "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." And the Lord Christ, the Son of God, never spoke to the race as He is speaking to-day, and He needs His messengers to prepare His way. (*T. Allen, D.D.*) *Conviction and comfort*:—A quaint

Scotch preacher said that the needle of the law opens the way for and carries the thread of the Gospel. I once quoted this saying in a tent-meeting, and a hearer remarked to me afterwards: "Yes, you're right; but the needle should be pulled out and not left behind." (*H. G. Guinness, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. **Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.**—*Voices that speak to the heart:*—This is one characteristic of the voices that reach us from God: they speak home to the heart (R.V., marg.). The phrase in the Hebrew is the ordinary expression for wooing, and describes the attitude of the suppliant lover endeavouring to woo a maiden's heart. Love can detect love. I. THE VOICE OF FORGIVENESS. The first need of the soul is forgiveness. It can endure suffering; and if that suffering, like the Jewish exile, has been caused by its own follies and sins, it will meekly bow beneath it, saying with Eli, under similar circumstances, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth good to Him." But the sense of being unforgiven! This bitterness of heart for sin is the first symptom of returning life! And before God can enter upon His great work of salvation, before He can clear away the débris and restore the ruined temple, before He can reproduce His image, it is needful to assure the penitent and believing soul that its time of service is accomplished, that its iniquity is pardoned. In dealing with the question of sin and its results, let us always distinguish between its penal and natural consequences. The distinction comes out clearly in the case of drunkenness or criminal violence. Society steps in and inflicts the penalties of the fine, the prison, or the lash; but in addition to these, there is the aching head, the trembling hand, the shattered nervous system. So in respect to all sin. The natural consequences remain. David was forgiven, but the sword never left his house. The drunkard, the dissolute, the passionate, may be pardoned, and yet have to reap as they sowed. The consequences of forgiven sin may be greatly sanctified; the Marah waters cured by the tree of the Cross—yet they must be patiently and inevitably endured. It was thus that Jerusalem was suffering, when these dulcet notes reached her. The backsliding and rebellious people were doomed to serve their appointed time and captivity, and suffer the natural and inevitable results of apostasy. Hence the double comfort of this first announcement. II. THE VOICE OF DELIVERANCE. Between Babylon and Palestine lay a great desert of more than thirty days' journey. But the natural difficulties that seemed to make the idea of return chimerical, were small compared with those that arose from other circumstances. The captives were held by as proud a monarchy as that which refused to let their fathers go from the brick-kilns of Egypt. Mountains arose in ranges between them and freedom, and valleys interposed their yawning gulfs. But when God arises to deliver His people who cry day and night unto Him, mountains swing back, as did the iron gate before Peter; valleys lift their hollows into level plains; crooked things become straight, and rough places smooth. III. THE VOICES OF DECAY AND IMMORTAL STRENGTH. As man's soul is still, and becomes able to distinguish the voices that speak around him in that eternal world to which he, not less than the unseen speakers, belongs, it hears first and oftenest the lament of the angels over the transcience of human life and glory. In a stillness, in which the taking of the breath is hushed, the soul listens to their conversation as they speak together. "Cry," says one watcher to another. "What shall I cry?" is the instant inquiry. "There is," continues the first, "but one sentiment suggested by the aspect of the world of men. All flesh is grass, and all its beauty like the wild flowers of the meadow-lands, blasted by the breath of the east wind, or lying in swathes beneath the reaper's scythe." The words meet with a deep response in the heart of each thoughtful man. But listen further to the voices of the heavenly watchers. The failure of man shall not frustrate the Divine purpose. "The Word of the Lord shall stand for ever." IV. VOICES TO HERALD THE SHEPHERD-KING. The Old Version and the margin of the R.V. are, perhaps, preferable to the R.V. Zion, the grey fortress of Jerusalem, is bidden to climb the highest mountain within reach, and to lift up her voice in fearless strength, announcing to the cities of Judah lying around in ruins that God was on His way to restore them. "Say unto the cities, Behold your God! Behold the Lord God will come." All eyes are turned to behold the entrance on the scene of the Lord God, especially as it has been announced that He will come as a mighty one. But, lo! a Shepherd conducts His flock with leisurely steps across the desert sands, gathering the lambs with His arm, and carrying them in His bosom, and gently leading those that give suck. It is as when, in

after centuries, the beloved apostle was taught to expect the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and, lo! in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as it had been slain. Do not be afraid of God. He has a shepherd's heart and skill. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

God the Comforter of His people.—The skill of a physician is shown, in the first place, in selecting out of many diseases that under which his patient suffers; and, in the second place, in choosing, out of many remedies, that which is most likely to effect his cure. There is as great variety in the diseases of the soul as in those of the body. And if there be this variety in spiritual diseases, and this variety of remedy, then evidently, in ministering to a mixed people, the preacher of Christianity will have to decide in each separate case what is the precise form of sickness, and what the exact medicine best adapted to its cure. Where the soul is utterly insensible to the truths of religion, there must not be the same process as where the conscience is busy in remonstrance. There are spiritual patients with whom we must try argument; but there are others with whom argument would be altogether out of place, whose disquieted minds totally incapacitate them for any process of reasoning; who require the cordials of the Gospel, that they may be strengthened for the trials and endurances of life. There is the lowering medicine for the over-sanguine and presumptuous; and there is the stimulating for the timid and mistrustful. I. In our text, there is a specification of one large class of medicine; and therefore, by inference, ONE LARGE CLASS OF SICKNESS. "Comfort" is the staple of the prescription. And what was the condition of these patients? We may ascertain this from the subsequent words, "Cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hands double for all her sins." Here evidently the condition of Jerusalem is one of distress and anxiety and distraction; and this accords most exactly with a passage in the Psalms, and with which we shall connect our text—"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul." Here there is the same medicine—"comfort"; but you have the disease more clearly defined—a "multitude of thoughts." Bishop Austin's version is, "The multitude of my anxieties within me"; whilst the representation in the original Hebrew would seem that of a man involved in a labyrinth, from whose intricacies there was no way of escape. All this agrees precisely with the case of Jerusalem in the text. And what cause of distressing anxiety would there be whilst there was warfare unfinished, and sin unforgiven! A multitude of thoughts is a very common symptom; but in different patients it requires very different medicines. A man might be "a man after God's own heart," and yet subject to the invasion of a crowd of anxieties. It is not uncommon for religious persons to erect standards of excellence, failing to reach which they become uneasy and doubtful as to their spiritual state. Reading the promises of the Bible, which speak of the righteous as "kept in perfect peace," which breathe tranquillity, abstraction from earthly cares and foretastes of the blessedness of heaven, they conclude that what they ought to experience is perfect serenity of mind; and when they often experience distracting anxieties which the spirit is unable to throw off altogether, and when in times of approaching in prayer the Lord God of heaven and earth, they find their attention broken, then they will add to every other grief a worse grief than all—they will suspect their own sincerity in religion. And never can it be a part of our business to lessen the extent of what is blameworthy, or to endeavour to persuade the righteous that freedom from anxiety is not a privilege to be sought for, or that the concentration of the whole soul is not to be attempted, and failure therein not bitterly lamented. But we know that amid the turmoil of this busy world there will often be such an invasion of the altar of the Lord as when the birds came down on Abraham's sacrifice. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And whilst we could not wish men to regard their infirmities as sufficient excuses, or to be content with imperfection, as though unavoidable; still, where there is the honest endeavour to stay the mind on God, and abstract it from earth, we may tell them that piety may consist with anxiety, and sincerity of prayer with a multitude of thoughts. God is speaking to those who were sorely distracted, and yet He still calls them "My people." It is not every failure which should fill you with apprehension as to your state before God. So wonderfully are we made, so many are the inlets into the mind, so great are the facilities with which evil angels can ply their suggestions, so difficult, moreover, is it to keep that attention to worldly business which is required from us as members of society, from being deformed by that carefulness which is forbidden us as members of Christ's Church;

that, indeed, it were vain to hope, however it be right to desire, that anxiety shall never harass us in a world that teems with trouble. So far from being necessarily a cause of despair or despondency, the Christian may rise superior to all these intruders, and prove that they do but heighten the blessedness of the blessing, though invaded by the influence of earth. God speaks to those as still "His people" who are wearied and worn down with warfare and toil; and in place of speaking to them reproachfully He has only soothing things to utter—"Comfort ye," &c. II. Our latter observations have somewhat trenched on THE CHARACTER OF THE MEDICINE which should be tried when the disease is a multitude of thoughts; but we must now examine with attention, and endeavour to determine its faithfulness and its efficiency. The case is that of a righteous man on whom cares and sorrows press with great weight; and whose mind is torn with anxieties and thronged by a crowd of restless intruders distracting him even in his communings with God. Now, the very disease under which this man labours incapacitates him in a great measure for any process of argument. His distracted mind is quite unfitted for that calm and searching inquiry which is required into the matter of the evidences of Christianity for strictly convincing him of the inspiration of Scripture. His mind is evidently unfitted for duly considering, and examining with that singleness of purpose which is demanded by their solemnity, mysteriousness, and importance such truths as those of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement. Ask ye what these comforts are? There are the rich assurances of God's forgiving love; there are the gracious declarations of His everlasting purpose of preserving to the end those whom He has chosen in Christ; there are the multiplied promises which make to the eye of faith the page of Scripture one sheet of burning brightness, always presenting most radiantly what is most suited to the necessity. There are the foretastes of immortality. You may without sinfulness and merely through infirmity be invaded and harassed by a multitude of thoughts. But the evil is that when thus invaded and harassed the Christian is apt to attempt a critical examination of his spiritual state, to encourage doubts as to his acceptance with God, and to try and satisfy himself by some process of reasoning as to whether he has indeed believed unto the saving of his soul, whereas his very state is one which unfits him for reasoning, for sitting in judgment on himself, and delivering an accurate verdict. He is sick, and requires God's comfort. III. The comforting message is to be delivered to Jerusalem, and annexed is a statement of her warfare being accomplished; and if you connect with this the exclamation of St. Paul—"I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course," you will see that we make no far-fetched application of the text, if we affirm it as SPECIALLY APPROPRIATE ON THE APPROACH OF THE LAST ENEMY, DEATH. Never is it likely that there will be a more tumultuous gathering of conflicting emotions than when the mind fixes itself on approaching death. It is here that the power of all mere human resources must eventually fail. Christianity furnishes an abundance of what is needed for allaying the fear of death, and soothing man's passage to the tomb. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) **Her warfare is accomplished.**—*The Christian's warfare*:—The acceptableness of any announcement will depend very much upon the state of mind and feeling in which we are found in respect to the subject of such announcement. Go to the soldier, wearied with a long campaign, and many a hazardous engagement, longing for a sight of his beloved home—to him how welcome will be the announcement, "Thy warfare is accomplished!" It was on this principle that the prophet Isaiah was directed to take a message of consolation to the ancient people of God. The language of the text may, without any impropriety, be applied to the termination of any state of anxiety, hardship, and grief. I. THE LIFE OF THE TRUE BELIEVER IS A WARFARE. Frequently is it represented to us in the Holy Scripture by this form of military phraseology. Hence, says the apostle, "Fight the good fight of faith"; and, writing to Timothy, "That by these thou mightest war a good warfare"; "I have fought a good fight," &c. 1. The great principle of the conflict is faith, founded and implanted in the mind by a supernatural agency. No man will ever in a Christian sense contend, until he is united by a living faith to Jesus, the Son of God: for faith acquaints him with his spiritual enemies; faith is the principle of the new life which puts itself into an attitude of resistance against all that is hostile to itself. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." When a man is slumbering in his sin, nothing is further from his thoughts than to maintain a spiritual conflict with invisible,

spiritual existences; but, under the influence of faith, he will find he is surrounded by a legion of foes. He looks within, and there he finds the corruption of fallen nature. Besides the corruption of an evil nature, there are the powers of darkness. The world, even in its lawful form, is a very serious enemy to our spiritual progress and our spiritual peace. 2. This contention will continue as long as life shall last. II. THE HOUR OF DEATH WITNESSES THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THIS WARFARE. 1. Death is the instrumental means of separating us from our connection with the present evil world; it strikes at once a line of demarcation, which throws us beyond the reach of all the elements of this present sensible life. He upon whom death has performed his solemn office, has no further interest in the possessions, the endearments, the gains, the business, the pleasures, and the satisfactions of this vain world. 2. Then, death terminates the strife of sin. 3. Death confesses that the believer is a conqueror over himself, and yields the palm of victory at the moment when he inflicts the blow (1 Cor. xv. 55–57). III. THE CONSOLING AND EXHILARATING QUALITIES OF THIS BLESSED CONSUMMATION. 1. When the warfare ends, the rest begins. 2. This state of rest is also a state of peculiar and inexpressible delight. It is something more than rest, as implying a cessation from toil and from contention; it is a joyful rest. Think of the place of rest into which the departed spirits of the just are received. They are where Christ is; they behold His glory. And then, consider the society to which the ransomed spirits of the just are admitted. Think of the employments to which they are advanced. They serve God day and night in His temple, and His name is in their foreheads. 3. This felicity is evermore increasing. 4. This felicity will be for ever and ever. "So shall we ever be with the Lord." (*G. Clayton.*) *Undeserved grace*:—"Fulfilled is her warfare, absolved her guilt, received hath she of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins." The very grammar here is eloquent of grace. The emphasis lies on the three predicates, which ought to stand in translation, as they do in the original, at the beginning of each clause. Prominence is given, not to the warfare, nor to the guilt, nor to the sins, but to this, that "accomplished" is the warfare, "absolved" the guilt, "sufficiently expiated" the sins. It is a great At Last which these clauses peal forth; but an At Last whose tone is not so much inevitableness as undeserved grace. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Grace masked by grace*:—How full of pity God is, to take so much account of the sufferings sinners have brought upon themselves! How full of grace to reckon those sufferings "double the sins" that had earned them! It is, as when we have seen gracious men make us a free gift, and in their courtesy insist that we have worked for it. It is grace masked by grace. (*Ibid.*) **Double for all her sins.**—"*Double for all her sins*":—It is not to be pressed arithmetically, in which case God would appear over-righteous, and therefore unrighteous. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness.**—*The Baptist a pattern preacher*:—I. DEPRECIATION OF SELF. Isaiah had predicted simply a "voice"; and John Baptist, accordingly, with a humility which ministers of the New Testament should follow, laid no stress on anything personal to himself—the announcement of his birth by an angel, his priestly descent, his years of preparation—though all these supplied advantages to his ministry. He concentrated attention on what he had to tell. In me there is nothing to attract or benefit. I am only what centuries ago was predicted—a voice. II. EXALTATION OF HIS MESSAGE AS DIVINE. III. A PROCLAIMING AS THE CENTRAL TOPIC IN THE EVERLASTING MESSAGE A DIVINE, AND THEREFORE EFFECTUAL, HELPER FOR THE RUINED. "He shall gather"; "He shall carry"; "He shall gently lead"; "All flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord" (vers. 10, 11, with 5). And John Baptist accordingly announced, as ministers of the New Testament should now announce, the presence in Christ Jesus of a perfect Saviour (John i. 26, 27, 29; Matt. iii. 11; John iii. 29, 30). Who among the audience of the "faithful ambassador" have rightly caught the message? (1 Pet. ii. 3.) 1. Those who surrender all habits inconsistent with his call. 2. Those who rejoice greatly in the guardianship and guidance of the great Deliverer proclaimed (1 Pet. i. 5, 6). 3. Those who steadily tread in the blessed steps of His life (Luke i. 74, 75; 1 Pet. i. 21). His sheep hear His voice; He knows them; they follow Him. (*D. D. Stewart, M.A.*)

Vers. 3–5. **Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**—*The way of the Lord prepared*:—I. THE JEWISH THEOCRACY. It is a favourite statement with those who seek

to account for Christianity on entirely mundane principles, that Christ grew, as it were, out of His age. The age was waiting for some such Teacher, some such Gospel—and Teacher and Gospel came. Just as the wreck of the Roman Republic demanded a hand and brain like Cæsar's, and they appeared at the critical moment and reorganised the State, so the Great Preacher of the universal Gospel was called for by His times, and He came. There is something in the spirit of an age, we are told, which creates the heroes and teachers of the age. This is very interesting, and has a large measure of truth in it. Men of high genius are singularly sensitive to the influences around them, and are created while they create; but it is blankly impossible to account for Christ and Christianity by natural evolution, with the Jewish theocracy, a grand prophetic system which for nearly two thousand years looked unto and prophesied of the Messiah, standing in the way. There was existing for ages in the world, kept alive by marvellous interventions of a higher hand, a national community, whose function was distinctly, from first to last, to prepare the way for the Advent, for the Divine kingdom which was to rule over and to bless mankind. These Jews were set to bear witness of the reality of the Divine rule, and its necessity, if states were to be saved from chaos, and the whole world from wreck. There was a period, when Moses led them in the wilderness, when the theocracy came out with wonderful clearness. Then there was a period, under their kings, when, through their worldly conformity to the life of surrounding nations, the theocracy was obscured. But the captivity ended that conformity in sorrow and in shame. From the time of the captivity the idea of the theocracy was restored. The prophets are throughout its great witnesses. The expectation, as matter of history, grew intense as the Advent approached. The expectation of the Advent of a Being, a Person, who should fulfil the promise and the prophecy with which their national life and literature were charged; who should bring, what Christ has brought—a Gospel of salvation to the world. It is a wonderful feature of the preparation, that just as the nation which exhibited the theocracy was dying away as a nation its belief in the theocracy grew more intense, and its witness grew more clear and impressive to the approaching Advent of the great world theocrat—the Christ. II. THE JEWISH DISPERSION. It was a very wonderful chain of providential agencies which, before the Advent, scattered that people, these witnesses so charged with the promise and the prophecy, through the civilised world. Up to the time of the captivity the Jews kept themselves in a kind of stern, or, as the heathen around them called it, a sullen isolation. They cherished the sense of a lofty superiority. But, after the captivity, they displayed a singular facility of dispersion, a happy art of settling and flourishing among the Gentile peoples, which makes them to this day, *pace* the Anglo-Saxon, the first settlers of the world. In every chief city of the empire which Alexander founded a colony of Jews was sure to be settled; and the same state of things afterwards obtained in the far wider empire of Rome. In order to appreciate the significance of this, you must estimate the utter confusion of human beliefs and ideas about Divine things and beings which had been the fruit of the Greek and Roman conquests. Neither Greek nor Roman had belief enough in his gods to impose them on the conquered nations; nor did they find anything Divine among the conquered nations which seemed better worth worshipping than their own. This confusion of religious ideas and systems and deities, none of which had power to emerge with absolute or even strong claims to belief, was profoundly detrimental to moral earnestness, and indeed to any high-toned belief about Divine things. There was an utter confusion and decay of faith. But here were communities settled among them who had an absolute and indestructible belief in their Revelation. They had a God to worship of whom they could give intelligible account. The Jews lived among the heathen in isolation still; but the isolation was visibly based on a religious faith, and on religious records. These Jews, scattered abroad, were witnesses everywhere of the reality and necessity of Divine revelation to, and Divine legislation for, man. They familiarised men with the ideas which Christianity proclaimed, and on which it rested its authoritative claim to the homage and the obedience of mankind. III. THERE WAS A VERY REMARKABLE CHANGE WITHIN THE BOSOM OF HEATHEN SOCIETY ITSELF, IN ITS INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL IDEAS, WHICH NOT ONLY OPENED THE WAY FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY, BUT SEEMED TO DEMAND SOME SUCH REVELATION OF TRUTH TO MANKIND. Students of philosophy note a very decided progress between the age of Socrates and the age of Seneca in the consideration of questions bearing on man's individual life and destiny. The supreme interest of a man's

life in the golden age of Greek philosophy lay in his relations, as a member of a society, as a citizen of a State. Within the little circle of Athenian society men realised a closeness of relation to each other, which made the State something of a household. The conquests of Alexander created an entirely new order of things. The Greek became, not the citizen of a State almost domestic in its magnitude and character, but the subject of a great Empire, lost in an undistinguished mass of fellow-subjects, and quite cut adrift from the landmarks and the moorings by which he had been wont to steer and stay his life. The Greek must think about himself and his world, and Alexander led him out into a world too big for him, which oppressed and distracted him, and overthrew all the traditions of his schools. It was a world, too, of ceaseless conflict and change. The state of the Greek world between Alexander's conquests and the establishment of Roman supremacy, say, roughly, two hundred years, was such as to throw the thinker back upon himself, to lead him to realise his individual responsibility, to force on him the question, "What, after all, am I? Whence did I come? For what am I here? Whither do I tend? I am in a world full of confusion and misery—how am I to regulate my life, so that my happiness may not become a wreck?" So the great thinkers increasingly concerned themselves with questions which had to do with the individual man, his duty, his responsibility, his destiny, his means of arming himself for the battle of life, his means of saving himself from utter and hopeless loss. Thus there was a growing tendency in men to consider very much the question which Christianity came to treat of as salvation. The thoughts of man, the longings and aspirations of man, seem to be led up step by step to the point in which the cry, "Lord, save, or I perish!" was ready, did he but know all the meaning of his dumb pain, to fashion itself on his lips. All was waiting for the proclamation, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor," &c. When men went abroad and proclaimed the Advent of a Saviour, they found a ready entrance to the world's sad, wistful heart. IV. THE ROMAN EMPIRE. Incomparably the most important secular herald of the Advent was the Empire—an Empire under whose sceptre such a decree could go forth (Luke ii. 1). There are many points of view from which the Empire may be regarded as the herald of the kingdom which was destined to master it, and found on it the edifice of Christian society. We are working and building on the foundations of the Empire still. The whole of modern European society is but the fully developed Empire of Rome. It is the centre of the secular, as the Advent of Christ is the centre of the spiritual, history of mankind. I might say much about the universal peace, which made the preaching of a universal Gospel possible. About the universal law and language, which made the career of the preachers, at any rate, far easier and more rapid than it could have been in any previous state of society. The fundamental question opened by the Empire is also a fundamental question of Christianity, the relation of men to each other. Is it enmity? is it brotherhood? Is the struggle for existence the ruling principle of progress, or brotherly sympathy, care, and love? The state of natural enmity and constant war gave way to a state in which peace, good-fellowship, and mutual ministries were regarded as the natural condition of society. Briton and Egyptian, Syrian and Spaniard, formed together a great political unity; and were drawn into bonds of relation to each other, the nature and bearings of which men were eager to explore. There rose on the minds of men the idea of human brotherhood. Men began to speculate about a common good in which civilised humanity was to share, and a duty of the whole human community to its weaker members, its sick, its poor, its wretched. Men wanted to know why and how they were brethren, why and how they were to love. And so arose perhaps the greatest herald of the Advent in secular society, the longing for a kingdom which should fulfil the promise which Rome in the nature of things was constantly breaking; and give peace, concord, love to a distracted world. Thus the way was prepared, the highway through the desert was made. (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*) *The Divine glory revealed in Christ*:—I. ITS LITERAL ACCOMPLISHMENT. 1. In the appearance of John the Baptist. Ages rolled away, and no such preparing voice was heard in the desert of Judea. But it was at length heard. 2. Following the footsteps of the servant, comes the Master. And as John had said, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," then was the glory of God manifested; and all flesh, living at that time in Judea, saw it together: the glory of God in human nature. Jesus Christ was the visible image of the glory of God all the time He was on earth. The

visible image—(1) Of the power of God. His works were Divine; His word was power. See His power over the elements. (2) Of the truth of God. The doctrine of Christ has brought us nearer to the unclouded truth of the Divine mind than men were ever brought before. (3) Of the holiness of God; and that even while He was man upon earth. (4) Of the justice of God. Though this is not so frequently adverted to as other attributes, yet it is important. Why did Christ die so willingly? If, then, the glory of God was revealed even in the lowliness and sufferings of the Saviour, I ask if the coming of Christ had not in it more real pomp than if He had come with all the grandeur of an Eastern monarch, to a people who waited for Him? II. ITS SPIRITUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT. This is seen in the manifestation of Christ to the hearts of men. In this there is both preparation and manifestation; for Christ, in mercy, no more bursts upon the soul at once than He did upon the world; He sends His messenger to prepare the way before Him; this is the first part of the process. That preparing herald, figured by John the Baptist, is repentance. Consider what repentance is, and you will see how it prepares the soul for Christ, for pardon, happiness, and purity. 1. The first element is a deep and serious conviction of the fact of our sin. For if we justify ourselves, there will be no preparation. 2. The second element is a conviction of the extreme danger of sin and its infinite desert. 3. The third element is a burdened and disquieted spirit. This supposes a feeling that we are not able to deliver ourselves. The way of the Lord is then plain; all obstructions are removed when we come to this; for all true repentance, like the preaching of John the Baptist, concludes by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God!" It is here alone that we see the glory of God. For what is the happiness of a pardoned soul, but one of the brightest manifestations of the glory of God upon earth? Here is a visible manifestation of the glory of the Divine patience; that man, amidst all his repeated provocations, should at last be saved and made happy. The glory of the grace of God! What a comment on the words of the apostle, "By grace are ye saved!" And then, see the glory of that working of the Divine power by which the soul is finally brought into the enjoyment of all the mind that was in Christ; the soul changing from glory to glory, and the work completed by an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. This is the manifestation of Christ to the soul. III. ITS ALLEGORICAL ACCOMPLISHMENT. It is seen in the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth. He sends forth His heralds. It is by the ministry of His Gospel that His dominion is established. The doctrine to be preached is that of repentance. So St. Paul preached at Athens. The manifestation of the Master follows. Here is a manifestation of the glory of the heavenly wisdom, raising, exalting, and purifying the human intellect; of the Divine righteousness, putting a stop to all cruelty and injury. The glory of peace and harmony; the union of man's heart to man, the extinction of external wars, and the diffusion of internal harmony. The glory of that order among families, and societies, and nations, preserved, and sanctified, and so regulated that no part infringes on the other, but the whole proceeds harmoniously, like a piece of sound mechanism. The glory of mercy and charity: teaching men to remember those that are in afflictions, as being themselves in like manner afflicted. This is a glory peculiar to the Christian revelation. (*R. Watson.*)

Preparation for the Advent of Messiah:—A positive preparation of the race itself was necessary, before the plan of redemption could be successfully revealed. This preparation was gradually going forward at the same time that our moral helplessness was so amply illustrated. If we reflect upon the nature of the Christian revelation we shall be convinced that its conceptions belong to an advanced period of civilisation. It addresses itself exclusively to the spiritual nature of man. But, in the earlier periods of our race, our conceptions are all from without; they have to do almost exclusively with sensible objects. The Gospel has to do with thought, feeling, sentiment, motive, and all their various attributes; and it could not be well understood until the mind of man had become somewhat at home in these conceptions. Nor is this all. The Christian religion addresses itself to the moral nature, the conscience of man. I. Hence, a remedial dispensation would naturally be delayed, until the moral character of man, both individual and social, had been fully displayed; and MANKIND HAD BECOME IN SOME DEGREE CAPABLE OF APPRECIATING THE FACTS THUS PRESENTED TO THEIR NOTICE. But, besides this, the Gospel is a revelation communicated to man by language, and its authenticity, as is meet, is attested by miracles. Now, considerable progress must have been made in civilisation before such testimony could be given as we

would be willing to receive on a question of so vital importance. Until the laws of nature are to some extent known, we cannot determine whether the Creator has or has not in a particular case departed from them. And this leads us to observe, again, that a revelation from God to man, informing him of this wonderful change in the conditions of his probation,—a revelation designed for all ages to the end of time, and destined to work a perfect transformation in the moral character of our race,—could not have been completed until language had arrived at a considerable degree of perfection. It was necessary that the doctrines and motives peculiar to the new dispensation should be promulgated with all possible explicitness, and yet guarded from all tendency either to incompleteness or excess. Amidst all the agitations of society, throughout all the overturnings of empire, the human mind, during this long period, had been gradually attaining maturity. Each nation, during its brief existence, had either added something to the stock of human knowledge, or made some contribution to the materials for human thought. Every revolution had illustrated in some new phase the principles of conduct, and had bequeathed the lesson to succeeding generations. II. We see, then, that God not only prepared a language in which this revelation for all coming ages could be written, but HE DIFFUSED THAT LANGUAGE OVER THE CIVILISED WORLD. He created a suitable vehicle for the truth, and He made that vehicle, as far as was necessary, universal. And this work was accomplished by means of the ambition of Alexander, and the all-grasping love of dominion of the citizens of Rome. Men ignorant of the existence and character of the true God, bowing down to the senseless images which their own hands had fashioned, indulging without restraint their own corrupt passions, were thus advancing His purposes, and opening the way for the advent of His Son. III. One other condition remains yet to be observed. The nations inhabiting the shores of the Mediterranean were originally distinct in government, dissimilar in origin, diverse in laws, habits, and usages, and almost perpetually at war. To pass from one to the other without incurring the risk of injury, nay, even of being sold into slavery, was almost impossible. A stranger and an enemy were designated by the same word. It was necessary that these various peoples should all be moulded into one common form; that one system of laws should bind them all in harmony. This seems to have been needful, in order that the new religion might be rapidly and extensively promulgated. In order to accomplish this purpose WAS THE ROMAN EMPIRE RAISED UP, AND ENTRUSTED WITH THE SCEPTRE OF UNIVERSAL DOMINION. In many respects it resembled the dominion of Great Britain at the present day in Asia. We perceive that the overturnings of forty centuries were required in order to prepare the world for the advent of the Messiah. The same omniscient wisdom has ever since been engaged in carrying forward the work which was then commenced. (*D. Wayland, LL.D.*) *Vox clamantis*:—It were surely a vain thing for a voice to cry in the wilderness where none can hear but the startled wild animals; where there are no sympathetic human hearts that can thrill with its message. But we must remember that of old the wilderness had a strange, weird attraction for many who aspired to live a holy life. And other souls who had similar longings, but did not possess the means or the courage to gratify them, would resort to the hermit of the wilderness for counsel and benediction. 1. The metaphor, so wild and striking, of a voice crying in the wilderness, is as appropriate as metaphor could be for representing the man of God who, in a degenerate age, lifts up his voice to declare the truth, to reprove sin, to call men to a new life. Rocks are not harder than hearts sometimes; the wandering blustering winds are not more inattentive to the speaker's message than are some souls. To a divinely taught spirit nothing is so truly a desert as the crowded city. To him it is lonely, forbidding, sad, yet mightily attractive, awakening his tenderest compassions, calling forth his mightiest and most patient exertions. 2. Now that it has been done, we probably fall into the way of thinking that nothing was easier than for John the Baptist to preach to the Jews of the time of Herod, or for our Lord to open His mission to the same people, or for Paul to preach Christ at Corinth and Athens and Rome. How different the reality! Could any one of the inhabitants of these places have been consulted by God's messenger beforehand he would probably have said: "Do you think that these cavilling, disputing doctors and philosophers will ever give credence to such stories as you bring? Do you think that these pleasure-loving people will ever wear the yoke of such an austere religion of self-sacrifice as you proclaim? Go home to your ordinary work again, and don't trouble yourself to speak a message which nobody

will hear; or if you cannot be at peace unless you say something about it, then go into the desert and speak it to yourself and to nature; for your chances of succeeding will be as great there as anywhere." Strange all this, yet more strange the fact that it is the wilderness and the solitary place which shall rejoice and be glad for the messenger of God who comes to prepare Messiah's way. The unlikely ground yields the harvest; they that are afar off come nigh. The voice in the wilderness is that of a herald announcing that a Greater One is on His way; be ye ready to receive Him. Widespread, radical, and lasting reformation was not achieved through the word of the Baptist; but such souls as could be prepared for the coming of the Lamb of God were aroused, called, separated from the hardened and worldly and unbelieving, and placed under discipline and teaching. From among their number our Lord chose His first disciples and chief apostles. Beyond the fringe of that little company which kept close to the Baptist something of good also was done. A wave of spiritual feeling passed over a great part of the nation; Jerusalem was greatly excited, if not savingly renewed. A general condition of desire was produced. 3. There are many advents of the Son of God, and for every one of them there is some forerunner, some voice crying in the wilderness: "Prepare ye His way; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." The voice of some John the Baptist has gone ringing through the wilderness of a dead faith, of a formal worship, of a worldly life, and men have been startled into attention, have been made conscious of shortcomings and sins. And although God never ceases to work among men, yet we come on barren dreary years of history, a very desert, when the signs of the Divine working are not apparent. Then arises some John the Baptist, or a general sense of dissatisfaction pervades the Churches, a sense of shortcoming and of shame, and the obstructions to a Divine manifestation are swept out of the way. Hardly a decade passes now without a cry arising from the Churches themselves: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Their conscience becomes increasingly quick and true; their ideal grows nobler; their conception of the Christian life assimilates to the standard given in the Word of God. And with attainment comes a longing for more, a sense of need, a craving for God. Then let us prepare His way, as we would that of a dear Friend whom we long to see, and whom we would not keep from us by any neglect or disrespect of ours. (*J. P. Gledstone.*) *Prepare ye the way of the Lord*:—I. GOD HAS MANY MESSENGERS, AND THEY HAVE OFTEN LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS. Some speak with a voice of thunder to arouse a sleeping world. The doctrine of others distils as the dew. Some open new paths to the seekers after wisdom: to others it is given to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Ever since man was driven from Eden he has been a wanderer in the desert. The thorn and the thistle around him are the emblems of the sin and the sorrow which spiritually mark his nomad state of existence. No wonder, then, that the wilderness is so often used as an emblem of this present life, in which you and I must listen to the voice of Heaven's messengers. We want more law work. Our consciences are too easily satisfied. Modern religion is far too superficial. The law prepares for the Gospel. The Comforter must first convince of sin. II. ISAIAH USES IT AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF HIS OWN MINISTRY. He, too, living now probably in the idolatrous reign of Manasseh, felt himself in a spiritual desert. Yet by faith he sees afar off, and the seer is himself transported into that bright future. Already foreseeing the seventy years' captivity of Judah, and then the joyful return of the exiles under the decree of Cyrus, Isaiah writes of these events as if himself living and acting among them. Yea more, he pictures the dawn of the day as ushered in by that return from Babylon. III. THE TRANSITION IS EASY TO THE PERSONAL TIMES OF THE MESSIAH, AND OF HIS HERALD, JOHN THE BAPTIST. The homely and heart-searching appeals of the Baptist proved him to be the pioneer of the righteous King. Before this wilderness preacher the mountains of Pharisaic pride were levelled, the valleys of Sadducean unbelief were filled up, the tortuous vices of the courtly Judæan were corrected, and the rude ignorance of the Galilean smoothed and reformed. IV. But even in this day THE WORDS HAD A WIDER SIGNIFICATION. Not only the land of Israel, but the Gentile world, even "all flesh," was then being prepared "to see the salvation of God." The former was accomplished by John's own preaching; of the latter he was only the herald. Providential agencies were even then at work preparing Christ's way among the Gentiles. 1. At the time when our Saviour was born the knowledge of the Greek language had spread more widely throughout Asia

and Europe than has since been the case with any other tongue. What a preparation was this for the spread of the Christian religion. We know that there is no greater barrier separating nations than a difference of language. But at the very period when Christianity began to be published it found one language generally read and understood from the Alps to the Caucasus; and so the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament could now travel, with the gospels and epistles, to the many provinces of the Roman Empire; for the valleys had been exalted, and the mountains and hills made low. 2. A second preparation designed by God's providence was—the extent of Roman dominion. The chief means employed by that great Empire for consolidating her possessions were her roads and her laws. (1) It was literally true that, owing to Roman dominion, both in Europe and Asia, the crooked had been made straight and the rough places plain. That sagacious people recognised the civilising power of good roads through their Empire, just as we do now of railways in our Indian and other colonies. (2) It is the province of law to rectify abuses and remove difficulties: and to effect this among the nations Rome ever felt to be her mission. Wherever she planted her colonies she invited all people to share her privileges, and to dwell in safety under the ægis of her laws. Was not this, then, a moral *via strata* made for the spread of Christianity? V. HOW THIS PROPHECY SHEDS A LUSTRE ON THE WORLD'S FUTURE. Once more in this wide desert "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed," and not "one," but "all lands shall see it together." Yes, He who ascended into heaven shall so come again. Are we ready for that day? Are we making others ready? I believe that every Christian should be as the "voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." The true Church, in short, must remain in the desert until the mystic "times" are fulfilled. She is to be "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." Meanwhile the voice of prophecy is given to cheer her amidst trial and disappointment. We labour for years to tunnel through the Alps: shall we not labour patiently to prepare the way of the Lord? (*S. P. Jose, M.A.*) *Prepare ye the way of the Lord*:—I. THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS WHICH HINDER THE SPREAD OF THE REDEEMER'S KINGDOM, spoken of here as valleys, hills, &c. Heathenism abroad: ignorance and vice at home. Intemperance hinders the progress of God's kingdom on every hand. 1. Intemperance hinders the progress of God's kingdom at home. Our country is occupied by three armies—an army of paupers, an army of criminals, and an army of police, to stand between the vicious and the virtuous, and protect the latter from the assaults of the former. How is this? There is this huge evil established amongst us, which casts its dread shadow over everything that is lovely and of good report. Where, *e.g.*, are the working men of England to be found to-day? Not in the house of prayer. In the case of many of them, they have no suitable clothes; but why is this? Because wages are low? Because trade is bad? I answer, because the money is carried to the public-house, and is thus worse than wasted. There are some who go many times, perhaps regularly, to the house of God, and yet are not saved. Why? The grand neutraliser of the Gospel is the habit of drinking intoxicating liquors. 2. It is also a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel abroad. (1) They tell us that we cannot, as Christians, take possession of the world, because we have not the means. Is it a truth that England, the richest land upon earth, made rich too by her Christianity, has done what she could for Him who redeemed her when she gives eightpence per head for the conversion of the world? Is it so? Alas! no; for while we have done this, we have spent £4 per head on strong drink. (2) They say the world is not converted because we have not the men—especially suitable men. How is this? There are men to be found for everything else. One reason is, that the drinking customs have done much to enervate the Church. Strong drink aims high. It aims at the men of active brain and warm heart. (3) Then there is the third reason—want of success. There are European barriers that are much stronger than heathenism and idolatry. The missionary tells us, over and over again, that he is far more afraid of English drinking than of native idolatry. II. IT IS THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO SWEEP THIS ENEMY AWAY. God has decreed that these mountains shall perish. 1. The Church can remove this mountain. Look at her power as a teacher. Are not the children of our country in her hands? Look at the political power which she possesses. Is there an election in which the Christian Church cannot turn the balance? She has not only the ordinary power which men have, but she has omnipotence at her command.

2. The Church must, if she would hold her own. If we are not assailing strong drink, it is assailing us. 3. The Church must, if she would please her Master. How are we to proceed? Abstinence first; then entire prohibition of the traffic. III. THE GLORIOUS RESULT. (*C. Garrett.*) *Preparing the way of the Lord* :— I. THE ADVENT IMPLIED. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." 1. The Lord here spoken of is doubtless the supreme Jehovah; and from the appropriation of the passage by inspired authority to Christ, I apprehend nothing less can be intended than to intimate that He who was coming was the true God and eternal Life. This was that Immanuel who was to bring in an everlasting righteousness, to redeem and restore the Israel of God, and accomplish salvation for all the ends of the earth. Let us, then, inquire, Is this interpretation of the passage justified by other scriptures, and especially by the event itself? Assuredly He came with all the signs and demonstrations of incarnate Deity. He Himself laid express claim to this high character, and most manifestly displayed the perfections which it involves. With these sublime views of His character agrees the testimony of all His inspired apostles. 2. The disciples of John were required to contemplate here the true Messiah coming to effect salvation, to fulfil all the promises made of old to their fathers. It is, therefore, of great interest and importance to ascertain what was involved in that character, and what was the work assigned Him to do. It is expressly declared that He came to do the will of God,—to magnify the law and make it honourable,—to render to it a perfect obedience, and make reconciliation for iniquity. 3. The way of the Lord to us must be understood of His approach to our consciences and hearts by His word and spirit. II. The charge to "prepare the way of the Lord" implies that there ARE DIFFICULTIES OR OBSTACLES IN HIS WAY. 1. There is the pride and self-righteousness of the human heart. 2. The heart is by nature hard and impenitent, blinded to its own defects, and, even after the confession of them, unwilling to have them condemned or to give them up. 3. The state of human desires and affections presents other and formidable obstacles to the claims of the Lord. Their desires are low—their affections carnal. The poor grovelling heart must be raised to noble and exalted ends and aims. 4. In some there exists a mass of prejudice, and the truth of Christ is viewed under a false light, or through a perverting medium. They will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, and they cannot enter therein. Some are prejudiced against the authority of revelation—some against the mysteries of godliness—some against the doctrines of grace or salvation by the merit of another; and many dislike the holiness, the self-denial, the separation from the world which Christianity inculcates. 5. Repentance is necessary to prepare the way; humility, to receive and learn the doctrine; prayer, to give it success in the heart; and watchfulness, to carry it out into practice. Every one who is himself a disciple of the Lord, has something to do in preparing the way of Christ in the earth. (*G. Redford, LL.D.*) *The road maker* (with Matt. iii. 3):—To the writers of the Gospel story this vivid expression seems to have commended itself as peculiarly applicable to the Baptist. He came heralding the speedy advent of the Messiah, and his life and ministry were a preparation for the greater life and more potent ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. In all essentials that task still remains to be performed. The modern road maker—the herald and hastener of a better and holier day—must be distinguished—I. BY A PROFOUND SENSE OF THE EVIL OF THE PRESENT. The prophet was no blind optimist chorishing a foolish hope of a happier future because he did not see the abounding evils around him. He saw with clear, penetrating eyes the moral and spiritual degradation of his nation and day. He speaks of it, ay, and of the national evils which must issue from it—exile, defeat, the overthrow of their beautiful city. That is true of the prophetic band from first to last—from Elijah to John. The man who deliberately closes his eyes to the evils of his day, or seeing them minimises their importance, or in thought disguises them by some euphonious phrase, will never—let his life be prolonged to beyond the age of the patriarchs—prepare the way of the Lord. Too many of us live in an imaginary world as different as possible from the world of stern fact. The men who do most in their own generation to make a way for a better day in the future are usually the men who see clearly one wrong which needs righting, one obstacle which needs removing, one lie which needs refuting, and give themselves to the doing of that one thing—*e.g.*, Wilberforce and slavery, Wesley and Evangelism, Cobden and Free Trade, Booth and the submerged tenth. One word of warning. To look fearlessly at the evils of your own day is not

without danger. Not until that Voice which speaks of comfort through forgiveness has been heard and welcomed does the call come which bids hands and feet and active will prepare the way of the Lord. II. BY AN UNQUENCHABLE FAITH IN THE FUTURE. The road maker is an optimist because he is a man of faith. There is an optimism which is both foolish and unfounded. But if the optimist has first looked facts in the face, and then rises by sheer force of faith in God above all that contradicts his hope, his optimism is not a vice, but a shining and beneficent virtue. Such was this prophet's. So with John. He is certain, despite the manifold evils—moral and social—that afflict his people, that the day of the Lord's anointed will be a glorious day—a day of great things; and he speaks of it and of Him whose shoe-latchet he is not worthy to unloose with an unbounded faith. "He must increase; I must decrease." Note on what the road maker rests—not on man. "All flesh is grass; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God endureth for ever." The people have God's Word; when all their human leaders have fallen, and every visible authority for God is taken away, this shall be their rally and their confidence. III. BY HIS READINESS TO SERVE OR SUFFER. So Isaiah: so John. No good cause but has exacted its toll of both from heroic hearts that have espoused it. (*W. Ll. Williams.*) *Comfort for the afflicted Church*:—I. THE DESIGN OF THIS PROPHECY is to speak peace and comfort to an afflicted Church. Not only to the Jewish Church under a temporal captivity, but to every Christian Church, and every faithful soul. 1. "Every valley shall be exalted." As the way St. John was sent to prepare by repentance was in the hearts of men, this must express some change to be wrought in those hearts. And what does it proclaim, but that humility is the way to glory? 2. "Every mountain and hill shall be made low." As the lowly and fruitful valleys represent the meek and pious servants of Christ, so do the lofty and barren mountains point out to us the haughty and unprofitable children of this world that oppose Him. 3. "The crooked shall be made straight." This is a most essential part in a highway, the end and intent of which is, to lead those who travel in it directly to the place and city where they would be. Man, at his creation, was placed in the straight way to heaven and happiness. Had he kept the eyes of his faith steadily fixed upon it, and walked directly on in the path of God's commandments, he had soon arrived at it. But he listened to the suggestions of the devil, who drew him out of it, pretending to show him a pleasanter and shorter road than that appointed. But no sooner was man a sinner than God was a Saviour. When the valley of humility is exalted by faith and the mountain of pride and self-sufficiency brought low in your hearts, the crooked shall instantly be made straight before you. 4. "The rough places plain." When the low ground is raised, the high levelled, and the whole marked out with a line and made straight, nothing remains but to clear away all obstructions. II. The words thus explained, what remains but that we APPLY THEM TO OURSELVES, FOR THE DIRECTION OF OUR PRACTICE? (*Bp. Horne.*) *Preparing the way of the Lord*:—I. THE DUTY OF PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD. 1. The herald. Allusion is here made to an ancient custom, according to which heralds were sent before to prepare the way for the monarch when he was about to march from one place to another. Christian ministers are the "voice" of God "crying in the wilderness." The very circumstance of this voice being needed shows the disordered state of man by nature. It is not enough for ministers gently to remind men of their state and duty—they must "cry." Very many are the souls that need to be thus roused. 2. The scene of his labours—"the wilderness." This is highly descriptive of the state of men in every age. A wilderness, a desert, indeed, is this world, while void of God's grace; destitute of beauty, and unfruitful as to every good work. 3. What is the work to which the herald calls? As far as we have it in our power, we are to aid in removing whatever hinders the reception of Christ in the world. What is it hinders the reception of Christ in our own hearts? The success of the messenger will ever depend upon his looking up to the Lord. II. OUR ENCOURAGEMENTS. 1. Every difficulty, however formidable, shall be surmounted. For "every valley shall be exalted," &c. What are the difficulties which present themselves? In the work of salvation there are two leading classes of impediments. (1) Internal. These are in every heart. There is much anxiety and depression: we are ready to imagine there is no hope; here are the valleys to be exalted. Some are puffed up with conceit of their own merit, and will not come to Christ; here are mountains to be made low. There are some untractable, obstinate passions; here are the

roughnesses' which are to be made plain. Who is sufficient for all this? None but the Lord alone. (2) External. In introducing the Gospel among the heathen there are many difficulties. 2. There shall be an universal manifestation of the Divine glory. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." There was a great manifestation of the Divine glory when Cyrus and the foes of the Church were made the instruments of delivering God's people from their captivity. Christians! this is not our work, or we should soon be dismayed. It is the way of the Lord. He is to work; He is to display His own glory. What tenderness and condescension has God shown! 3. The certainty of all this. "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." When one promises who can fulfil our wishes, we have all the encouragement we can possibly need. In no blindness of mistaken zeal, in no rashness of enthusiasm, yet with all holy boldness, let us labour to prepare the way of the Lord. (*W. Williams.*) *The King's highway* :—I. VALLEYS MUST BE LEVELLED UP. 1. Inattention. (1) If we attend not to the Gospel message we can neither realise its importance nor secure its benefits. (2) Those who absent themselves from the house of God are indifferently prepared for the coming of the Lord. (3) So those who while there allow their minds to wander upon their merchandise, pleasures, &c., are ill prepared for the coming of the King. 2. Apathy. (1) Thousands of professors of religion put forth little effort in the cause of God. (2) Begin with yourself. Make a stir among your neighbours. Begin now. 3. Despondency. (1) There are those who are so affected with a sense of their sinfulness that they fear to trust in Christ for salvation. (2) Some professors take a morbid, gloomy view of the work of God. II. EMINENCES MUST BE LEVELLED DOWN. 1. The mountain of pride must be reduced. (1) The pride that will not make full confession of sin. (2) The pride that will not receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child. (3) The pride of reason that will not accept salvation until its mysteries are comprehended. (4) The progress of Christ is also hindered by the worldly pride of professors. 2. The mountain of presumption must be depressed. (1) Sinners are presumptuous when, without forsaking their sins, they attempt to believe for salvation. (2) Professors are presumptuous when they expect the work of God to revive in the Church without exerting themselves to promote a revival. (3) While we work as though everything depended upon working, we must trust as though everything depended upon trusting. 3. The hills of ingratitude must be brought low. (1) Some are ostensibly so zealous for the conversion of sinners that they forget to thank God for the good He is bestowing. (2) There are others who will not rejoice when they hear good tidings of the work of God, because they are not themselves the subjects of that work. III. THE CROOKED PLACES MUST BE STRAIGHTENED. 1. Prejudice. (1) Some object to the movements of the blessed Jesus because He comes too loudly. (2) Others complain because He comes too silently. (3) Some dislike them because "publicans and harlots" are getting converted. (4) Others find fault because the work of grace takes hold upon the better classes. (5) And there are those who disparage the work of God among the children because they are too young. Nothing pleases crooked prejudice. 2. Jealousy. (1) It hears that sinners are converted, but is not pleased because the converts have joined other churches. (2) We may be anxious for the prosperity of God's work for party purposes. (3) How admirable was the spirit of Paul, who rejoiced that Christ was preached, no matter by whom! 3. Censoriousness. (1) None of us are so perfect that we can afford to be severely scrutinised. We should therefore endeavour to put the best construction upon each other's conduct. (2) We should be especially careful not to impeach good men with want of zeal for God because they differ from us in judgment as to the best way to promote His work. 4. Covetousness. (1) The acquisition of property is the one end for which some persons appear to exist. It is to no purpose to remind such persons that the world is perishing, and that the Church missions are languishing for want of funds (2) Can the God of benevolence bless a covetous Church? (3) The cure for covetousness is giving. IV. THE ROUGH PLACES MUST BE SMOOTHED. 1. That ugly rock of Sabbath desecration must be removed. (1) God did not institute His day for our amusement. (2) It was not instituted to encourage idleness. It is separated from the toil of secular business. 2. That rut of drunkenness must be filled up. 3. Those sinks of immorality must be filled. Lying, cheating, oppression, uncleanness. 4. The rough places of instability must be smoothed. (1) Like the chameleon, which takes the colour of every object on which it rests, there are those who never remain the same person

for four-and-twenty hours. Treating Church membership as a coat that might be put on or off at pleasure. (2) At one moment they are all in a flame, the next moment they are cold as ice. Sometimes they appear like the oak, at other times like the reed that is shaken with the wind. (3) In the Church they are one thing, in the world another. Yet are they the noisiest fault-finders against the quiet, steady, unostentatious workers. (*F. W. Macdonald, M.A.*) *Preparing the way of the Lord* (with Luke iii. 10-14):—I. EXTERNAL PREPARATION (Isa. xl. 3-5). Our King has notified us that He wants to encircle this world with His glory, and we are the pioneers to make way for His chariot. Let me indicate a few things about this work if you are going to make it a grand success. 1. There must be a willingness to undertake it. Indifference will kill the enterprise. Difficulties will appear; there must be courage and a cool head to guide a brave heart. Three things must be prominent—(1) Regularity of effort. (2) A desire to find one's own particular work. (3) Surrender to the guidance of the Spirit. 2. There must be an appreciation of the importance of the work. If the King has given an order, there must be some reason for it; and when the carrying out of that order involves careful planning and difficult execution we must infer the importance of the result, and hence of the preparation. (1) Cutting down forests. What are the dead trees in the way? Apostate Christians. They lie right across the King's track, and He has to rein up until somebody removes them. What are the strong, sturdy, even luxuriant trees on the way? Worldly Christians. (2) Levelling the hills. Pride is a high hill. Unbelief is a considerable mountain. Criticism is a rocky mound. (3) Filling up the hollows. Oh, the deficiencies in the Church to make up! II. INTERNAL PREPARATION (Luke iii. 10-14). Every pioneer of the coming King must observe these demands. 1. Generosity. A niggardly nature is too narrow quarters for the Lord to dwell in. 2. Justice. 3. Peaceableness. It was the soldier's duty to fight, but only when necessary, and only to secure peace. The ultimate aim of justifiable war is always peace. When you have got the way all prepared, you will find that it is—(1) A highway for the King. (2) A way of blessing for His subjects. (3) A way beginning with a cross and ending with a crown. (*W. H. G. Temple.*) *A great work requires preparation*:—There is a lesson which man is taught in many ways, but which he is very slow to learn. It is the necessity of preparation before any great work can be taken in hand and brought to a prosperous end. Before men begin to build, they must dig the foundation. Before they reap the harvest they must sow the seed and prepare the soil. The truth is an elementary one, and yet through neglect of it, many a good work has failed, many an earnest worker has despaired. And the greater and more lasting the work, the longer and deeper the preparation must be. Things which shoot up quickly, quickly pass away. A tree does not spring up in a night. A nation is not born in a day. History shows us the long period of conception, and the painful period of travail, before great ideas can be brought to the birth and great changes can be wrought in the political world. Geology again teaches us the countless number of the ages of preparation in which this earth was fitted to be the home of man. (*F. Watson, M.A.*) *Preparation for the coming of Christ*:—There is one event in the world's history which by every Christian must be admitted to be unique, alike in itself and in its consequences. The coming of God in the flesh, bringing life to a dying world, light to a dark world, peace to a world at enmity with God, may find its types and shadows, but it can find no parallels amongst other historical facts. There had been comings of great men, but never the coming of the great God. There had been revelations of truth, but now the Truth Himself was revealed. Great kingdoms had been set up quickly to pass away, but now the world-wide eternal kingdom was established. We may call it a crisis in history; indeed it was. It was the crisis, the turning-point in the history of the world, the turning-power in the history of each individual man. We may describe it in its results as a re-creation, but even that word is inadequate, unless it means much more than a restoration of the old creation to its original beauty and perfection. The preparation for this unique event, how can we exaggerate its importance! So much preparation was needed for any one of the ages; how much more for that which is described as the fulness of them all! So many agencies were set at work to fit this world to be the home of man; how can we overestimate the preliminary work by which men were prepared to be the home of God? (*Ibid.*) *The gnostic gospel*:—It is well worthy of notice that almost the earliest heresy with which the Church battled was one which denied the reality of this preparation. A fundamental

gnostic doctrine was the suddenness of the appearance of the Christ in human fashion. There was indeed a preparation, a development, so to speak, of the Supreme Being before He could stoop so low as earth. But there was no preparation of man for the reception of his God. Suddenly, at the time of His baptism, the Christ appeared in human form upon the earth. His human nature, or human body, if indeed it could be called human, had no previous history. It did not grow like ours. It could not trace its origin from the parents of the race like ours. It was an instrument which the heavenly Christ took to Himself for His work, and which He flung away when He had no further use for it. Thus teaching, the gnostics cut off the Christ from all the men before or after Him. They were not bone of His bone, or flesh of His flesh. Thus was denied all preparation of the human nature by which the Saviour of men worked. And the world into which He came, it also had not been prepared for His coming. If the supreme spiritual God had in any way come in contact with this material world, it had been by accident; nay, rather by mishap. In this world of ours God had not been the king, and never could be king. With this human nature of ours, God had not been and never could be united. The Christ did not come to give this earth, in their fulness, truths of which He had already vouchsafed us foretastes, but He came to deprive us of a higher life, which had unawares come in contact with material bodies, and had been contaminated by them. Instead of light struggling with the darkness to subdue it, the gnostics imagined light struggling in the darkness to escape from it. If fuller light was revealed by their Christ, it was only that He might gather up the stray light lost from heaven and take it for ever away. This is the gnostic gospel. This is the gospel without the Old Testament. This is the gospel without preparation of the Man Christ or man's world. Not such the teaching of the Church. She has taught us to regard the history of the world as the unfolding of the great plan by which God would gather all nations and peoples to Himself. (*Ibid.*) *Preparation among the heathen for the reception of Christianity*:—This preparation is not to be regarded as confined to the chosen people of Israel. It is true, "Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the peoples." But even darkness, thick darkness, may be preparatory to light. It was so at the creation of the world. It is so in every-day experience. If we believe, as believe we must, that man was created with capacities for comprehending the light; if we believe that in his pure and unfallen state it was natural for him to love the light; if we believe that his higher nature is never wholly lost: then we must confess that the very darkness in its depth and grossness must have caused longings deep and vast. When men groped in the darkness, and missed their way, and felt they had missed it, they must have longed for the Day Star to arise and shine. They must have said, we were meant for something better than this. They must have hoped for happier times. "They sat in darkness and the shadow of death, being fast bound in misery and iron. They fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress." He in whose heart a longing for better things has arisen, albeit that longing may be indefinite and ill-directed, has not been left unprepared for receiving a gift from God. (*Ibid.*) *Israel's preparation for the coming of Christ*:—Beyond this general preparation of the nations there was also a special preparation of a particular people. We are entitled to argue this from the condition of that people when the Saviour appeared. You find that nation scattered all over the world; though in it, yet not of it. It was disliked and despised. It was persecuted and down-trodden. In most places it was a mere handful. In no place had it the supreme authority. Numbers, educated opinion, popular prejudice, and state power were all against it and its distinctiveness. Yet it was never crushed, and it was never absorbed; it never ceased to exert power and influence. Low as its fortunes then were, none of any nation were so proud of their history, none were more hopeful of their future. Indeed, it might be said, with some truth, that at that time the Jews alone had hope. The nations were groaning in their pains. Old institutions and old religions were worn out. Men's hearts were failing them for fear, and for looking for those things which were coming upon the earth. The Jews alone hoped for the coming of new and better times. The Jews alone thought that the pains they were suffering were not pains of dissolution, but birth-pangs, the pains followed by new life and fresh joy. (*Ibid.*) *Vox clamantis*:—The note of all times that are progressive is a note of urgency, preparation, advance. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The appealing "voice"*:—Sometimes there is nothing

to instruct us but a "voice." We hear it, but cannot trace it. It is called the spirit of the times, the voice of the day, the genius of the hour. Sometimes it is personated in one man, one policy; at other times it is a diffused voice, coming, apparently to the ear, from all the points of the compass at once, but with singular unanimity, emphasis, truthfulness. It is never a voice of despair, or a tone that would cast the soul into dejection, but always like a clarion, or a chiming bell, or a father's call, or a soldier's resounding peal. (*Ibid.*) **Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**—*A highway in the wilderness*:—We ought to read here, not "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord," but rather, "the voice of one crying, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord." Now, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness"—if you read so—will have a sufficiently direct application to John Baptist and to few men besides. But "the voice of one crying, Prepare a highway in the wilderness," is no more exclusively applicable to him than to John Calvin or John Knox or John Ruskin. It is applicable to everybody who does anything for the world, especially in its waste places and its worst places, in the way of improvement. It is applicable to Copernicus, Bacon, James Watt. Above all, it is applicable to Christ Himself. It is an anticipation of better and still better times for all mankind. 1. Does it matter at all to us who can have no hope of seeing it in our time, who have certainly, as it would seem, to live out our lives in a condition of things in which not so much the presence of improvement as the need of it is conspicuous? To this question, I think, there are two answers, both of which, for religious minds at any rate, have some weight. (1) Our idea of God, of a Divine order in the world, is very much our whole stock-in-trade in the matter of religion. The question with us, as regards religion, is, how much we can see of God in what is not God, and in what seems opposed to God? Is that which we see of Him, though it must be little, yet enough to give us feeling, emotion, to fill our minds, not with a thousand anxieties and alarms about things clean and unclean, but to fill them to overflowing with reverence, all that constitutes the mysterious life of a spirit conversing with that unutterable Spirit behind the veil? Second to this even, though of infinite importance, is the question whether we shall devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers, or meditate upon the Good Samaritan, and go and do likewise. It obviously, then, concerns very much our idea of God, our experience of Him, what we see or feel of Him, our stock-in-trade in the matter of religion, what notion we form and entertain of the future destiny of mankind. We know that the past has not been all that could be wished. Plenty of desert in that backward view. Will the future be better? Evidently that is a matter which must go to shape our idea of God, of a Divine order of the world. This is to look at the whole instead of a small part, and form some conclusion or other about the whole. It does matter a good deal to us, therefore, though we are not to live to see it, that, if it is possible or right to entertain it, we should entertain the belief that the endless ages that are yet to come will exhibit the Divine order as beneficent and beautiful in a way in which past ages and our own age have had scanty experience of it. (2) Another answer to the question, What does it matter to us what the future of mankind may be? is obviously this: It is not so much a duty as an instinct for man to live for posterity. We are all of one stock. With reference to this instinct and this satisfaction, the case is plain as regards the future being other and better than the past or the present. We have all something to do, and can do something for posterity. We have the conviction or the hope in doing this, that it is not going to be in vain. 2. "Prepare ye in the wilderness a highway for our God." In this, possibly, rather than in any other form, there comes the Divine call to those in every age, and especially in this age, to whom the Divine order is most of a reality and a power. Personal piety—you must have that, say the professors of ecclesiastical pedagogy—before entering upon this or that work. It is quite true: personal piety you must have to be fit to live, not to say to teach others or help others to live well. But if you have piety enough to have any satisfaction in helping to leave the world a little better than you have found it, then that is enough of a qualification and commission for taking part in work which will occupy your whole life. This general view of the Divine order and of the demands which it makes upon those who are most conscious of the reality of it suggests one or two reflections. (1) In regard to the fulfilment of the Divine order, it often happens that, while weaker agencies at work in forwarding it are recognised, greater ones, even the greatest of all, escape notice. Since the Divine order is not always clear, it must often

happen, in the case of lives of good men and even great men devoted to the advancement of it, that efforts to advance it have other results than those who made them contemplated—great results which they did not expect, no results where they expected great results. (2) As it is often not the mightier but the weaker agencies at work in furthering the Divine order that are recognised and appreciated, so in the case of men who are more or less consciously devoted to the advancement of it, there is often a failure of insight; and they are found working for issues which they did not anticipate, both in the way of failure and in the way of success. In regard to the Divine order embracing the life of all that is, has been, shall be, the clearest sighted of mankind see through a glass darkly. Constantine was agreed that the triumph of the Christian faith was assured by his making it the religion of the State, though John Wesley had afterwards some reason, in his time, for thinking perhaps that more harm was done to it by that event than by all the Christian persecutions. The Christian world, all but a small part of it, was certain that the devil had broken loose in the Reformation in Germany, and few people who heard it did not devoutly believe that Luther's mother was a witch. John Baptist himself is not so remarkable for what he knew as for what he did not know of his own life-work and its effects. I mean, as regards the eternal order, in which he was no doubt a devout and a brave believer. As a forerunner he was nothing of a foreseer. Not only are the greater agencies at work in furthering the Divine order least recognised among the mass of men, but even among choice spirits devoted to the furthering of that order, misunderstanding as to the results of their own activity and the activity of others is more common than insight. Thus stands the case as regards one class of agencies at work in furthering the Divine order. That which is valued in regard to it is the old ecclesiastical machinery, creak and groan and rattle as it may. In the meantime, discredited to some extent by its association with enlightenment not always orthodox, the spirit of humanity enters from the outside into the religious world, to the creation of new social conditions for whole communities. (3) What promise there is in this of a better era both for the Church and for the world is better seen as yet by the world, perhaps, than by the Church. The importance of the fact cannot at any rate be overrated. Nothing is so common in religious circles, among good people, as lamentation. The good old times of religion are no more. That is their complaint. (4) In the meantime, religious people who are so much disposed to complain of the good old times passing away are helping to prepare for times infinitely better than the good old times, in ways of which they are as far as possible from conceiving. They are deepening dissatisfaction with the life, even the religious life of the day, by their lamentations. That is one thing—a negative sort of thing. More positive is the effect of their keeping in their own view and that of others a certain high ideal of life, though it be not the highest of all. (*J. Service, D.D.*) *Christ requires a straight road* :—The King's chariot is coming; you must fill up the ravines and level down the hills. He will not accommodate His chariot to the tortuous lines of your life. If the Lord Jesus Christ is coming into your soul, He is not going to follow the crooked ways of your iniquitous conduct. You have got to make a straight road for Him. (*A. T. Pierson, D.D.*)

Vers. 4, 5. **Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.**—*Christianity an essential element in true civilisation* :—I. THE WORLD IS STILL FULL OF THINGS NEEDING TO BE SET STRAIGHT. So far as the economy of our earth is concerned a period of confusion has immediately preceded the establishment of Divine order. Chaos preceded Paradise. Egyptian bondage was the precursor of the exodus, which was the beginning of a national life Divinely ruled. Judaism was at its worst and Paganism in its most corrupt condition when the voice of the preacher of righteousness was heard, preparing the way of the Lord. Isaiah here compares the social and religious condition of a people awaiting a revelation of Divine glory to the condition of a country, barren as a desert, and impassable by reason of mountains and valleys; and the preparation of a highway amongst these physical obstacles represents the exaltation of what is base and the abasement of some things that are high in human life before the coming revelation of God. Around us here in England, as well as in those foreign countries to which missionary enterprise addresses itself, is a wilderness, in which what is good cannot and does not grow. The bodily and moral degradation of some of our own people, if it were revealed in all its nakedness, would startle the Church from its stately

propriety. A "wilderness" is a fit emblem of a large section of our own population. Yet in this land we have had the Gospel for centuries. How much more, then, do the heathen want and deserve your sympathy! Another phrase in our text, which speaks of "valleys," may remind us further of depths in our social life in which corruption hides. Meanwhile pride covers us, as with a garment. We talk of "the progress of the age," we boast ourselves of our achievements and discoveries. There are "mountains" of pride to be brought down, as well as valleys of degradation to be exalted. And how many "crooked" things have yet to be made straight! What distortions of truth are to be found in England, as well as elsewhere! The orderliness of Divine progress in the natural world is a truth so contorted that some argue from it that all things seen were originally made of things that do appear, and that there was no Divine Creator in whom they found their origin. The mercifulness of God is used as an argument against the possibility of punishment for sin. II. THE WORLD IS NOT ESSENTIALLY THE BETTER FOR THE HUMAN INVENTIONS OF WHICH THE NINETEENTH CENTURY IS SO BOASTFUL. Much of the misery of modern life is due to the fact that moral and religious advance has not kept pace with mechanical advance, and our danger is lest developed mechanism should be to our age what a complicated and resistless machine would be in the hands of a child who knows not the ends for which it is designed. Trains and steamers carry us over land and sea with a swiftness which, to our grandfathers, would have seemed incredible. Our daily bread is often the product of labour done in the far-off fertile fields of California. There has been a literal fulfilment of these words, which speak of conquering mountains and valleys, and overleaping all obstacles, such as Isaiah never dreamed of. But the question is fairly asked, Are we the better for all this? Are we wiser, are we happier, are we nobler, are we more Christ-like, than our fathers were? We have greater appliances than our fathers, but it may be fairly doubted whether we surpass them either in capacity or in enjoyment. When you go for a holiday you can rush up the Rhine, through Switzerland, and back across France in a fortnight, but probably, in a dozen journeys of that sort you see far less than poor Oliver Goldsmith did when, with a fife as his companion, he trudged along the highways of Europe. Scientific instruments are marvellous in power and in accuracy, but scientific men have not advanced in genius beyond Newton or Herschel. Music is heard on every hand; but it is not better than the music of Handel, or of Bach, or of Haydn. In short, we have not a higher life because we have higher material appliances, and you and I are not one whit the nobler men because we can read all the news of the world in a penny paper, and transact our business with the other ends of the earth in a few hours. What do we all gain if, in covering our land with factories and steam engines, we are covering it also with want and wretchedness? In spite of all scientific discoveries and mechanical appliances, it is evident that the world wants something more than these can give. It wants freedom from its sins, and a Redeemer who can set it free. It wants love amidst its cruelties, and rest amid its weariness. III. THE WORLD REQUIRES MOST OF ALL A REVELATION OF THE GLORY OF GOD. Many say, "Let our trade and our railways and all our conveniences first find entrance to a heathen land, and then the people there will be prepared for the Gospel." A grosser delusion could hardly be promulgated. Our own social condition might show its fallacy, and experiment in heathen lands has confirmed it. When this so-called "civilisation" has preceded Christianity, idolaters have become atheists, and their last state worse than their first. The great object we Christians are to keep in view, in all our achievements, is that "the glory of God" may be revealed—not the glory of man, nor of a society, nor of a sect, but the glory of God. As a king, a man finds his glory in the contentment of his people; as a father, a man finds his glory in the well-being of his children; and so the great King and Father of us all finds His "glory" in our contentment and well-being. And how can that be brought about? It is by the work and words of those who speak "comfortably" to the sinners, who proclaim a reconciled God revealed in Jesus Christ. IV. GOD IS LOOKING TO THE CHURCH TO BRING ABOUT THIS CHANGE. He is addressing His people here, and, instead of saying "I will comfort," He says "Comfort ye." No angel messengers now wing their flight from heaven to announce the glad tidings of great joy. The message has been entrusted to us. Let us have patience, though the results of our work at home and abroad seem sparse and small. The upraising of valleys and the levelling of mountains is no child's play, even in the physical world, and it is harder still in the spiritual realm. When we remember the cost at which some modern discoveries were won, and see

the patience and skill and risk which accompany the driving of tunnels through mountains, or under the sea, we are ashamed of the ease with which Christians give way to disheartenment. In preparing the highway here spoken of we must work on the plan the Norwegians adopt for keeping up their roads. Each occupier of land, in proportion to his acreage, has his own allotted portion of road to maintain, and for that he is responsible. So, in proportion to your capacities and opportunities, you have your work to do—in your home, in your class, in your sphere of thought or activity, and from that responsibility none can release you. (*A. Rowland, B.A.*) *The prospects of the Church* :—I. SOME OF THE MOST FORMIDABLE OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE DIFFUSION AND PROGRESS OF TRUE RELIGION, AND THE CERTAINTY OF THEIR REMOVAL. 1. The defective character of personal religion. There are many features of the Christian character scarcely ever brought out to public view; and others whose nature is so misapprehended as to lead to a misshapen exhibition of the spirit and precepts of the Gospel of Christ. Have you never been pained when at the close of the day you have endeavoured to ascertain the character of your thoughts, feelings, and actions ? Have you never been surprised at the moral personage who has presented himself to your view at such seasons ? There is much of secularity mingled with the religion that prevails. What has religion done for us if it has not so elevated the tone and order of our feelings as to render us indifferent to the pleasures of sin ? As a natural consequence of this defective piety much is withheld from the service of God. There is so much of self mingled with our religious engagements. The purposes of God embrace the agency and co-operation of man. If, then, the piety of the Church be defective, if the body that acts for God be enfeebled by disease, or misguided in its operations, how fatally must its efficiency be counteracted! But assuredly an end will be put to this state of things, for "every valley shall be exalted," &c. 2. The division and animosities amongst Christians. A sectarian character has thus been given to the Church, a fictitious and morbid zeal has been engendered, and those resources which ought to have been expended in the evangelisation of the world have, on many occasions, been laid out for party and sinister purposes. 3. The connection that subsists between religion and State politics. The Christianity that has been patronised by the State—that has been adopted as the stepping-stone to emolument and power, this has been mistaken for the religion of the Bible. II. THE RESULTS WHICH THE PROPHET REPRESENTS AS CONSEQUENT UPON THE REMOVAL OF THESE OBSTRUCTIONS. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Nothing can be more inspiring than this prospect. If it is gratifying to see the boundaries of science enlarged, or the elements of human happiness increased; if the political resurrection of a nation inspires us with joy; if it invigorates our hearts to see the spirit of an age awakening from its slumber and preparing itself for wise and virtuous action, what should be the emotion of our hearts in contemplating such a consummation as is represented in my text? It is not the mere promise of an approaching good by which the prophet here seeks to inspire our mind. It contains the elements of all conceivable happiness. It will embody and secure to the inhabitants of our world the highest enjoyment of which their nature is susceptible. The glory of God has hitherto been but partially unveiled. The sun is still behind the cloud, and a shadow is in consequence thrown on our path. But when the piety of the Church shall be freed from its present stains, when her divisions are healed, then shall she arise and shine, for her light will have come, and the glory of the Lord will be risen upon her. But we are informed that "all flesh shall see it together." The Evangelist slightly varies the latter part of the prophecy—"All flesh shall see the salvation of God." As yet the salvation of God is known to but a limited portion of the world. But the salvation of God all are yet destined to see. (*T. Price.*) *The levelling force of Christianity* :—There are and ever have been in the soul of society opinions, prejudices, feelings, conventional notions which, like mountains and valleys, have separated men into classes, and prevented the free-flowing interchange of soul. Those mountains rear their frowning heads and throw their chilling shadows in every district of society. Those valleys yawn everywhere, and form an impassable gulf between the brothers on either side. Christianity has a power to remove those mountains, fill up the valleys, &c. How does Christianity do this? In two ways—I. BY THE LEVELLING TRUTHS WHICH IT REVEALS. 1. A common God. 2. A common nature. 3. A common obligation. 4. A common depravity. 5. A common salvation. II. BY THE LEVELLING SPIRIT WHICH IT GENERATES. The spirit which Christianity

generates in the human soul is such that raises a man above all those prejudices of the heart and conventionalities of life that divide men. What is the spirit? It is a spirit that has supreme regard to three things—1. The spiritual in man. 2. The right in conduct. 3. The eternal in destiny. The socially levelling force of Christianity, however, does not involve spoliation. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) **The crooked shall be made straight.**—*The prophet and the picturesque*:—There is much in us which would instinctively resent and repudiate this ideal that he has put before us. Take, for instance, that sensitive faculty in our century receiving so peculiar and overwhelming a development, the sense of the picturesque. The words of my text break in with a very surprising emphasis. This vehemence of the prophet clashes with all the primary instincts of this sentiment of ours. Mountains flattened out, valleys filled in, highways levelled from end to end, every broken piece of rough ground repaired, every turn and twist in the path straightened—what a picture to portray with such rapturous enthusiasm! Could any result be more deplorable? It is the very murder of the picturesque! The picturesque asks only that the mountains should rise yet higher, be more pathless, more craggy, more perilous; that they should be torn by glaciers and scoured by avalanches and wasted by storms and bemoaned by winds, and be aghast with lonely desolation—that is what it prefers, that is what excites it,—and the valleys shall plunge yet deeper, more gloomy vaults, sunless, with hoarse torrents buried in awful black gulfs and roaming along in anger out of sight. There should be no roads if possible; at least, never level or straight for two yards together; and there should be cliffs that are frowning and overhanging and ruinous and threatening, and high and fierce and solitary rocks. Everything should be rough, everything should be crooked, for the sake of the picturesque! (*Canon H. Scott-Holland, M.A.*) *Picturesque abuses*:—In this contrast between the prophet and the picturesque is there nothing but of a light or superficial nature, nothing serious? I doubt it. The prophet's thunderous intensity brings our sentiment to a check just at the point where it is apt to pervert the moral judgment. Where is that? At the point where it helps to blind us to the actual life, the actual needs and necessities of a living present. The feeling for the picturesque belongs always to those who are outside the object of their admiration. They are looking on as unconcerned spectators. That which they observe lies wholly outside their own living, personal experience, and that is why it touches them and startles them, and pleases because it startles. It is so odd, so unexpected, so dreamy, so old. That is the sentiment bred in tourists, in passengers tarrying the day, gazing from without at a scene, unaffected by its sorrows, aloof from its inner reality. We like these strange, huddled, dirty streets, and these swarming beggars, and these crumbling walls, and these crooked alleys, and all the oddities of decay, and all the quaintness of the obsolete. Abuses, so long as they do not hurt us, are much more picturesque than their remedies. In this mood what serious blunders we have made abroad—offences against our best English self, for the native English have a love for liberty, for a free people. How much has our love for the picturesque killed our sympathy for freedom in Rome or in Venice, shall we say? This error which we make again and again abroad is very apt to repeat itself here at home; for those who have leisure to enjoy the picturesque are bound, of course, to have already reached some comfort themselves, some security of position. That thatched cottage in the dell, in the hollow of the wood, could anything be more engaging? We have sketched it again and again. It is very damp, and those colours on it that we like so, the greens and the yellows, reveal the dampness. It is buried under the trees, it stands on soppy ground, and there is no drainage; there is a cesspool behind. But how raw the new brick four-roomed house would look without an offence in our rustic nook! There is a great deal more of this among us comfortable and educated people than we are at all aware of. It acts as a dead weight on us, it counteracts the force of our reforming zeal. We should never for one moment dream of letting the picturesqueness stand in our way if we had to sink into consumption through the damp or die of typhoid in some undrained, old-fashioned street; but somehow it puts in its plea with us with far greater power when others are concerned, and we are but spectators. It is against all this that the prophet's zeal thunders. The picturesque may rightly widen our sympathies for the past; it may plead for gentle handling of what is so fair in the deposits of the past, it may rightly prompt us to do our very utmost to save what is beautiful and natural from cruel, hideous misuse by commercial greed, but there is one supreme law which it never must gainsay,

the law which is uttered in the cry of the recovered king, Hezekiah, when he recovered from his sickness: "Death cannot celebrate Thee. The living shall praise Thee, as I do this day." (*Ibid.*) *Redemptive growth:*—Since the cloud and curse of sin, all this growth of ours, which is our life, is remedial, corrective, redemptive. It is won through strife over wrong, through struggling out of evil, and always, therefore, it must witness to its vitality by straightening the crooked, by making the rough places plain. It must always testify to its life. Always it must be bettering bad highways. It must be abasing mountains that obstruct and daunt. It must be filling up valleys that cramp and choke and darken. That is the necessity, the necessity of clearing the way for free motion towards a better day. But, again, even from inside this growing life, even after we have torn ourselves out of the ranks of unconcerned spectators and irresponsible tourists, and have thrown ourselves with heart and hope into this remedial work, and are keenly striving to bring the crooked straight and to loosen the terrible burden of wrong; even then this old perplexity and trouble will recur, and recur in a subtler and much deeper form. Perhaps in the very midst of our reforming zeal there will suddenly come a thought, a sight crossing our mind of all our hopes achieved. The crooked, now so cruelly wrong or disastrously distorted, has at last been made perfectly straight. What then? Are we better off? What a poor, stale, stupid place this world will have become. All wrongs redressed, all blunders rectified, all inequalities levelled; everybody on the same platform, decent, snug, comfortable—a dull, unbroken mass of average respectabilities. Comfort for the comfortless—it was for that that we had hungered and toiled. But the comfortable! Look at those who have already attained it. Are they so encouraging a prospect? What if all were as they? After all, moral character is our sole aim; and will character have lost or gained when our efforts have succeeded? Where is character found now? we say. Is it found amid the comfortable? Hardly. Is it not always won through suffering, strife, anguish? Those rare simplicities of the poor, those generosities, those devotions—are they not worth all the smugger virtues? Would they not have vanished in a world where there was nothing crooked, no high lights and no dark shadows, no ups and downs? Perhaps we take up some industrial Utopia, some book like "Looking Backward," and as we read we are chilled to the marrow. There is a dull recoil. How utterly repugnant; how flat and stale and unprofitable! All that makes humanity dear and pathetic and glorious gone, died out! "No room in such a world," we say, "for high adventures, shining heroisms; no trumpet calls, no splendid risks, no holy indignation, no exaltation of sacrifice, no prophetic passion. Democratic equality has levelled all the roads straight as dies. They run between their kerbstones. All is smooth, orderly, equitable, and there is no material there for art, none for music. Where shall we seek for Schubert's songs that float like dreams?" "They were won," we say, "by his tears." And where will be our Hamlets and our Lears in the romance? How will man ever display his higher capacities except through pain and struggle and sorrow? Yet those are the very conditions that we are labouring to deny him. Alas! our hearts sink, our imagination protests, our hopes flag, and the glowing passion of the prophet, as it catches sight of the very fulfilment of its dream, dies away in the wail of the preacher, "Vanity, vanity, even this is vanity." (*Ibid.*) *No fear of Utopia:*—We have invented a terror for ourselves. We need not be the least afraid. These visions of the future deceive us by suggesting a finality at which man will have arrived. These Utopias are just what will not be true. That is just what we are quite certain will never occur while this present age endures. The one thing that we know of the future is that it will not be like that, for we know that at each moment of his earthly career, until his Lord Jesus comes again to make earth and heaven anew, man will be found warring as a soldier—a pilgrim pressing on towards eternity with mountains still towering ahead, dark with unknown destiny, with valleys into which he must plunge, and moaning with perils through which he must dare his way; with tough tasks still set him to achieve; with nerves, therefore, still strung and prophet voices calling and eyes strained forward into the night, and loins girt, and heart on fire, and foes to fight, and deaths to die, and victories to win. But you will say, "Is that a very encouraging message? Why waste our efforts, then, in struggling to set things right if the crooked will never be straight, if the high road will never be levelled? Why grind at smoothing down our present hills if always there will be fresh mountains beyond?" Just because man is, in essence, a pilgrim, a soldier, a servant of

Jesus crucified, and it is his very life to bring this to the front. He discovers himself in and through this struggle and pilgrimage, through the strain of the war. That is his mission in which he proves his courage and his nerve. Unless he is always correcting evil, unless he is always battling down wrongs, he is not himself, and he knows not of what spirit he is made. What the particular wrong may be which he is called upon to redress at this moment, or at that, is determined for him by the conditions of history, by God Himself, for God is in history—He directs, He allots, He distributes the task to man—there is a design clearly disclosed. One by one, God brings up to men the difficulties, the obstructions that He would have them encounter. Our forefathers had their own fight to fight, and they fought it. They were tested and proved in other ways. One fight at a time! They fought for liberty, they fought for free speech; they could not attend to underlying poverty. Now their part is played, their mountains are brought low, and their crooked things are made straight, and therefore there is time and opportunity for something else. There is another task for us, another test applied. We are not to enjoy what our fathers put straight without doing our own part to bend the crooked into line, to make rough places plain. (*Ibid.*) *The battle for to-day:*—Since God is in history, there is continuity in our pilgrimage, and there is purpose. The old wars, by healing some wrongs, prepared opportunities for new efforts. There is advance, after all, along this highway, however much there is still always a rough place just ahead, a cruel corner to put straight. We are farther along. There are wrongs righted and thrown behind us, and therefore the nearer we draw to the end. Enough for us that we know the spot on the road at which we stand, that we know what are the crooked things which it is our own special task to set straight. Let us look at them and leave the rest to God. Who can doubt at what spot on the road we stand to-day? Those crooked things on which the light of God has been turned in our day—there they are; we know them and we see them—the commercial pressure that falls on the weak, and that breaks and spoils the humanity under it, manhood, womanhood, home, joy; the heartless mechanism of an impersonal economic system which crunches the aged, the women, the children; the sorrows of those who labour on without any hope of reaching an end of their labour; men and women, jaded, bruised, disfigured, always under-fed, invalided by penury, unqualified for work, unfit for what they do; men and women tossed to and fro by blind tides of fluctuating markets over which they have no control; men and women accumulated in hordes, unshepherded and unregarded in squalid tenements, in sordid and mean dishonour, living environed by disease, born into a world too masterful for their infirmities, sustained at the edge of starvation by a competition that never improves them and yet never eliminates them, drawn under by demands which they are helpless to fulfil, bruised and damaged in trying to meet them. No one anticipated that our industries would create them or sustain in existence classes of this type. They are the signals of some defect in our system, of some perversion, of some disease, of some disaster—that something that meant well enough has gone crooked, that the machinery of our civilisation is out of gear. We have got out of the track. That much is plain. Therefore a responsibility is laid upon us; a thing has got to be done. (*Ibid.*) **And the rough places plain.**—*The rough places made plain:*—I. We may take this to be, in outline, THE DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S WORK WITH OUR WORLD AND WITH MANKIND, REGARDED AS A PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE. It is the voice of history, of nature, of science, of revelation. The present is a preparation for the future, as the past was a preparation for the present, and as the future will be a preparation for a still coming and greater future. We know the history of religion; how slow its progress—how for centuries it was only successful in casting down obstacles, and preparing the hearts of men for the entrance of a faith which was worthy of its Author. It required not the labours of one prophet like John only, but the labours of many generations of prophets, to prepare for the advent of Jesus Christ. Religion passed through numerous forms before it arrived at that form which Christ gave it. And as this was the work of God in the religious thought and life of man, so was it the work of God in the world. The kingdom of heaven did not come until the world was in a measure ready for it. II. So we may say that this is AN INDEX TO THE COURSE OF HIS PROVIDENCE IN EVERY AGE AND COUNTRY. This lesson may be learned—that in all cases the spiritual is above the material; and that all progress and improvement in the material world are but means to an end, and are intended to serve far higher interests. All these benefits of rapid

intelligence, of conveniences, of comforts, are but the removal of hindrances out of the way of the progress of what is spiritual and Divine. If they leave men devoid of better aims—if they leave us selfish, earthly, false—they are no blessings after all! If we use the *gifts* of nature and invention and discovery merely to attain our own ends, and if there is no growth of the spirit of truth and charity, we have gained nothing: we have merely added to our former powers the power to increase our selfishness. But such is not the use for which these new acquisitions are designed. If there are more facilities for reaching the human mind by thought and speech or writing, all the more carefully ought everyone who has influence over his fellows to see that that influence is wholesome, and not hurtful. The material is the servant of the spiritual. What John the Baptist was to Christ, such is all the world to the Christ. All nature was a preparation for Him, all knowledge, all discovery. The world did not see this at the time; but the fact is true for all that. People say that the growth of human wisdom and the increase of human blessings are adverse to the Gospel; but on looking back on history we see that all these things were in the hands of God, and were all made to prepare the way for the kingdom of God. So it is, and so ought it ever to be. III. THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN MAKING THE PATH TO GOODNESS EASIER. IV. THIS IS OUR WORK AS CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD AND FOR THE WORLD. This is part of our task for those who are finding the road to goodness and right living hard and rough. Each of us has something in his power to prepare the way for the kingdom of God in the lives and hearts of others. To many, the difficulties of a right life are very great, and it is no easy task for them to carry it out. Everything is against them: training, circumstances, companions, habits. From their youngest years they have been familiar with evil. It comes to them naturally to deceive, to lie, to do all manner of misdeeds. How can such a youth ever open into a manhood of worth or goodness? He must be helped by education, by guidance, by living examples of affection and well-doing. Christian society, the Church, must come to his aid. And what is all this but doing the work of Christ, the work of prophets and evangelists, the work of the Gospel, preparing a highway, helping those who cannot walk, making the rough places plain, making it easier for a man to stand in goodness and truth? After all is done, however, both for nations and individuals, there will be difficulties to overcome. You can never for yourselves, or for those whom you most love, so arrange things that all personal need for care and effort shall cease. There will be for every man the cross to carry, and for many men the thorn to trouble them. (*A. Watson, D.D.*) *Rough places:*—I. ROUGH PLACES. 1. In general human history. 2. In individual human life. II. ROUGH PLACES MADE PLAIN. 1. The supreme power of Jesus Christ. 2. The supreme power of Jesus Christ used for the advantage of mankind. 3. The advantage of mankind identified with the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ. III. THE TRANQUIL AND BLESSED FUTURE OF THE WORLD. Christianity is good news. Inequalities are to be rectified. Relations are to be adjusted. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. **And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.**—*The revelation of God's glory:*—From this animating prophecy we may consider—I. THE GLORY OF THE LORD. When Isaiah was favoured with the Divine vision the angels sang, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." Another inspired writer observes, "The heavens declare the glory of God." In the display of this glory God "hath clothed Himself with light as with a garment"; and hath peculiarly manifested it in those two grand events, the creation and redemption of the world. Hence the glad tidings are emphatically called "the glorious Gospel"; and the spiritual instruction of the Gospel is called "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This plan of redemption is the arena of heaven, into which the angels "desire to look." It is the rich assemblage of love and mercy, justice and faithfulness, truth and goodness. II. THE REVELATION OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD. The dispensation under which God revealed Himself to our first parents is commonly called the Covenant of Works. The condition required was perfect obedience. By the sin of Adam and Eve this covenant was broken, and "judgment passed on all to condemnation." The glory of the Lord shone round about our offending parents when the very sentence of condemnation was associated with an intimation of mercy. The glory of the Lord was first revealed in the promise that

the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. As generations succeeded, it pleased the most High God gradually to reveal larger discoveries of this sovereign remedy of human woe. In the days of Abraham the promise of mercy was repeated (Gal. iii. 8, 17). The inspired compositions of King David more explicitly unfolded the Divine glory in the redemption of sinners. The grand accomplishment of the words of our text was reserved for the personal appearance of the Son of God. III. THE GLORIOUS EXTENT OF THIS REVELATION. "All flesh shall see it together." At the period of this prophecy the earth was full of darkness and habitations of cruelty. The light of Israel was, comparatively, but as the light of a taper. The space which it illuminated was contracted. The glory of the Lord to be revealed under the Christian dispensation was to resemble the sun in the firmament: it was to shine for all kingdoms, nations, and languages under heaven. It was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people, Israel." The aspect of the present times encourages us to hope that the day is rapidly advancing when "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." IV. THE GLORY OF THIS ANIMATING PROSPECT IS CONFIRMED BY ITS CERTAINTY. "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (2 Tim. i. 9; Psa. ii. 7, 8; Isa. xlix. 5, 6, xlii. 6; John x. 16, xii. 32). V. THE DUTY OF MISSIONARY EXERTIONS IN ORDER TO PROMOTE THE REVELATION OF THIS GLORY. 1. Doth any one ask, "Where is the authority for missionary exertions?" It stands upon the authority of the Most High God. 2. The duty is great, as you regard the exceeding great love of the Lord Jesus Christ. 3. The duty is great, as you consider the personal obligation which you yourselves are under to missionary societies. 4. The duty is great, as God, in His bounty, hath entrusted you with talents to promote this charitable work. (*Basil Woodd, M.A.*) *The glory of the King:*—The august manifestation promised. I. AS TO ITS NATURE. 1. It is the King Messiah in person. (1) The historical allusion is to the Shechinah. (2) But prophetically it is applied to Christ. Jewish expositors apply it to Messiah. It follows, then, that—2. The Shechinah was a type of Christ. (1) It was an undoubted symbol of Divinity. It was the medium in which it pleased God to reveal Himself in ancient times. The complement of such a symbol must needs be a Divine person. The type cannot be grander than the antitype. (2) It was a standing miracle. In it vapour and fire were miraculously supported in union. It is therefore called the "support of cloud and fire." "Pillar" is an unfortunate translation of the Hebrew. A luminous canopy extending over London in its whole extent could scarcely be called a pillar. But the nation of Israel, whether in encampment or on march, could scarcely occupy less space. This miracle would set forth the wonderful union of the Godhead and manhood in the person of Christ. (3) But further, on more nearly considering the Shechinah, it was found to enshrine a beatified human form. This is distinguished as the "similitude of Jehovah" (Exod. xxiv. 10, 11; Numb. xii. 8; Isa. vi. 1-5; Ezek. i. 26). This very thing is seen in the holy mount, only that the true humanity of Jesus transfigured is itself the similitude. Behold, then, the "Imago of the Invisible God"; the "brightness of His glory and the express image of His person." (4) In this character Messiah will come when in full form He appears as the King (Dan. vii. 13; Matt. xxiv. 30, xxvi. 64; Acts i. 11; Rev. i. 7). 3. Meanwhile Christ reveals Himself in His Spirit. He displays—(1) The glory of His wisdom. (2) The glory of His power. (3) The glory of mercy, justice, and holiness in His method of pardoning and saving sinners. II. AS TO ITS EXTENT. "All flesh shall see it together." 1. This term includes the Jew. The day is coming when "all Israel shall be saved"—when the nation shall become Christian. 2. It also comprehends the Gentile. (1) Presage of the calling of the Gentiles was given when the Magi worshipped at Bethlehem. (2) Further presage was given when Jesus, though "sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," nevertheless opened His ministry in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matt. iv. 12-16). (3) It was also presaged in incidents of His ministry. The healing of the centurion's servant. The preaching to the Samaritans (John iv. 39, 42). The healing of the Canaanite's daughter (Matt. xv. 21-28). 3. The grand fulfilment is future. (1) As yet "all flesh" have not seen the glory of the Lord. Certainly all flesh have not seen it "together." (2) But this shall be. (3) Distinctions of Jew and Gentile will merge in the universal blaze of the glory of Christ. III. AS TO ITS CERTAINTY. "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." 1. The Lord can do it. 2. He will do it. (1) His honour is pledged. (3) His existence is pledged. (3) "He cannot deny Himself," "The

Scripture cannot be broken." 3. Are we prepared to meet Christ? (*J. A. Macdonald, M.A.*)

Vers. 6-8. **The voice said Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass.**—*The earthly transitory: the heavenly enduring*:—When we make a judgment of the objects of sense and of faith, "the things that are seen" claim the preference over "the things that are not seen." The appearance which the world presents is seducing, that which religion exhibits is forbidding. The appearances are deceitful, and the judgment we form of them false. I. THE VANITY OF THE THINGS OF THIS LIFE. Empty as is every thing in the world, and limited in its duration, it is one of the truths the most common and the least received. 1. The voice of reason teaches men that they have only a little while to live. If they will but reflect upon their constitution, they cannot but discover, both within and without, innumerable principles of their speedy dissolution. 2. This the Scripture teaches without ceasing: adapting its lessons to the importance of the awakening truth, no strong expressions are overlooked, no striking images escape the sacred writers. 3. Besides, our own experience proclaims to us the fact by the most indubitable proofs. II. THE SOUNDNESS OF A CHRISTIAN'S HOPE IN FUTURITY. The future is as enlivening to the Christian as the past is humiliating to the man. Death, properly speaking, is only the lot of the wicked. The Christian, in the estimation of the Gospel, never dies; he falls asleep, he "rests from his labours." (*P. Huet.*) *The fading and the abiding*:—I. "ALL FLESH IS GRASS." The prophet describes man by this name of "flesh," as that which strikingly sets forth his general state and ordinary habits. What is man? Is not the care of the flesh his grand concern?—the pampering the body, the gratifying its senses, or fulfilling the lusts thereof? Here and there, indeed, we meet with one who has broken its trammels; whose soul, rising up on the wings of faith and love, seeks for happiness in God; but when we look at the world at large, we are compelled to say that it is a world whose aims, pleasures, pursuits, are earthly. Yet how vain are these pursuits! "All flesh is grass"; that is, like the grass it is liable to various casualties. If it abides to its utmost duration it soon withers and is gone. The blade when it has only just sprung above the ground may be trodden under foot, may be parched by the heat, cut off by the cold, or withered by the blight; may be plucked by the hand, or mowed down by the scythe; thus is it with man. No sooner does he appear in the world than some little casualty may at once deprive him of life. This is the state of all—"for all flesh is as grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field": "the wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more!" But is there no difference? Surely there are some distinctions. Yes, there are, and as Archbishop Leighton observes, this difference is beautifully expressed by the inspired writer—"the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." When we enter a field, it is not so much the common blade which attracts the eye. It is the flower—those various beautiful ornaments with which the creative power of God has adorned the face of the earth. So there are various external embellishments which distinguish some from the ordinary race of men. Every soul, indeed, is of inestimable value. Still, it must be confessed that there are properties which some possess which are more attractive—youth, beauty, honours, talent. But what are they all? But the flower of the grass. They partake of the fading nature of the plants from which they spring. II. THE WORD OF GOD IS AS ABIDING AS HIMSELF; and this notwithstanding all the attempts that have been made, by wicked men instigated by evil spirits, to destroy it. This has been their constant aim, for the Word of God has been their constant dread. 1. It abides in its doctrines. These are not evanescent theories, like some of the dicta of the philosophers; they are eternal truths. 2. Its promises endure. Its sanctions also stand for ever; namely, the rewards and punishments which are there made known. Let those who are now surrounded with many temporal blessings regard them as flowers, which the goodness of God provides to sweeten their present path; still set not your hearts upon them: they are but short-lived gifts, fading flowers. There is but one flower that will never fade, "The Rose of Sharon." (*J. H. Stewart, M.A.*) *The withering work of the Spirit* (with 1 Pet. i. 23-25):—Something more than the decay of our material flesh is intended here; the carnal mind, the flesh in another sense, was intended by the Holy Ghost when He bade His messenger proclaim those words. It does not seem to me that a mere expression of the mortality of our race was needed in

this place by the context; it would hardly keep pace with the sublime revelations which surround it, and would in some measure be a digression from the subject in hand. The notion that we are here simply and alone reminded of our mortality does not square with the New Testament exposition of it in Peter. Look at the chapter in Isaiah with care. What is the subject of it? It is the Divine consolation of Zion. The Lord, to remove her sorrow, bids His prophets announce the coming of the long-expected Deliverer, the end and accomplishment of all her warfare, and the pardon of all her iniquity. Further, there is no sort of question that the prophet goes on to foretell the coming of John the Baptist as the harbinger of the Messiah. The object of the coming of the Baptist, and the mission of the Messiah whom he heralded, was the manifestation of Divine glory (ver. 5). Well, what next? Was it needful to mention man's mortality in this connection? We think not. But there is much more appropriateness in the succeeding verses, if we see their deeper meaning. Do they not mean this? In order to make room for the display of the Divine glory in Christ Jesus and His children there would come a withering of all the glory wherein man boasts himself; the flesh should be seen in its true nature as corrupt and dying, and the grace of God alone should be exalted. This would be seen under the ministry of John the Baptist first, and should be the preparatory work of the Holy Ghost in men's hearts, in all time, in order that the glory of the Lord should be revealed and human pride be for ever confounded. The Spirit blows upon the flesh, and that which seemed vigorous becomes weak, that which was fair to look upon is smitten with decay. The withering before the sowing was very marvellously fulfilled in the preaching of John the Baptist. When our Lord Himself actually appeared, He came into a withered land whose glories had all departed. But I am coming to your own personal histories. In every one of us it must be fulfilled that all that is of the flesh in us, seeing it is but as grass, must be withered, and the comeliness thereof must be destroyed. I. Turning, then, to THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN CAUSING THE GOODLINESS OF THE FLESH TO FADE, let us—1. Observe that the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of man in withering up that which is of the flesh is very unexpected. In our text even the speaker himself, though doubtless one taught of God, when he was bidden to cry, said, "What shall I cry?" Even he did not know that in order to the comforting of God's people there must first be experienced a preliminary visitation. Many preachers of God's Gospel have forgotten that the law is the schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. They have sown on the unbroken fallow ground, and forgotten that the plough must break the clods. Preachers have laboured to make Christ precious to those who think themselves rich and increased in goods; and it has been labour in vain. It is our duty to preach Jesus Christ even to self-righteous sinners, but it is certain that Jesus Christ will never be accepted by them while they hold themselves in high esteem. Wherever there is a real work of grace in any soul, it begins with a pulling down: the Holy Ghost does not build on the old foundation. The convincing work of the Spirit, wherever it comes, is unexpected, and even to the child of God, in whom this process has still to go on, it is often startling. We begin again to build that which the Spirit of God has destroyed. Having begun in the Spirit, we act as if we would be made perfect in the flesh; and then, when our mistaken upbuilding has to be levelled with the earth, we are almost as astonished as we were when first the scales fell from our eyes. 2. Furthermore, this withering is after the usual order of the Divine operation. Observe, the method of creation. There seems to be every probability that this world has been fitted up and destroyed, refitted and then destroyed again, many times before the last arranging of it for the habitation of men. What was there in the beginning? Originally, nothing. There was no trace of another's plan to interfere with the great Architect. The earth was, as the Hebrew puts it, Tohu and Bohu, disorder and confusion—in a word, chaos. So it is in the new creation. When the Lord new creates us, He borrows nothing from the old man, but makes all things new. Take another instance from the ways of God. When man has fallen, when did the Lord bring him the Gospel? The first whisper of the Gospel was, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head." That whisper came to man shivering in the presence of his Maker, having nothing more to say by way of excuse; but standing guilty before the Lord. If you will pursue the meditation upon the acts of God with men, you will constantly see the same thing. God has given us a wonderful type of salvation in Noah's ark; but Noah was saved in that ark in connection with death; he himself, as it were, immured alive in a

tomb, and all the world besides left to destruction. All other hope for Noah was gone, and then the ark rose upon the waters. Remember the redemption of the children of Israel out of Egypt: it occurred when they were in the saddest plight, and their cry went up to heaven by reason of their bondage. As in the backwoods of America before there can be tillage, the planting of cities, the arts of civilisation, and the transactions of commerce, the woodman's axe must hack and hew: the stately trees of centuries must fall: the roots must be burned, the old reign of nature disturbed,—even thus the Lord takes away the first, that He may establish the second. As it has been outwardly, we ought to expect that it would be within us. 3. We are taught in our text how universal this process is in its range over the hearts of all those upon whom the Spirit works. The withering is a withering of what? Of part of the flesh and some portion of its tendencies? Nay, "All flesh is grass; and all the goodliness thereof"—the very choice and pick of it—"is as the flower of the field," and what happens to the grass? Does any of it live? "The grass withereth," all of it. The flower, will not that abide? So fair a thing, has not that an immortality? No, it utterly falls away. So, wherever the Spirit of God breathes on the soul of man, there is a withering of everything that is of the flesh, and it is seen that to be carnally minded is death. Wherever the Spirit of God comes, our righteousness withers as our sinfulness. There is much more to be destroyed, and, among the rest, away must go our boasted power of resolution. Still the man will say, "I believe I have, after all, within myself an enlightened conscience and an intelligence that will guide me aright. The light of nature I will use, and I do not doubt that if I wander somewhat I shall find my way back again." Ah, man! thy wisdom, which is the very flower of thy nature, what is it but folly, though thou knowest it not? When the withering wind of the Spirit moves over the carnal mind, it reveals the death of the flesh in all respects, especially in the matter of power towards that which is good. We then learn that word of our Lord, "Without Me ye can do nothing." 4. Notice the completeness of this withering work within us. The grass, what does it do? Droop? nay, wither. The flower of the field: does it hang its head a little? No, according to Isaiah, it fades; and according to Peter, it falleth away. There is no reviving it with showers, it has come to its end. Even thus are the awakened led to see that in their flesh there dwelleth no good thing. What dying and withering work some of God's servants have had in their souls! Look at John Bunyan, as he describes himself in his *Grace Abounding!* For how many months and even years was the Spirit engaged in writing death upon all that was the old Bunyan, in order that he might become by grace a new man fitted to track the pilgrims along their heavenly way. The old nature never does improve. 5. All this withering work in the soul is painful. As you read these verses, do they not strike you as having a very funereal tone? "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." This is mournful work, but it must be done. Those who experience much of it when they first come to Christ have great reason to be thankful. Persons who come to Christ with but comparatively little knowledge of their own depravity, have to learn it afterwards, and they remain for a long time babes in Christ, and are perplexed with matters that would not have troubled them if they had experienced a deeper work at first. 6. Although this is painful, it is inevitable. Why does the grass wither? Because it is a withering thing. "Its root is ever in its grave, and it must die." How could it spring out of the earth, and be immortal? Every supposed good thing that grows out of your own self, is like yourself, mortal, and it must die. The seeds of corruption are in all the fruits of manhood's tree; let them be as fair to look upon as Eden's clusters, they must decay. 7. This last word by way of comfort to any that are passing through the process we are describing. It gives me great joy when I hear that you unconverted ones are very miserable, for the miseries which the Holy Spirit works are always the prelude to happiness. It is the Spirit's work to wither. "Because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." What doth the Lord say? "I kill." But what next? "I make alive." He never makes any alive but those He kills. II. THE IMPLANTATION. According to Peter, although the flesh withers, and the flower thereof falls away, yet in the children of God there is an unwithering something of another kind. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." "The Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." The Gospel is of use to us because it is not of human origin. If it were of the flesh, all it could do for us

would not land us beyond the flesh; but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is superhuman, Divine, and spiritual. If you believe a Gospel which you have thought out for yourself, or a philosophical Gospel which comes from the brain of man, it is of the flesh, and will wither, and you will die, and be lost through trusting in it. The only word that can bless you and be a seed in your soul must be the living and incorruptible Word of the eternal Spirit. Do you receive it? Then the Holy Spirit implants it in your soul. And what is the result of it? There comes a new life as the result of the indwelling of the living Word, and our being born again by it. A new life it is; not the old nature putting out its better parts: not the old Adam refining and purifying itself, and rising to something better. Wherever this new life comes through the Word, it is incorruptible, it lives for ever. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The transitory and the durable*:—I. THE TRANSITORY NATURE OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS. Consider some of those things which constitute the goodliness and the glory of man, and see how they justify the assertion in the text. 1. Personal endowments of beauty and of form. We make our boast of beauty: of the sparkling eye, of comely features. Small is our cause for boast! That body which seemed to concentrate in it all that was beautiful, see it when wasted by accidents and by time, when blasted by the touch of death! 2. The text may be illustrated by adverting to the wisdom, as well as to the beauty and strength of man. Since the attention of man was first directed to the objects of nature, what an innumerable succession has there been of notions, of systems, of theories. And yet we look on these ill-digested systems as belonging only to days which are gone by, and as now utterly exploded. For the fact is, that all knowledge, except that which is derived from the Bible, is destined to pass away. 3. Advert to the transitory nature of those things which are the produce of the imagination and taste. Whatever the pencil of the painter has portrayed; whatever the chisel of the sculptor has wrought; whatever the skill of the architect has reared,—all these are destined shortly to be destroyed. This should convey a very forcible reproof to those who expend so large a portion of their time in the embellishments of life, in dress, and in furniture, and in equipages. 4. In reference to the possessions of men,—wealth and fortune, and their concomitants—grandeur, eminence, pomp, and luxury. 5. As strikingly is this illustrated by the emptiness of that shapeless thing,—that shadow of a shade called fame. 6. See it illustrated, also, as to dominion and power. Kingdoms and empires rise and fall—flourish and decay. 7. The world itself is an illustration of the sentiment. II. THE DURABILITY OF THAT DISPENSATION WITH WHICH GOD HAS BEEN PLEASED TO BLESS THE WORLD. The "Word of our God shall stand for ever." This sentiment is greatly illustrated, and abundantly confirmed, by—1. The utter impotence of persecution. 2. The utter failure of the opposition of infidelity. 3. The blessed and delightful spread given to it in our day. 4. The dispensation of truth with which God has blessed the world is the dispensation of the Spirit. The Word of our God is a living word; it is not only a dispensation of words, addressed to the understanding and will, but a dispensation of the Spirit coming to the heart of man. (*J. Bromley.*) *Israel's oppressors; Jehovah's promise*:—The words are of universal import; but the connection shows the sense in which they are here used by the prophet. Israel's oppressors are mortal: the promise of Jehovah—such a promise, namely, as that contained in vers. 4, 5—remains sure. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *The abiding Word*:—I. THE WEAK AND PERISHABLE NATURE OF THINGS OF EARTH. The word translated "goodliness" signifies excellency. Every sort of excellency. Is it external? Beauty of person, strength of frame, the influence which rank, title, wealth, power, family bestow? It is but as grass, the withering flower. Is it internal? The highest order of intellect, the finest imagination, the soundest judgment, most retentive memory? But the word is wider still. It takes in all moral excellency, truth, justice, benevolence, morality, and all the external decencies of that sort of religion which often is taken for the true religion of the heart, yet is not such. It embraces that in which we are so prone to confide, human power, our own wisdom; all are as grass, as separated from the Word of God, and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. The wind of deep inward temptation, of sore trial, does but pass over it, and it is gone. If man deal with us, we find it sometimes a very solemn thing, how much more when God deals with us. When He comes in the convincing power of His Spirit, in the solemn hour of death, and in the thoughts of immediate appearance before Him, ah! how wither then the flowers that have seemed the fairest. But in the midst of all that fades and perishes and is not, there is, blessed be God, that which standeth for ever. II. THE ABIDING CHARACTER OF "THE WORD OF

our God." This is true in whatever sense we take it. Is it the decree of God? (Isa. xlvi. 10.) Is it His written and revealing Word? (Isa. lv. 9, 10.) Is it His law? (Matt. v. 18.) But by "the Word" here, is especially and pre-eminently meant the Gospel (1 Pet. i. 23–25). The Gospel stands upon the immutable perfections of God. There is not an attribute that does not uphold it. "The Word of our God shall stand for ever." It shall stand amidst all the instability of the creature, amidst all the faithlessness of man, amidst all the unfaithfulness and unbelief of our own hearts. Is the grass to be despised, the flower to be scorned? Be thankful for them while you have them, admire that God who is in them, their chief Beauty, their only real Beauty. Be thankful, seek the right use of them by seeking to glorify God in them. Is it strength of body? strength of intellect? Use them for Him, and in His service. But remember, they fade as you behold, and wither as you use them. Hold them as perishable memorials of the imperishable God. How real are the blessings of the Gospel when realised in the soul! The righteousness of Christ. It stands, it is everlasting (Dan. ix. 24). Consolation is everlasting (2 Thess. ii. 16). Light, everlasting (Isa. lx. 19). Love, everlasting (Jer. xxxi. 3). Life, eternal (Rom. vi. 23). The blessings in the Gospel are durable riches, because the Gospel endureth. Why is it that there is so much instability among many that yet are true believers? They are not rooted and grounded in Christ. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

Ver. 8. **The grass withereth.** — *The decay of the material* :—Viewed in its immediate relations to the context, the "flesh," which is grass, is the vast population of the Babylonian empire. The "goodliness thereof," which is the flower of the grass, is the pomp and pride of the Babylonian civilisation. The "Word of the Lord" is that prophetic word of the future glory of Israel and her Messiah-King which seems to have found a grave of oblivion beneath the overshadowing growth of Babylonian splendour. I. THE NECESSARY DECADENCE OF ALL THAT IS SIMPLY MATERIAL AND EARTHLY. 1. The world had never looked upon a more splendid civilisation than that which greeted the eye of the prophet as he looked down in vision upon the great empire of Nebuchadnezzar. For a thousand years Babylon had been the seat of empire, but under her present sovereign she had risen to a glory of which her founders had never dreamed. Nebuchadnezzar, following in the footsteps of Nabopolassar, his illustrious father, had extended his empire by conquest until he was in fact as well as in name, "King of men." Northward, he held all Assyria in subjection, and reigned to the limits of the frozen zone. Southward, he had subjugated Egypt with its vast empire, and reigned to the limits of the equatorial belt. Tyre, with all her world-wide commerce, was his vassal, and so his fame had been carried to the remotest borders of the great west. This vast empire it was now the ambition of Nebuchadnezzar to consolidate and unify. For this purpose he had opened long lines of communication between its remotest parts. Canals, one of which was five hundred miles in length; highways across the great deserts connecting with the hills of Arabia and the Mediterranean Sea, with caravansaries, fortified garrisons, wells of water, &c., at all needed points; walled cities along the great thoroughfares as storehouses and resting-places for man and beast—these were amongst the wise provisions for bringing the people of various nationalities and races into the cordial relations of mutual interchange and commerce. But the purposes of the great conqueror went further than this. To give stability to his empire he sought to bring about an amalgamation of all the races and a unification of all the religions within his realm. This was the significance of the image of gold which was set up in the plain of Dura, and which all were required to worship on penalty of being thrown into the furnace of fire. And when, in obedience to the Divine voice, the prophet declared all this might and glory to be but as the evanescent and fading flower, you and I, if we had been present, would have looked upon him as some misanthropic churl. And yet, what were the real facts in the case? Within less than forty years from the time to which the prophet alludes, the city was captured and pillaged, the seat of government removed, and the empire distributed among the conquering allies. 2. We find ourselves to-day in the midst of a civilisation as much more splendid than that of Rome as the latter was superior to that of Chaldea. In all that constitutes true greatness; in all that is at once beneficent and beautiful; in liberty, in philanthropy, in literary and æsthetic culture, in adventure of science and perfection of art, there seems scarcely anything more to be desired. Humanity seems at last to have attained

its goal. Culture is in its richest and most perfect flower. We are ready to say, "Surely this consummate civilisation of our race shall not wither like that of Babylon or Rome!" Has it any elements of durability that its forerunners had not? The answer to these questions will be found in the answer to another, namely, whether this civilisation shall root itself simply in that which is material, or shall be permeated by that which is spiritual and Divine? For amidst all the decadence of the past, there has been ever that which could not perish, which was not subject to change, and which had the power of communicating its own stability to all that came under its influence. II. THE STABILITY OF THAT WHICH IS SPIRITUAL AND DIVINE. "The Word of the Lord." Other things undergo mutations, but it abides ever the same. It has also this marvellous property, that it communicates the elements of its own permanence to all that comes under its influence. It is thus like a seed cast into the soil, which takes up inert matter, incorporating it with itself, and thus imparting to it the life which is immanent in itself. Of this life-containing, life-imparting power of the Word of God we may find beautiful illustration in the history of the decline and fall of the empires to which we have referred. Look first at Babylon. Is there anything that shall survive the wreck of the imperial city? Yes, there is a captive people, despised, toiling as slaves in the erection of the splendid architectural monuments of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Few and feeble apparently they are, overshadowed by the countless hosts of Chaldea. But they are believers in the Word of the Lord. That Word has, as an incorruptible seed, found a lodgment in their hearts. It has imparted to them its own immortality. Babylon, that rejects this Word, shall perish; but Israel that believes it and lives upon it shall survive. That which we have seen to be true in this respect of Babylon was equally true of Rome. The eternal city was "laid on heaps," but from the ruins came Christianity in all the beauty of undying youth. The Vandals that destroyed everything else had no power over it. Nay, in the breasts of the very slaves whom they bore to their northern homes, they carried this incorruptible seed. The religion of the slave conquered the master; and hence came that hardy type of Celtic and Saxon Christianity which made the north of Europe the seed-bed of the Reformation. There are preserving salts which, taken up into the pores of the frailest grass and the most delicate flower, do, as it were, transfigure them in their beauty and so preserve them for ever from decay. And thus the religion of Christ has power to give immortality to that which is most fleeting and evanescent. It lays its wand upon that frail flower of physical beauty which lasts but for a day, and it transforms it into the undecaying beauty of the resurrection. It enters into the pulses of youthful ardour and enthusiasm, and makes them beat high and warm in pursuits that can never be interrupted and from motives that never pall. It lifts ambition to a higher plane. It gives to all the activities of the soul their normal and healthful development. It brings the favour of God which is life, and His loving-kindness which is better than life. And what it does for individuals it does in a certain sense for nations also. Let the atheistic materialism, which is seeking to supplant Christianity, become the dominant influence in this country, and Ichabod is written upon all our institutions. The fate of Babylon and of Rome will be ours. The nation and kingdom that will not serve God shall perish. (*T. D. Witherspoon, D.D.*) **The flower fadeth.**—*Progress in decay:*—There are at least two sides to everything. To everything in morals there is a dark and a bright side. Every truth is a revelation of God—a Theophany—a Shechinah. And as the Divine pillar in the Exodus had sometimes an aspect of cloud, and sometimes of fire, so is it with all truth. Its appearance alters with our own changes of character or condition; to the eye of sense it may be a Shechinah of gloom, to the eye of faith a Shechinah of glory. Thus is it with our text. I. LET US CONTEMPLATE IT FIRST BY THE EYE OF SENSE. Let us sit solemnly together in the shadow of the Shechinah. How depressing seems the thought! What a tender and fragile growth is "the grass"! How short-lived all the goodliness of "the flower of the field"! Yet such is human life! 1. "The flower fadeth!" How impressive the truth when we think of others—the beloved of home and life! Where are the happy children who sat with you in the school, and went forth in your holiday?—the men and women who shared with you life's heavier tasks and strangely saddened joys? How many of them do you meet to-day? 2. "The flower fadeth!" How impressive the truth when you think of yourselves! Where now is the bounding heart of your childhood? Where the unclouded hopefulness of youth? As the tide of time rolls on, first, youthful

beauty fades like a flower. Then activity declines: the airy step of childhood flags into the slow measures of weary feet! Then strength decays: the right arm loses its cunning, the form bends under its load! Meanwhile, even the moral man seems to share the infirmities of the physical; the tender affections are chilled, the glorious intellect unhinged or exhausted. And it is all saddening—this withering of the human blossom, and the heart recoils from its emblem—a fading flower! Let us so live that it may be said of us truly, "His glorious beauty was a fading flower." For the fading flower hath fulfilled well its ministry! Was its life long or short; was its beauty great or little; was its sphere wide or narrow; the flower had done well the special work God gave it to do. Richly varied and full of splendour was the flora of the now barren Palestine in the days when Isaiah swept from his harp this requiem to the withering flower! In nothing, perhaps, are there more notable differences than in the spheres and services of flowers. In the wild howling desert the stately palm waves its radiant flower-tuft, and many a lowly plant and shrub open fragrant blossoms. And amid Polar ice-fields and in the fissured lava of volcanoes come forth these sweet children of the summer in their ministry of beauty and of love. Meanwhile, earth's fairer fields are beautified, like old Eden, with their blessed omnipresence. They are all of different classes and uses; but each, in its own season and sphere, makes its little life a blessing—and the air of heaven is sweeter, and insect-life is fed, and the heart of childhood is thrilled with joy, and the soul of wearied manhood is made happier and holier, because of the silent yet earnest ministries of the fading flower! II. TO THE EYE OF FAITH THE SHECHINAH IS GLORIOUS. Indeed, did these tides of time roll over a sinless world, every premonition even of our mortal decay would awaken only joyful anticipations and emotions. For what, after all, is a flower? Is it in itself a perfection—a consummation? No! far from it! It is, at most, a phenomenon of progress! And its decay is only the passing away of a good thing, giving place to a better! The great end and purpose of all vegetable life is the perfected seed! And analogous to this is the progress and development of man's mortal life. Its earthly offices and uses are only for the strengthening within of the spiritual and immortal; our present life, with all its activities and enjoyments, is but the flower-form of a being whose fruit-form or seed-form is in an after and higher life! And death itself is no more than the falling of the petals from the well-set fruit. Therefore, as the wise husbandman grieves not when his orchards shower their gay blossoms, but rejoices, rather, because this is but a prophecy and promise of the golden wealth of autumn, so we should not grieve when, in the development of man, the mortal flower-leaves fall away from the swelling fruit of immortality! 1. It applies to individuals. Fruit is always of greater value than flowers. Therefore, the trained intellect, the calm judgment, the sanctified affections, the subdued passions, the strong, regnant conscience of the mature man, are worth incalculably more than the fiery impulses, the hot and headlong passions, and all the prodigal bloom and aroma of his younger and fairer life. It applies as well to communities or nations—to that organic life of the race which constitutes its oneness. Here, too, the fruit is worth more than the flowers. 2. The world has had its radiant spring-time and its gorgeous flora. In Rome, Greece, Persia, Egypt, Assyria, Judæa, human nature put forth splendid blossoms until the whole air was fragrant with intoxicating aroma. The old philosophy, the old mythology, the old arts and eloquence and poetry—the whole power and passion of the young imperial genius of old time gave to earth the seeming of a fairy palace filled with shapes and sounds of surpassing splendour. And verily that weird glory hath passed away! But have we lost by the decay? Are earth and life sadder than in those heroic times? Would you exchange your printing-press for all the pencils of old artists, and the tongues of old orators, and the harps of old minstrels? Would you barter railroad and telegraph and steamship for all the radiant dreams of the old idealists? Would you give up your simple Christian faith for the old gorgeous mythology? 3. We are considering the whole of earthly life as the flower-form, rudimental to the heavenly fruit-form; and the analogy between flower-life and man-life is manifold. (1) Flowers differ widely in their beauty and glory. Among species ranking as equals, how the lily differs from the rose; and both from the violet! And so is it of humanity. It has its roses, and lilies, and violets; and now and then a magnificent or monstrous aloe, and always its countless myriads of flowers of the grass. And although to the eye of sense the value of flowers is according to their outward manifestations; yet, true wisdom

regards colour and aroma as only phenomenal of progress. Presently the petals, alike of the grand flower and the tiny blossom, will wither, and of both the value seems only in the accomplishment of their Maker's purpose with the fruit or the seed. So God accounts of His children. The king, the conqueror, the man of imperial gifts and genius will die as fades the great aloe, and the humble pass away as the flower of grass. And then the search, as material for the Judgment, will be the fruit or seed of the developed character. (2) Flowers differ widely in their seasons and spheres of influence. Fair children die like snowdrops in the early spring. Then come the summer flora. Men in the meridian splendour of their powers passing away, as vineyards and orchards and meadows shower their prodigal blossoms. Nor is the human winter without its flowers of exquisite fragrance and beauty. We have them in our midst, men whose grey heads are our crowns of glory. And as in their seasons, so in their spheres, men, like flowers, differ. At the foot of the awful arctic glacier did our heroic Kane find blossoms of delicate beauty; and in the dreariest waste of Sahara the eye of the fainting explorer grew bright as it fell on a bursting flower. So is it of human influence. In the loneliness of obscurity, in the humiliation of poverty, in the dark chamber of patient, unpretending suffering, have saintly spirits wrought a gracious work. (3) Meantime, human life and flower-life are alike, mainly because both are phenomenal of progress. Earthly life is short, and we would not have it longer. The season of flowers is full of peril to the tender germ of fruit. Having perfected the seed, nature's next care is to disperse or distribute them. Some are borne away on their own airy wings, and as they float up in the sunshine, freed of their heavy earthy beauty, the perfected seed, as a spiritualised blossom, seems fairer than all flowers! Some are borne across oceans, and take root in other continents. Such is the progress and development of that whose young life was born of a fading flower! Oh, to a prescient eye what possibilities, what colours of beauty, what forms of majesty, what felicities, what glorious hopes, what ineffable fruitions, are embosomed in a seed! And analogous to this—but immeasurably more wonderful—are the embryonic powers, and shall be the development of the human soul in the after-state! (*C. Wadsworth.*) *Summer blossoms*:—We expect the leaves to fade and fall in October. They have had their full time of growth and unfolding, and their fair share of the beauty and blessedness of the world. But there is nothing to prepare us for the fading of the blossoms of early summer. When, therefore, we see the flowers fading on the ground and the blossoms falling from the tree, our feelings receive something like a shock. The contrast between the death of these fair creations and the bright overflowing fulness of life around fills us with a peculiar sadness. A premature fate, we feel, has overtaken them; they have not had their full share of the feast of life. 1. Looking exclusively at the fact itself, there is nothing but sadness in the fading of the flower. It seems a wanton destruction of so much life and beauty; and we are apt to ask, "To what purpose is this waste?" 2. But much as we mourn all these fading flowers, the human as well as the natural, we cannot wish them to abide for ever. It is the fading flower that is so wonderfully beautiful. Fix its beauty unchanged, and you make it an artificial flower, a dry mummy. It is the fleeting human blossom that is so tenderly dear. We love each other more devotedly owing to the shadow feared of man that falls upon and consecrates our love; because we must soon, we know not how soon, be parted. We should feel everlasting flowers to be utterly incongruous in a world of change and decay; their steadfast continuance, when there was no reason for their continuance, would weary and offend our minds. 3. But the truth of the fading flower has another and a brighter side. It is not all death and desolation. We shall pass at once out of the shadow into the sunshine when we consider the reason why the flower fades. The flower fades that the fruit may take its place. The fading of the flower, rightly viewed, is therefore a natural and necessary phenomenon of life. In itself it is joyous, and not grievous. In the unfallen Eden the fading flowers suggested no thought of gloom to Adam, but only of bright progress from life to fuller life, from a lower to a higher stage of development and perfection. Viewed, then, in the light of Him who hath brought life and immortality to light in His Gospel, and free from the cloud of sin, the fading of human-life and of flower-life is not in reality sad, but joyful. Man dies, but his life on earth is only for the formation of the eternal life. Every gift we receive is but a promise; every beauty we behold but a prophecy; every pleasure we enjoy but a foretaste. The Christian's whole life is but the earnest of the inheritance that awaits him. We see by faith, although we are slow of heart to believe

it, that our very losses and privations are ministering to a noble and goodly development pregnant with an everlasting promise. Death itself is the act of blossoming. It is a scientific fact that it is the dying plant alone that flowers. Blossoming is the highest point in plant life. When it has produced its blossom it perishes. In human life it is so likewise. Our existence here is but a daily dying, the continual production of a blossom, within whose petals as they wither is expanding the immortal fruit; and death is but the final falling of the sere petals from the fruit when it has set. It is not destruction, but development; the mortal not destroyed, but putting on immortality. 4. Then, consider that the blossom belongs to the plant itself, the fruit to the race. The blossom is the end of the selfish life; the fruit is the beginning of the unselfish. 5. Further still, the plant that flowers is confined to one spot; but when it fruits and seeds it gets wings, as it were, and can fly away from its natal place to long distances, as you have often seen the thistle-down or the fleecy parasol of the dandelion do, to make the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Is it not so in human life? That death which seems to bound our life, in reality gives us wings, and takes us out of this cramped and narrow sphere of change, and sorrow, and sin, into the freer air and larger sunshine of God's everlasting kingdom. The fruition of life is not the limitation, but the freedom and enlargement of life. And who knows what life and beauty and blessedness to others may spring from seed dropped by our losses and death? Looking thus at this life as only the flower-form of our being, we see the reason of its brevity. The life of the blossom is short because it has to prepare the way for the fruit; and the season in which it is put forth is dangerous to the formation of the tender germ. We should welcome the growing infirmities and decays of life as signs that summer, the season of fleeting glories, is passing away, and that autumn, the season of enduring fruition, is drawing nigh. They proclaim to us that now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. 6. But I reserve the grandest thought connected with my theme to the last. The flower fades and falls off the plant, but it does not altogether vanish; it does not perish utterly. Some part of it, larger or smaller, according to the species, remains behind to form the nucleus of the fruit. In every case the lower part of the central and most important part of the blossom is left, and it is out of it that the fruit is formed. A good deal of the fleeting flower, indeed all that is essential in it, is thus made permanent in the enduring fruit; and the fruit itself may be looked upon as a more perfect and lasting blossom, retaining the colour, and fragrance, and grace of form that distinguished the blossom, but superadding qualities, such as nutritiousness and flavour, which the blossom lacked. Is not the analogy here very instructive and consoling? Not only do all our sanctified losses turn to gains, but the gains are largely composed of what we lost. We take up with us into every stage of our advancing progress what was best and most serviceable in the previous stage; and in the fruit of our achievements we can trace much of the fair blossoms of hope and aspiration which led to its formation. Nothing that is really good in human life ought to be thrown away as useless when we have outgrown it. The good of childhood ought to remain in manhood. The enthusiasm, the freshness of interest, the innocent simplicity, the spirit of hope, inquiry, and wonder which characterise our early years, ought to endure late in life, under the calmer and quieter outside of maturity. Let us not mourn, then, that so many fair and precious things pass away from us as we go on to our immortality; for nothing that is really essential to our well-being shall perish utterly, but shall be absorbed into our souls and become their eternal wealth. (*H. Macmillan, LL.D.*) *The thought of death* is not to be dwelt upon morbidly in the manner of Swift, who said, "I was forty-seven years old when I began to think of death, and the reflections upon it now begin when I wake in the morning and end when I am going to sleep." But it is well for us to have the thought at hand. (*W. R. Nicoll, LL.D.*) **The Word of our God shall stand for ever.**—*The higher criticism:*—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY "THE WORD OF OUR GOD"? You answer, "The Bible." I think not. At least, and certainly, to Isaiah it could not mean more of the Old Testament than he possessed—a mere fragment of the Book in our hands. Even to Peter it could not have meant all the records we have, seeing that some had not been written when he repeated the prophet's statement. What, then, are we to understand by this phrase, "the Word of our God"? Simply, truth. Truth in its very widest sense, whether in the Bible or out of it, is "the Word of God." II. Higher criticism proposes to solve for you and me, what we have neither the time nor ability

to do for ourselves. TO WHAT EXTENT INTERPOLATION HAS GONE ON. It is a strictly honest, unbiassed, sincere scrutiny into the claims, history, authorship, date, and language of the books of the Bible. III. WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT? Only good. If we are honest we shall want only the truth; and after the examination is completed truth will stand more grandly than ever before us. IV. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD HIGHER CRITICISM may well be for these reasons—1. One of welcome. We rejoice in every honest and reverential inquiry for truth. 2. One of hope. The future of our faith looks all the brighter from the discussions and questionings of to-day. Men are beginning to think. An interest is awakening in the vast questions that relate to our higher life. 3. One of confidence. Are we wise in our fear for the safety of "the Word of our God"? Does "the Word of our God" need our defence? Is not He pledged to its security? That which cannot stand the test of criticism had better go; but truth, "the Word of our God, shall stand for ever." (*J. E. W. Cook.*) *The enduring Word*:—"The Word of the Lord endureth for ever." How do we know that? Certainly, not in the same way as we are sure of the universality of death. We know it to be true if we believe two things—1. That God, the perfect moral being, exists. 2. That He has spoken to man. The Word of God, speaking in conscience, in revelation, is like God Himself—above the waterfloods of change; it lasts. (*H. P. Liddon, D.D.*) *The passing and the abiding*:—I. Since the Word of our God shall stand for ever, the BIBLE WILL REMAIN. 1. Think of the Bible as history. "The Old Testament is supported by the exhumed records of the kings of Egypt and Babylon and Nineveh and Moab. We are now shown in the Boulag Museum at Cairo the very body of the Egyptian king who oppressed Israel. At a hundred points confirmatory evidence has been dug out of the Assyrian ruins. In the day when the Bible was attacked by unbelief, there appeared out of the very ground hosts of defenders. God's Providence supports His Book." 2. Think of the Bible as to philosophy. John Stuart Mill will tell us, "It is impossible to find in the ideas of any philosophy, even the latest, a single point which is not anticipated and ennobled in Christianity." 3. Think of the Bible as to science. It is true, as one has said wisely and wittily, that "the intention of Holy Scripture is to teach us to go to heaven, and not how the heavens go." And yet the great astronomer Sir John Herschel will tell us: "All human discoveries seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more and more strongly the truth contained in the Sacred Scriptures." 4. Think of the Bible as to morals. Those words of James Russell Lowell, spoken so bravely at a dinner in London, before a company of sceptics, are well worth treasuring: "The worst kind of religion is no religion at all. And those men, living in ease and luxury, indulging themselves in the amusement of going without religion, may be thankful that they live in lands where the Gospel they neglect has tamed the beastliness and ferocity of the men who, but for Christianity, might long ago have eaten their carcasses like the South Sea Islanders, or cut off their heads and tanned their hides like the monsters of the French Revolution." This Bible, the Word of God, which history substantiates, which philosophy cannot anticipate, which science reinforces, which is the source of all true morals and secure civilisation, is to abide. II. Since the Word of our God shall stand for ever, THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST IS TO ENDURE AND CONQUER. For the very heart and kernel of God's Word is the revelation of the certainly vanquishing kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. III. Since the Word of our God standeth for ever, HEAVEN WILL SHINE ON US AT THE LAST. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) "*The Word of our God*":—All explanations can be reconciled by suffering the prophet to express his own ideas, without any adventitious limitation and admitting, as the only sure conclusion, that by "Word" he means neither promise, nor prophecy, nor Gospel merely, but "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Deut. viii. 3; Matt. iv. 4). There is a tacit antithesis between the Word of God and man; what man says is uncertain and precarious, what God says cannot fail. Thus understood, it includes prediction, precept, promise, and the offer of salvation; and although the latter is not meant exclusively, the apostle makes a perfectly correct and most important application of the verse when, after quoting it, he adds, "and this is the Word which is preached (εὐαγγελισθέν) unto you"; that is to say, this prophetic declaration is emphatically true of the Gospel of Christ. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *The Bible its own defence*:—A well-known Presbyterian minister is reported to have said, "We must defend the Bible." Must we? The Bible is badly off when it needs your defence or mine. I stood on the "Big Four" railway track the other day watching the Cincinnati and

Cleveland express pass by. A young bee, called out by the warm April winds and bright spring sunshine, flew toward the train. Supposing I had rushed for a club or a rifle, and had run down toward the approaching express, crying aloud, "I must defend the cars from that bee's attack," would you not have said, "Get out of the way; let the train defend itself"? The Bible is its own best defence. (*J. E. W. Cook.*)

Ver. 9. **O Zion, that bringest good tidings.**—*The tidings the Church has to publish*:—The text has been variously rendered. The best authorities give it, "Thou that bringest good tidings to Zion," which rendering better agrees with the latter part of the verse, with some parallel passages, and with the scope of the passage. Our translators took Zion and Jerusalem in the nominative case, and so did others before them, as if the prophet called on the chief city to acquaint the other cities of Judah with the joyful news of their returning inhabitants: but there is far more congruity in the herald's being instructed to ascend the high mountains that the Jewish captives in the remotest corners of Chaldea may hear the joyful proclamation of liberty, and prepare to return to their own country. The Jewish Targum (no mean authority) paraphrases the words thus: "O ye prophets that bring glad tidings to Zion." Vitringa supports the same idea, as does also Bishop Lowth. The language may, with great force, be addressed to the missionaries of every denomination. "O thou that hast good tidings to tell, get thee up into the high mountain. Say to the cities of the Eastern and the Western world, Behold your God." I. THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH HAS GREAT TIDINGS TO TELL TO THE WORLD AT LARGE. The Jewish prophets were the heralds of a Saviour to come, and beautiful upon the mountains were the feet of those who published peace; but the Christian Church has to proclaim the actual accomplishment of the great salvation. We have to tell of a Saviour incarnate, crucified, enthroned. We have to tell of a justifying righteousness, a sanctifying spirit, a pardoning God: of Satan vanquished. The Christian Church has to reveal—1. A system of truth as opposed to the errors of heathenism. These truths are universally applicable. All have minds to which truth is precious as life to the eye, and the truth as it is in Jesus is more needful than life itself. 2. A system of devotion, as opposed to the absurdities of their superstition. Would you choose to have them still ignorant of the attributes of acceptable devotion? 3. A system of purity, as opposed to the shameless vices of their idolatry. Morality is interested in the triumph of missions. 4. The Christian Church can tell them of the life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel, as opposed to their obscure and degrading notions of futurity. II. THESE TIDINGS OUGHT NOT TO BE KEPT SECRET, BUT ARE TO BE URGENTLY AND UNIVERSALLY PROCLAIMED. "Lift up thy voice with strength: say, Behold your God." This light ought to be held forth as a burning torch, like the beacon-light of ancient Pharos, that it may scatter the darkness of the night, and guide the tempest-tossed vessel of distant nations to the safe anchorage and peaceful haven of the welcome shore. We are bound by every tie, by all that can constitute the most solemn and religious obligation, to diffuse far and wide the grand principles of salvation. Dwell upon the moral destitution and wretchedness of the nations sitting in darkness, and simply ask whether this be a desirable state of things. III. THE CERTAINTY THAT THESE TIDINGS SHALL NOT BE PROCLAIMED IN VAIN. God has said, "My Word shall not return void." The Spirit is promised. (*S. Thodey.*) *The Church and her message*:—I. THE THOUGHTS THAT CLUSTER AROUND THE NAME, "O Zion, that bringest glad tidings." That is almost a definition of the Church; at any rate, it is a description of her by her most characteristic office and function—that which marks and separates her from all associations and societies of men. Her true dignity is that she bears a Gospel in her hand, and grace is poured into her lips. We are to suppose the manifestation and approach of the Divine Deliverer; hence what constitutes Zion the messenger of good tidings is the presence in her of the living God. Translate that into New Testament language, and it just comes to this: that what constitutes the Church the evangelist for the world is the simple possession of Christ, or of the Gospel, and that breaks out into two or three points. 1. Whoever has Christ has the power to impart Him. 2. The possession of Christ for yourselves imposes upon you the obligation to impart Him. (1) All property in this world is trust property, and everything that a man knows that can help or bless the moral or spiritual age or intellectual condition of his fellows, he is

thereby under solemn obligation to impart. There is an obligation arising from the bands that knit us to one another, so that no man can possess his good alone without being untrue to the solidarity of humanity. You have got, you say, the remedy, healing for all the diseases of humanity. What would you think of a man who in a pestilence was contented with swallowing his own specific, and leaving others to die? You have got the Christ, and you have got Him that you may impart Him. (2) It is an obligation that arises, too, from the very purposes of your calling. What are you saved for? For your own blessedness? Yes, and No. No creature in God's great universe but is great enough to be a worthy end of the Divine action. But no creature in God's universe so great as that he is a worthy end of the Divine action, if he is going to keep all the Divine gifts in himself. We are all brought into the light that we may impart light. 3. The very fact of the possession of this Gospel, or of this Christ, for ourselves ought to—and in all healthy conditions will—inspire the impulse to impart. All deep conviction longs to be vocal. II. We have here, in a very picturesque and vivid form, the setting forth of THE MANNER IN WHICH THE EVANGELIST ZION IS TO PROCLAIM HER MESSAGE. The fair-featured herald is bidden to get up into the high mountain, perhaps a mere picturesque detail, perhaps some reference to the local position of the city set upon a hill, like the priests of Ebal or Gerizim, or Alpine shepherds, calling to each other across the valleys, to secure some vantage ground; and, next, to let her voice roll out across the glen. No faltering whisper will do, but a voice that compels audience. "Lift up thy voice with strength." But a timid heart will make a tremulous voice, and fear and doubt will whisper when courage will ring it out. So "be not afraid"; there is the foundation of the clearness and the loudness with which the word is to be uttered. Our message is to be given with a courage and a force that are worthy of it. "Be not afraid." That is a lesson for this day. There are plenty of causes of fear round about us, if, like Peter on the water, we look at the waves instead of at the Master. 1. Let us cherish a firm, soul-absorbing confidence in the power and truth of the message we have to tell. 2. Do not let us make too much of the enemy. 3. Let us remember the victories of the past. 4. Above all, let us remember who fights with us. III. THE SUBSTANCE AND CONTENTS OF THE EVANGELIST ZION'S MESSAGE, "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" They were to be pointed to a great historical act, in which God had manifested Himself to men; and the words are not only an exclamation, but an entreaty, and the message was to be given to these little daughter cities of Judah as representing all of those for whom the deliverance had been wrought;—all which things are paralleled in the message that is committed to our hand. We all have given to us the charge of pointing men to the great historical fact wherein God is visible to men. You cannot reveal God by word, you cannot reveal God by thought. There is no way open to Him to make Himself known to His creatures except the way by which men make themselves known to one another, that is, by their deeds; and so high above all speculation, high above all abstraction, nearer to us than all thought, stands the historical fact in which God shows Himself to the world, and that is in the person of Jesus Christ. How beautiful in that connection the verses following my text are: "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand"; yet "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd." And so in that Christ is the power of God, for He is the arm of the Lord; and in that Christ is the gentleness of God; and whilst men grope in the darkness, our business is to point to the living, dying Son, and to say, "There you have the ultimate, the perfect representation of the unseen God." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *News proclaimed on mountain-tops*:—Some suppose an allusion to the practice of addressing large assemblies from the summit or declivity of hills (Judg. ix. 7; Deut. xxvii. 12; Matt. v. 1). J. D. Michaelis compares the ancient practice of transmitting news by shouting from one hill-top to another, as described by Cæsar (*Bell. Gall.* vii. 3). The essential idea is that of local elevation as extending the diffusion of the sound. (*J. A. Alexander.*) **Behold your God.**—*The manifestation of God*:—Taking the words as they stand in the text, consider them in—I. THEIR EXTERNAL ACCOMPLISHMENT in the incarnation, nativity, personal appearance, and ministration of the Son of God in Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah. II. THEIR INTERNAL ACCOMPLISHMENT in the hearts of all those who have spiritually received the tidings of His Gospel. It is the process of Christ, from His incarnation to His ascension, spiritually repeated within us; and our salvation entirely depends upon our "beholding this God and Saviour,"

manifesting Himself in all His amiable attributes within us, and by our will cheerfully co-operating with Him in His great work of love. (*J. Duché, M.A.*) *The beholding of Jesus Christ*:—The prophet is directing the attention of his countrymen and of the Church in every age to the Messiah who is the true God and eternal life. This illustrious personage we may behold in a variety of interesting and instructive situations. 1. Carry your thoughts back into eternity, and behold Him, who in time was made of a woman, sitting upon the circle of the heavens, in the essential glory of the Godhead; His habitation immensity, His duration eternity, His perfections uncreated and infinite. 2. As a confirmation of the original glory and Godhead of Jesus Christ, "behold your God" at the morning of creation, the dawn of time. Was it not His effective hand that planted the pillars of the universe and raised the magnificent fabric of earth and heaven? What He formed as the God of creation, He preserves as the God of power. 3. From the fall of our first parents to the birth of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer is only to be seen in promises and prophecies, in sacrifices and ceremonies. Passing over, therefore, this long lapse of time, suffer me to conduct your thoughts to Bethlehem. There, "behold your God." 4. Omitting the occurrences of His childhood and youth, let me invite you to look at Jesus entering into the wilderness under the influence and direction of the Holy Ghost. Behold Him tempted of the devil forty days and forty nights. It is a Divine maxim that "God cannot be tempted, neither tempteth He any man." But God in human flesh sustained the hour of trial. 5. After this strange event, permitted to the powers of darkness, Jesus appears in a new scene of life. Behold, then, your God going forth as a teacher, accompanying His ministrations and instructions with signs and wonders, and all the marks of Deity. And He is the "same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." In every age, as well as in the days of His flesh, there is treasured up in Him, for the free use of all that come unto Him, pardon, and peace, and grace, and strength, and life, and salvation. 6. Just before the close of His ministrations, a profitable view of the Lord Jesus opens to us in the garden of Gethsemane: there "behold your God!" He appears emphatically a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." But let us follow Him from the garden, through all the intermediate scenes of insult, reproach, and ignominy, to the bar of Pontius Pilate: there at the tribunal of man "behold your God!" He, who shall one day appear to judge every man according to his deeds, now stands arraigned as a criminal before the judgment-seat of man. Judgment is perverted: Pilate declares Him innocent, yet suffers Him to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified. Mingling in the crowd, follow Him from the common hall, and "behold your God" as He passes through the streets of Jerusalem, bearing His cross amidst the revilings and tauntings of the people, who, in all the virulence of persecution, exclaim, "Away with Him, away with Him! crucify Him!" "Behold your God" ascending the summit of Calvary. Oh, what a scene was here! a scene which all nature seems backward to behold. Standing at the foot of the Cross, learn that "ye were not redeemed with corruptible things," &c. (1 Pet. i. 18, 19). 7. The last view which we have to take of Jesus Christ closes His sufferings, and accomplishes our redemption. "Behold your God" bursting the barriers of the tomb, vanquishing the king of terrors, despoiling the sepulchre, breaking the bands of corruption, and rising to life, never to die again. Then was fulfilled that prophecy, "O death, I will be thy plagues." To enter into the spirit of the passage, you must keep your mind's eye upon the Saviour, and behold your God as He is ascending to the realms of bliss. Conclusion—"Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." Now it is your privilege by faith to "behold your God" as a Saviour, delighting in mercy. (*S. Payne.*)

Vers. 10-12. **Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand.**—*Power and tenderness*:—The beauty and peculiarity of these words consist in the combination of the might of Adonai-Jehovah (ver. 10), with the gentleness of the Shepherd, carrying in His bosom the weak and weary of the flock (ver. 11). I. "Behold your God," FULL OF MIGHT AND MAJESTY (ver. 10). To Christ all power has been committed. He is "the arm of God" (chap. li. 9), "the Man of Jehovah's right hand," &c. (Psa. lxxx. 17). His name is "Immanuel." II. HE COMBINES WITH THE POWER OF THE VICTORIOUS KING, THE GENTLENESS OF THE TENDER AND LOVING SHEPHERD. "He shall feed His flock." That word is a comprehensive one. It means that He shall act all the part of a shepherd towards them; leading them, protecting them, providing alike the green pastures and the still waters. Nay,

as if this were not enough, He is beautifully represented as "gathering the lambs in His arms";—making a pillow for them in the folds of the loose "abbêh," or shepherd's mantle, as they nestle close in His bosom. And while thus He deals with the tender lambs, He is equally merciful and considerate not to overdrive their nursing mothers. Exult in this twofold word of comfort, "Behold thy *King* cometh, *meek* and *lowly*." Behold your God! Behold your Shepherd! strong to smite, strong to save. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Characteristics of the great Saviour:*—These words exhibit to our view some of the most lively characteristics of that illustrious Saviour by whose incarnation our fallen race are become again entitled to that long-lost inheritance which had been forfeited by sin, and by whose redeeming process in their souls they are rendered capable of enjoying it. The illuminated prophet proceeds to point out the personal character of this great Deliverer. 1. "Behold! the LORD GOD shall come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him." The mistaken Israelites vainly ascribed to these words a temporal interpretation, and looked for a deliverer whose conquering arm should effectually rescue them from the earthly powers to which they were tributary. But the true children of faithful Abraham wait for the spiritual accomplishment of this prophecy in their hearts: and see and feel "the strong hand" of their Redeemer in that inward opposition which He raises in their breasts to all the evil desires and corrupt passions of human nature. 2. "Behold! His reward is with Him, and His work before Him." This work is no other than the complete deliverance of man from the captivity of sin and Satan. This reward is no other than the glorious acquisition of those lost or wandering souls, who were originally His by creation, and are now doubly so by redemption. The prophet seems to dwell upon the power and majesty of this Deliverer. He represents Him as coming with a strong hand: and, indeed, such is usually His first appearance in the sinner's heart. David speaks of this first appearance in the most alarming terms: "The arrows of the Almighty stick fast in me, and His hand presseth me sore." The first feelings of an awakened and convicted conscience are agonising indeed; for they are the breaking forth of heaven's majestic light upon the benighted soul, which shakes nature to her very centre, and discloses every hidden recess to which conscious guilt flies from its approach. But when viewed with composure, and received with cheerfulness, it soon becomes as mild and sweet as the radiance of the risen day after a dark and tempestuous night. Hence it is that in the next verse we find the dignity and majesty of this august Personage sweetly tempered with condescension and love, and melting into heavenly meekness, gentleness, and compassion. 3. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd," &c. (1) "The flock" here mentioned can be no other than our whole fallen race, who by virtue of that "incorruptible seed" that was inspoken into the first Adam, are put into a capacity of regaining eternal life through the redeeming power of Christ, their second Adam. (2) But though the Shepherd's love is thus universal, and all men are the objects of His pastoral care; though they are all His children by redemption, yet all do not alike follow the "Shepherd's voice"; all are not equally willing to be fed with His "bread of life." (3) Let the humble-minded Christian "lift up his head and look up." He need not, as the Psalmist expresses it, "run here and there for food; and grudge, because he is not satisfied": the wants he feels, reason, he well knows, cannot supply; the comforts he aspires after, are such as the world cannot give. Wherever his Shepherd leads, he is content to follow: he is sensible of His presence, in darkness as well as in light. The evils by which he is oppressed he is satisfied to bear, because his Deliverer is ever at his side. (*J. Duché, M.A.*) *The magnitude and tenderness of Divine dealings:*—We find frequent reference in Scripture to the Divine hand, arm, and bosom, by which God is brought the nearer to the level of our comprehension, and within touch of our love and confidence. In these verses there is a striking combination in the use made of these figures. I. THE MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S POWER AND RULE. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span?" &c. The reference to the Divine hand is essentially human, man being the only creature on God's earth who has a hand. How wonderful is its construction! It is marvellously adapted for skill, power, and authority. It is that which in happy combination with other endowments gives man dominion over creation. It is his hand which, in more senses than one, sways the sceptre. It is his hand that asserts his royal nature, his power and authority to rule. Again, the arm

is that which gives leverage to the hand, and without which the hand would be useless. The hand and arm of God are spoken of here. We read elsewhere that the heavens are the work of His fingers, that in His hands are the deep places of the earth, and that His hands formed the dry land. Here we read, "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span?" The great Architect and Framer of the universe is represented as forming and adjusting earth, sea, and sky with His hand. This is the graphic representation of the Divine Worker at work. The one implement used is the hand of the Great Worker—its hollow for the seas, its span for the heavens! What sublime poetry descriptive of creative skill! The illustrations are taken from primitive life. The truest poetry comes from primitive simplicity. 1. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?" What is the sublime truth which this richly figurative speech conveys? One truth at least is the self-sufficiency of God in His creative work. He needed not to go beyond Himself. All creation is the outcome of His own power and skill, independent of the shifts of machinery and tools. When this has been stated, the prophet proceeds to draw other figures from primitive life in the simplicity of its operations to describe God's creative work. "Comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure"—that is a tierce, or the third of an ephah. It is the same word as that used in Psa. lxxx. 5, "Thou givest them tears to drink in great measure." As Delitzsch beautifully expresses it, it is a small measure for the dust of the earth, but a "great measure" for tears. "Weighed the mountains in scales," that is, a steel-yard, that by which the greater loads are weighed; "and the hills in a balance"—the tradesman's balances which weigh smaller things, but with greater accuracy than the "steel-yard." Nothing has been done by haphazard. Every world has been balanced, and the equilibrium of the universe adjusted with infinite wisdom and skill. Astronomical observation leads to this conclusion; Isaiah asserted it with regard to this earth before astronomy was born. 2. So far we have dwelt upon Isaiah's statement of what God had done. Now we notice the prophetic announcement of what God would do. The former refers to His creative power, the latter to His providential rule. "The Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him." There is here a prediction of a special Divine advent in power, but I take this as typical of all Divine advents and interventions throughout the ages. We have read of the Divine hand in the record of God forming and adjusting the earth, but now we read of the Divine arm in His personal advent and providential rule. There is a Providence as well as a creation. God has not completed His work by His creative skill and power. "He worketh hitherto." The hand that formed and adjusted is moved by the arm that rules and governs. It is the arm that wields the hand. The Scriptures abound with emphatic references to the Divine arm. "Hast thou an arm like God?" (Job xl. 9) asked God out of the whirlwind of Job. "Thou hast a mighty arm" (Psa. lxxxix. 13), exclaimed the Psalmist; and again, "His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory" (Psa. xcviii. 1). Isaiah wrote, "The Lord hath sworn by the arm of His strength" (Isa. lxii. 8), and again, "Therefore His arm brought salvation" (Isa. lx. 16). In these and similar passages the arm of God is the symbol of His power in providential and redemptive works. "His arm shall rule for Him,"—that is, shall bring all foes submissive, and make all subjects obedient to His sovereignty and command. It is instructive to notice the different names applied to God in the Scriptures to show various aspects of His character and work. Observe the names by which God is called here. "The Lord God" (Adonai-Jehovah)—a combination of the two greatest names by which God was known under the Old Dispensation. The consequent announcement is that of the advent of the "Mighty One" (R.V.). Yet these words, expressive of power and dominion, are followed by others which have all the tenderness and grace of a pastoral symphony. II. THE TENDERNESS OF HIS SHEPHERDLY CARE. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd," &c. The hand that meted out the heavens and measured the waters of the deep is that which feeds the flock, and the arm that rules for Him is the arm that gathers the lambs. "And carry them in His bosom." Ah! I have not read of "His bosom" in this context before now. I heard no mention of His bosom when He was spoken of as measuring the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meting out heaven with the span: it is only when the prophet speaks of the lambs that he mentions not only God's arm but also His bosom. The hollow of His hand is good enough for the waters, His span for the heavens, His arm for His subjects, but only His bosom for the

lambs. This is a tenderness specially adapted to the peculiar need. "And shall gently lead those that are with young," or, "those that give suck" (R.V.). The great Shepherd will not forget motherhood with its cares and burdens. God's omnipotence can only be equalled by His compassion. He is not only Almighty, but also "Almighty to save." Our God who created the heavens has also lifted up the Cross. (*D. Davies.*) *The grandeur and pathos of theology:*—In those words, "His arm shall rule for Him," we have the grandeur of theology; but in these words, "He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd," we have the pathos of theology. (*Ibid.*) *Consolation from the thought of God's omnipotence:*—In his autobiography, Goethe tells us that the earthquake in Lisbon fairly stumbled his faith and awakened his alarm at the time when he first heard the news of it. The notion of Divine reliability fell under his suspicion; how could anyone trust a God who would suffer that 70,000 people should be overwhelmed by one awful tide of the ocean, rushing up and back as the earth rose in imperious strength of upheaval; where was His goodness? What might He not do next? The young man was frightened at the manifestation of so much almightiness. Later on in life he saw how fine it was to have for his God a being who could rock the world at His will. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.**—*The care of the Good Shepherd for His flock:*—1. The prophet first declares the general office of the Saviour. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd." 2. Here His people are described under the endearing name of a "flock." It is thus descriptive of the happy privileges which they enjoy. They are not left to roam at large like the beasts of prey; but they are brought by Divine grace into a settled state. They are as a flock of sheep under the shepherd's eye. They are distributed, it is true, in various parts; but yet under the Lord's particular care. 3. "His flock." This is to make known more especially their privileges—they are emphatically His. They are "His" as given to Him by His eternal Father. They are "His" by His own immediate purchase; for He has redeemed them. They are "His" also, as by the action of the Holy Ghost upon their hearts they are led into His fold. 4. The word translated "feed" properly signifies the whole care and government that a shepherd exercises towards his flock. Christ takes a general oversight of them; but He has them particularly in His eye. So, too, a shepherd distinguishes the different states of his flock, and suits himself to their particular wants. 5. By the "lambs," those are meant who are young in years, and young converts. They are described by this emblem to set forth their weakness and tenderness and inability properly to take care of themselves. He "gathers them with His arm, and carries them in His bosom." Here you notice a most pleasing union of power and love employed in their service. It is thus that the Lord Christ exercises the tenderness of a shepherd towards His flock. Remember how many sweet promises are addressed to the weak and to the young in the flock (chaps. xxxv. 3, 4, xlii. 3). We particularly notice this, to encourage those who may be setting out in the Lord's way. Sometimes a thought comes into the mind, "Ah! if I were but like such a Christian! if I had as much zeal and devotedness to my Master's service as he has, if I had his joy and peace in believing,—then I should be able to go on my way rejoicing in the Lord. This is a mistaken view. The love of the Shepherd to His flock does not originate in their love to Him. He did not expect to find them angels; He knew that they were sinners. He treats them as a shepherd does his tender lambs. 6. "He shall gently lead those that are with young"; or, "those that give suck." You see this beautifully illustrated in the history of Jacob, after his meeting with his brother Esau. Esau said to him, "Let us take our journey, and I will go before thee"; but Jacob, like a good shepherd, knowing the roughness of his brother, said to him, "My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day"—only one day—"all the flock will die." How many resting-places does the Good Shepherd provide! Conclusion—(1) Such is the description given by the prophet of our blessed Saviour. Surely it is plainly that on which our faith may rest in seasons of trial, and which may as surely attract our love in seasons of outward peace and prosperity. Look at His dealings with His disciples in the hour of their sorrow: how many comforts does He afford! (2) What is there that can so attract you as this "Shepherd of the sheep"? Everything that regards the fulfilment of His office may draw forth our attachment. (*J. H. Stewart, M.A.*)

Christ the Shepherd of His people:—I. A DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH AND PEOPLE OF GOD, under the notion of a flock. 1. With respect to God they are called a flock because they are separated from the rest of mankind, and given to the Lord Christ. A flock is a company of sheep which is the property of some owner. 2. With respect to the Lord Jesus, the Church is called a flock because He brings them into His fold, calls them out of a natural state into a state of grace, and fellowship with Himself. 3. With respect to other men, among whom believers converse, they are called a "flock" upon a threefold account. (1) As they are helpless. (2) As they are harmless. A sheep will take injuries, but it is not prone to return them. (3) They are useful. Believers are a blessing by their prayers and by their example. II. THE RELATION CHRIST STANDS IN TO THEM as a Shepherd. Two things are implied in this relation—care and tenderness. III. WHAT CHRIST DOES FOR HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE as their Shepherd. IV. THE WAY IN WHICH THIS IS DONE. Suitably to everyone's circumstances and condition. 1. Christ's carriage towards His flock is according to their ages. 2. It is according to their strength or weakness. Such as cannot walk shall be carried; and they that are heavy laden shall be gently led. Comfort yourselves with this; none of the flock shall be left behind. 3. It is according to the difficulties or dangers His sheep are in. Uses—1. This doctrine affords a just word of reproof to those who are shepherds under Christ, but act not according to His example towards the flock. Knowledge of the state of the flock is one great, though much-neglected branch of a pastor's office. 2. How should souls long to be under the care of this Good Shepherd! You are exposed to wolves and devils, to all errors and sin, whilst you keep off from Christ; there is no safety for you, but only in His arms; no provision, but in His covenant. 3. How safe are all the saints! 4. What a blessed plea is here for the Church in dangerous times! Christ will spare His flock, and the land for their sake. 5. With what boldness may the people of Christ attend upon all holy ordinances. They are designed for your support, till you get above them. (*J. Hill.*) *The Shepherd and His flock:*—I. THE SHEPHERD. He, the Lord God, whose hand is strong, and whose arm shall rule for Him, "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, who hath meted out heaven with a span, who hath comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, who hath weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance"—He for whom there is nothing too hard to be accomplished, and nothing too minute to be observed, offereth to be the Shepherd of your soul, to feed it and to watch over it. Will not His love, His power, His wisdom, be sufficient for all its need? II. THE FLOCK. As the Shepherd is powerful and wise, and full of love, so are the flock weak and foolish, and ready to go astray. The sheep is a weak, defenceless creature, having neither strength to resist the wolf, nor speed to escape from him. It is not like the ant, provident, and able to care for its own sustenance. If once astray, it is rarely known to return of its own accord. III. THE SHEPHERD'S CARE OF HIS FLOCK. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd." The word translated "feed" refers to all a shepherd's care for his flock, including all necessary and beneficial attention to them (Ezek. xxxiv. 15, 16). IV. THE TENDERNESS OF HIS CARE. (*G. Innes.*) *The Redeemer as a Shepherd:*—I. THE REDEEMER UNDER THE ENDEARING CHARACTER OF A SHEPHERD. 1. It is the office of a good shepherd to know his flock. "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." He has a tender feeling, a compassionate concern for the meanest and most sickly of His flock. 2. The Good Shepherd defends His flock from every threatening danger. David exposed his own life to defend his flock. Those holy and humble shepherds to whom our blessed Saviour's birth was first notified, kept watch over their flocks by night. Will the Redeemer fall short in His office? No! "Behold, He who keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." 3. The Good Shepherd gathers His flock, whether they have wandered from the fold, or have been driven away by an enemy, or scattered by storms (Ezek. xxxiv. 12). The Shepherd of Israel will magnify His office in this respect. Christ shall gather the Jews, the people of His ancient Church, into His sacred fold. 4. The Good Shepherd heals His flock, whether languishing under deep disease or smarting wounds. It was charged upon the shepherds of Israel as a high crime that they had not healed the sick, nor bound up that which was broken, nor brought again that which was driven away, nor sought that which was lost. But this could not be objected against our compassionate Redeemer. 5. The Good Shepherd provides green pastures and pure water for His flock.

II. WHAT KIND OF A SHEPHERD IS CHRIST? 1. He is a great Shepherd (Heb. xiii. 10). 2. He is the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. v. 4). Other shepherds are mere men, of like passions with ourselves. 3. He is the good Shepherd (John x. 14). 4. He is a Shepherd who has no equal. This is obvious in numberless instances. Other shepherds lay down their commission at death. But the Shepherd of Israel by dying conquered death; and carries on His work by His Holy Spirit, with all that power and success which attended His personal ministry on earth. III. THE FLOCK WHICH CHRIST DOTH TEND. 1. It is a little flock (Luke xii. 32). Though small and despised in the eyes of a vain world; though poor in spirit, humble and meek in their deportment among men, they are greatly beloved by their God. They are not only little in their own eyes, and in the eyes of a vain world, but little in point of number, compared to a thoughtless multitude. 2. They are in some degree acquainted with their own hearts. 3. They are a peculiar flock, as they are all purchased with blood. 4. They are a chosen flock. 5. They know their Redeemer's voice, and are charmed with it. 6. They follow the blessed Shepherd (John x. 27). (*J. Johnston.*) *Jesus Christ the Shepherd of His people:*—I. HOW THIS TITLE OF SHEPHERD AGREES TO JESUS CHRIST. Our blessed Lord is spoken of in Scripture under several characters—as a Physician, a Ruler, the Captain of our Salvation, &c., and in this and many other places, as a Shepherd: a metaphor full of comfort. A shepherd is called to the office and trust; and this may eminently be said of Christ. God the Father appointed Him to this office, and fitted Him for it (Ezek. xxxiv. 23). And upon this account God calls Him "My Shepherd" (Zech. xiii. 7). A good shepherd gives an account of his sheep; and so will Christ (Heb. ii. 13). II. SOME OF THE CHARACTERS THAT BELONG TO HIM AS A SHEPHERD. 1. He is the Shepherd of souls (1 Pet. ii. 25). 2. He is that great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. xiii. 20). Great in respect of the dignity of His person, and great in His accomplishments for His office. 3. He is the Good Shepherd (John x. 11). He is the very best Shepherd—(1) As being most wise and discerning. He is acquainted with the state of His whole flock, as their different circumstances require. (2) As being most faithful and constant. (3) In respect of His love for His flock (John x. 11). III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN HIS FEEDING HIS FLOCK. 1. As being the Shepherd of His people's souls, the food wherewith He feeds is spiritual. Even our common supplies for the body are from Him. 2. Of this spiritual food He makes use of great variety. (1) He feeds His flock with His word and ordinances. (2) By the influences of His Spirit. (3) With Himself, with His own flesh and blood, as received by faith. (4) By the various dispensations of His providence towards them. (5) When necessary, by afflictions. (6) After Christ has fed His flock for a time here, He will eternally feed them with higher entertainments in heaven. 3. The food wherewith Christ feeds His flock is precious, even the privileges and promises of the Gospel. How costly, how precious, are such things as these! 4. Christ feeds His people with pleasant food. 5. The provision Christ affords His flock is plentiful (Cant. v. 1). 6. The food with which Christ feeds His flock nourishes the soul to eternal life (John vi. 50). IV. IN WHAT RESPECT MAY CHRIST BE SAID TO FEED HIS FLOCK LIKE A SHEPHERD? 1. As He feeds them with judgment and discretion, with due regard to their age and growth. 2. As He doth this with the greatest care and compassion, as those weak creatures He hath paid the greatest price for, and stands in the nearest relation to. 3. As He feeds them effectually, so as to make them to thrive. 4. As He will go on to feed them, till they are nourished up to a fitness for the glory He designs to bring them to. (*D. Wilcox.*) *Christ the Shepherd:*—The language is partly metaphorical, because spiritual and intellectual ideas are taken from natural objects. But there is another sense in which the language is not exclusively metaphorical; because there is such a steadiness and determination in the character, that we know at once what it means—it almost ceases to be metaphor. The metaphor is one most commonly used to denote a king or ruler, a prophet or instructor, a priest or sacrifice. The origin of this is obvious, especially in reference to the first of these titles. In the country in which the scene is laid, all wealth consisted in possessions of flocks and herds. Ancient history tells us of a race of shepherd kings, whose tyranny over the people was so great that they were more like wolves than shepherds. And it is conjectured that on this account chiefly it is said of the Egyptians that "every shepherd was an abomination to them." The first idea, then, which the title of shepherd gives us is, that of the kingly character, and we find that every king was the high priest

of that people also. Melchizedek was both "king of Salem and priest of the Most High God." And he who was recognised thus as a shepherd, was also regarded as the principal teacher in spiritual matters. Thus we see how the title of Shepherd comprehends all the other characters of our Lord—King, Instructor, and Priest. It would naturally follow that when an individual was thus recognised as "shepherd," the people over whom he was placed would be denominated his "flock" or his "sheep." The word "shepherd" includes in it all that pertains to the office of a shepherd. I. SKILL. II. TENDERNESS AND AFFECTION. III. WATCHFULNESS. IV. POWER. (*C. Evanson, M.A.*) *Jesus the Shepherd:*—I. OLD TESTAMENT ILLUSTRATIONS of the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ discharges the office of feeding His flock like a shepherd. 1. Out of five great types we begin with Abel, the shepherd slain. Abel was a type of the Saviour, in that, being a shepherd, he sanctified his work to the glory of God, and offered sacrifice of blood upon the altar of the Lord, and the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering. Farther down the page of sacred history we find another shepherd. He is a more instructive type of the Saviour, perhaps, than the first, but in Abel we discover a truth which is absent in all others. Abel is the only one of the typical shepherds who dies at the foot of the altar, he is the only sacrificing shepherd; and herein you see Jesus Christ in the very earliest ages set forth to mankind as the slaughtered Victim. 2. Now we turn to Jacob, the toiling shepherd. Here is a type of the Good Shepherd, not as dying, but as keeping sheep with a view to get unto Himself a flock. Jacob's labour was of the most arduous character. It is sweet to dwell upon the spiritual parallel of Laban having required all the sheep at Jacob's hand. If they were torn of beasts he must make it good; if any of them died, he must stand as surety for the whole. And did not the Saviour stand just so while He was here below? Was not His toil for His Church just the toil of one who felt that He was under suretyship obligations to bring every one of them safe to the hand of Him who had committed them to His charge? When Jacob had received a reward for all his toil out of the flock which he himself tended, he then conducted both his family and his flock away from Laban. Jacob coming back from Laban to the Promised Land is a true picture of Jesus Christ coming up from the world, followed by His Church, to enter into that better Canaan which has been given to us by a covenant of salt for ever. 3. Joseph is a type of Jesus reigning in the Egypt of this world for the good of His own people, while they are here below. Jesus Christ is King over Egypt's realm. Observe the likeness between Joseph and Jesus in this respect. Joseph was of very singular advantage to the Egyptians. They must have starved in the years of famine, if his prescient eye had not foreseen the famine, and stored up the plenty of the seven previous years. And Jesus Christ is of great service even to this wicked world. It is by Him that it is preserved. 4. Moses, when he kept sheep, kept them in the wilderness, far away from all other flocks; and when he became a shepherd over God's people Israel, his business was not to preserve them in Egypt, but to conduct them out of it. Here, then, is a representation of Jesus Christ as the Shepherd of a separated people. Jesus, like Moses, might have been a king. As Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, so Jesus Christ said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan," to all the pomp and glory of this present world, and preferred to take part with His despised people, who were crushed down by the reigning powers in the Egypt of His days. Now, Moses began his mission by going to Pharaoh, and saying, "Thus saith the Lord, Let My people go, that they may serve Me." Jesus Christ begins as the Shepherd of the separate ones by demanding that they should be let go from the bondage of their natural estate. Our main point is the great exodus of Moses. Every heir of heaven is brought right out of Egypt, led through the Red Sea of Jesus Christ's blood, baptized into Jesus, and brought out into the separated position in the wilderness. It is easy to see how Moses was a shepherd to the people while in the wilderness. 5. David. This shepherd represents Jesus Christ, not at all as the others, but as King in the midst of His Church. David, like Jesus Christ, begins his life with trials. II. NEW TESTAMENT DESCRIPTIONS. III. IMPRESSIVE APPLICATIONS. 1. One of comfort and satisfaction to you who are poor, needy, weary, troubled lambs or sheep of the flock. "He shall gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." The lambs have not the value of mature sheep, yet they are the most thought of under the great Shepherd. They might fetch the least price in the

market, but they have the greatest portion of His heart. The weaklings and the sickly of the flock are the special objects of the Saviour's care. 2. A second application containing comfort and warning too. Sinner! our Lord Jesus Christ now represents Himself as being a Shepherd who is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Such is Jesus now, looking after stray sheep. Where are you? 3. So we shall conclude with these words, which may be for both saint and sinner. Let it never be forgotten that Jesus Christ is pre-eminently to be preached as the suffering One (Zech. xiii. 7). You shall know about the toiling Shepherd by-and-by; the Shepherd reigning in Egypt, the Joseph you shall know soon; the Shepherd of the separated flock, you shall follow ere long; the Shepherd reigning in Jerusalem, the David you shall rejoice to serve; but now you have to do with the Shepherd bleeding and dying. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Good Shepherd*:—The blessed Jesus is represented under this amiable character. The metaphor suggests—I. THE GRACIOUSNESS AND BENIGNITY OF HIS NATURE. It was goodness, alike unmerited and unsolicited, that originally moved Him to interpose in our behalf. On what penitent did He ever look with coldness and aversion? II. The idea of PROVISION. As the shepherd leads about his flock from one spot of pasturage to another, so does the Redeemer of His people conduct them to places where nourishment and sustenance may be obtained. III. The ideas of WATCHFULNESS AND PROTECTION. They are exposed to a variety of perils; but He is vigilant to observe, and omnipotent to defend. IV. KIND ATTENTION TO THE FEEBLE, AND TENDER SOLICITUDE FOR THE YOUNG. "He shall gather the lambs with His arm," &c. V. An idea of THE FINAL BLESSEDNESS RESERVED FOR THE FLOCK. From the tender care exercised over them here, we may infer somewhat of the dignity to which they shall be advanced hereafter. There are many of the ordinary phenomena of nature that fail to engage our wonder, merely because they are not uncommon. What, for example, if it did not come under our daily observation, could more surprise and astonish us than the progressive development of our own faculties? Who could believe that, under the feeble exterior of infancy, there slumbered intellectual energies, which, when a series of years had gone by, would expand to constitute the profound scholar, the enlightened statesman, and the accomplished orator? But multiplied experience has taught us what education and circumstances can do, and we cease to wonder that from the infant mind such fruits are capable of being reared. But surely, when we thus behold the admirable progress of which our nature is susceptible within the narrow compass of threescore years and ten—when we remember that the vast intellect of Newton was lodged in an infant's body—it may serve to remove our doubts as to the higher perfection of which our nature is capable in a future state of being. The goodness of the Great Shepherd in conducting His people to their final state, is most beautifully represented in the concluding verses of the 7th chapter of Revelation—a passage at once so tender and sublime, that it is said our great Scottish poet, from his very boyhood, could never read it without tears. (*J. L. Adamson.*) **He shall gather the lambs with His arm.**—*The Good Shepherd's consideration for the weak and tender of His flock*:—I. CHRIST'S FLOCK IS MADE UP OF BELIEVERS OF SEVERAL GROWTHS; OF LAMBS AS WELL AS MORE GROWN SHEEP. 1. As to the ages and years of Christians, we read of Paul the aged, and of Mnason, an old disciple (Acts xxi. 16); and of others the kindness of whose youth God particularly remembers. Josiah (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3); Obadiah (1 Kings xviii. 12); Samuel (1 Sam. ii. 18); Timothy (2 Tim. iii. 15). 2. In respect of stature, strength, and growth in grace, Christ's flock is made up of lambs as well as sheep. Grace is not perfected as soon as implanted, nor does it thrive in all alike. In some, the good seed brought forth an hundredfold, in others sixty, in others but thirty (Matt. xiii.). God has ordered it thus for wise purposes; that the weak may be assisted by the strong, and the strong have opportunity of showing their compassion and tenderness to the weak; that the strong may by this means be kept humble, as seeing in the case of others what they themselves once were; and that the weak may not be discouraged, but reach after the attainments of the strong. II. THE INSTANCES HERE MENTIONED OF CHRIST'S COMPASSIONATE REGARD TO THE WEAK. 1. The lambs, when wandering, He will gather with His arm. "Gathering" supposes our proneness to wander. (1) This proceeds from the remains of corruption in us, and in His whole flock, which are not yet perfectly renewed. (2) The suddenness and surprise of a temptation may sometimes occasion their going astray. (3) As making way for both these, Christians

too often let down their watch; upon which they are betrayed by corruption, and Satan gets an advantage over them. Christ will gather such with His arm. Which implies—(*a*) That He looks after them, even when they are going astray from Him, and He is concerned for them still. (*b*) That He will not let them wander too far, not beyond the reach of His arm, with which they are both encircled and restrained. (*c*) That He will employ His power, when the case necessarily requires it, in order to their recovery. (*d*) That He will gather them with gentleness and care. (*e*) That He will gather them with His arm, with it stretched out kindly to receive them, and to give them a gracious welcome to Him again. 2. He will carry them in His bosom. This implies great weakness in some that belong to Christ's flock, and great compassion and grace on the part of Him, their Shepherd. "The lambs," or young converts of Christ's flock, may be in many respects weak: weak as to knowledge, faith, and love. Such weaklings as these Christ has in His flock; and yet He does not cast them off, but "carries them in His bosom," which notes—(1) That He observes with compassion the very weakest in His flock, and has His heart, as well as His arms open, to cherish them. (2) That He will take them into a place of safety. (3) In a word, Christ's carrying the weak of His flock "in His bosom," notes His acceptance of them as sincere, notwithstanding the weaknesses they lament over. These shall not keep them from His heart. 3. Our Lord and Shepherd Jesus Christ "will gently lead those that are with young." These words may set forth the condition and state of such sheep and followers of Him as are sorely burdened. And there are many things to burden Christ's sheep, as their difficult services, the load of their unmortified sins, and the bitter fruits of them, in their various sufferings of body and mind. As pressed with these, some of Christ's flock may be said to be as feeble as sheep that are with young, or give suck: but such "He will gently lead." Which implies—(1) That He will go before them in the way they are to take. (2) He will lead them gently on, and not hurry and try them by any means beyond their strength. (3) He will bear with all their weakness and imperfections, groans and complaints, and never take occasion from thence to be severe with them, or forsake and leave them. III. CHRIST WILL MAKE GOOD HIS CHARACTER OF A SHEPHERD TO HIS SHEEP THAT ARE WEAK, EITHER THROUGH THEIR SMALL ATTAINMENTS IN GRACE, OR THE GREATNESS OF THEIR BURDENS. 1. This is here expressly asserted, "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." 2. To this His compassionate nature inclines Him (Heb. iv. 15). Such a nature cannot but be peculiarly concerned for the weaklings of His flock, whose groans are continually going to heaven. 3. This He has in His commission. (Isa. lxi. 1.) 4. This has all along been His dealing with His flock; and He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Application—Will Christ gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom? What an inducement is this to come into His flock! Be humbled, that you should be such weaklings as you are, so apt to wander, and so unable to return; but yet remember the excellent properties of Christ as the Shepherd of His flock. (*D. Wilcox.*) *Four attributes of Divine love*:—Isaiah tells us here of—I. THE STRENGTH OF THE DIVINE LOVE. "He shall gather with His arm." The power to overtake and elevate such an one as Saul of Tarsus is no power less than "the arm of the Lord revealed." "He shall carry in His bosom." Even greater power is involved in this than in first gathering in the arm. The power of endurance. Such power was that of the Divine love in Christ towards Peter. II. THE GENTLENESS OF THE DIVINE LOVE. So with the Divine love that said to Mary, "Why weepest thou?" or to Thomas, "Reach hither thy hand." III. THE PROTECTIVENESS OF THE DIVINE LOVE. That may be the chief thought in these words. He promises more than the intervention of His arm between soul and dangers: He promises the intervention of His entire Being. IV. THE ADAPTATIONS OF THE DIVINE LOVE. (*U. R. Thomas, B.A.*) *A Sabbath-school sermon*:—I. We have to examine A PORTRAIT OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD. 1. Men carry in their bosoms their gems, their jewels, and so doth Christ carry the lambs of the flock, regarding them as His peculiar treasure. He puts an estimate upon them according to His own relationship to them. He knows, too, what the child cost Him, for to redeem a little child from going down into the pit He must needs bear the penalty due to justice, and suffer even unto death. He recollects, moreover, what that child will come to if He do not save it by carrying it in His bosom. A soul is a precious thing to Christ, for He believes in its

immortality. And He knows, too, what may come of that little child if He saveth it, for the possibilities of blessing within one little saved child who shall estimate but the Lord who knoweth all things? Jesus knows that a boy may be the spiritual father of hundreds ere he dies. There may be in the congregation a Chrysostom or an Augustine. Right among us may sit a little Whitefield, or a young Luther. II. We have AN EXAMPLE FOR THE CHURCH. There are two great things which a Church ought always to have, namely, an arm to gather with and a bosom to carry in. III. A practical word or two upon THE MODEL TEACHER. He who gathers the lambs with His arm and carries them in His bosom is the model of a Sunday-school teacher. In what points? 1. There should be about the teacher attractiveness, in order that he may gather. 2. After you have attracted, uplift. He carries the lambs in His bosom, and therefore He must lift them up. Everything about a teacher should tend to raise the children. 3. When He lifted up the lamb, He laid it on His heart. If you are to bless the little ones, they must lie on your heart. You must make them feel the life of your religion. 4. Next, bear them forward. The lamb is put into the shepherd's bosom, not that he may stand still with it all the day long, but because the sheep are going this way and the lambs must go that way too, and therefore he carries it. You must be always going forward yourself if the child is to go forward with you. 5. Guard the children. Christ placed the lambs in His bosom to protect them. 6. The next word is, cheer. 7. Delight in them. That tenth verse has a great charm for me. "The Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him." Well, what did He have before Him but the sheep that He went forth to find, and the lambs which He gathered and carried in His bosom? They were His work, but they were also His reward. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

The lambs and their Shepherd:—I. DESCRIBE THE LAMBS. 1. They are truly sheep. They are not sheep in maturity, but they are sheep to a certainty. The sheep of God are harmless. They can bear, but they cannot revenge. The sheep goes further than the non-inflicting of evil, it bears evil without complaint. The extraordinary patience of the sheep is seen in God's people, when they joyously endure a weight of affliction, and pass through the valley of death with composure. Sheep, again, are cleanly creatures; cleanly in their feeding—carrion never tempts them; cleanly in their habits. Furthermore, the sheep is guileless. You see the lion creeping through the thicket full of cunning; but sheep have none. Again, sheep are tractable. When a man tames a lion so that he may sport with it, he gets the name of lion-tamer; nobody is renowned for taming a sheep, for it has a tractable disposition, and so all the elect of God have an obedient and yielding spirit. Do not forget that the lambs are truly Christ's sheep. They are as dearly bought with His blood; they are as surely objects of His care; they are as manifestly illustrations of His power; they shall as certainly be proofs of His faithfulness as the strongest of the flock. 2. Why are they lambs, and in what are they distinguished? (1) Some of them are lambs for age, though not all; for there are some young Christians who are full grown, and there are others very aged, who remain to be lambs still. (2) The distinguishing mark lies rather in spiritual deficiencies—they are but children in knowledge. They are immature also in experience. (3) So are they lambs in tenderness of feeling. They are too susceptible, and therefore feel the unkindness of the world acutely. (4) They are timid and trembling, and dare not courageously proclaim themselves at all times on the Lord's side. (5) Perhaps, too, they are subject to melancholy, to doubts and fears, and distresses of mind. II. Let us come to EXPRESS OUR FEARS CONCERNING THESE LAMBS OF THE FLOCK. We are afraid for them, because of the howling wolves there are about. We are equally alarmed because of their association with the goats. Then we are jealous over the lambs because of the old lion. We are even more concerned when we think of the bear. A flattering world hugs tightly. When we put all these dangers together, we add to them the fact that lambs are subject to the same diseases which are incident to all sheep. They, too, get the foot-rot of weariness in the ways of God. They begin to be slothful in the cause of God. They suffer from coldness of heart, have a tendency to wander, and catch the stiff neck of pride. III. Let us REJOICE IN THE GOOD SHEPHERD. "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." 1. Who is He of whom such gracious words are spoken? "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand," &c. But let us read on (vers. 12-18). 2. Why doth He carry lambs in His bosom? Because

He hath a tender heart, and any weakness at once melts Him. But more, it is His office to consider the weak. For this it is that He was made a faithful high priest —that He might have compassion on the ignorant. He was a lamb Himself once. He purchased them with blood. Moreover, He is responsible for that lamb. They are all a part of His glory. 3. What does He say He will do? "Carry them." Sometimes He carries them by not permitting them to endure much trouble. At other times, by having some tender, loving person to take care of them. He carries them instrumentally. At other times, such lambs are carried by having an unusual degree of love given them, and consequently a large amount of joy, so that they bear up and stand fast. Though their knowledge may not be deep, they have great sweetness in what they do know. 4. How does He carry them? He carries them in His bosom—not on His back—that is how He carries stray sheep. (1) Here is put forth boundless affection. Could He put them in His bosom if He did not love them much? Where does the Father place the Son? He is in the bosom of the Father. Where did Abraham carry Lazarus? In his bosom. Where did Naomi bear her young grandson Obed? He was in her bosom. Where did the man in the parable put his little ewe lamb? In his bosom. (2) Then there is tender nearness. How near to a man is that which is in his bosom. (3) Then it is a hallowed familiarity. Lambs when put into the bosom, having no intellect, cannot therefore learn anything; but the lambs of Christ's flock, whenever they ride in Christ's bosom, talk with Him; they tell Him all their secrets, and He tells them His. (4) Then there is perfect safety. The dear ones in His bosom—what can hurt them? They must hurt the Shepherd first. How can they get the lamb out of the Shepherd's arm? Must they not cut off the Shepherd's arm before they can hurt the lamb? IV. LET US HEAR THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE. If you be the lambs, hear the Shepherd's voice, which says, "Follow Me." You that are not lambs, hear His words, "Come unto Me." Those of us who are His sheep, let us hear the Shepherd's voice, saying, "Feed My lambs." (*Ibid.*) *Greatness in league with gentleness*:— In the chapter before us our Saviour is described as Jehovah God. Greatness in league with gentleness, and power linked with affection, now pass before us. Heroes who have been most distinguished for fury in the fight, have been tender of heart as little children; sharp were their swords to the foe, but gentle their hands towards the weak. It is the index of a noble nature that it can be majestic as a lion in the midst of the fray, and roar like a young lion on the scene of conflict, and yet it has a dove's eye and a maiden's heart. (*Ibid.*) *Jesus and the lambs*:—I. WHO ARE THE LAMBS WHICH OUR BLESSED LORD IS SAID TO GATHER AND TO CARRY IN HIS BOSOM? 1. In a certain sense we may affirm that all His people are lambs. In so far as they exhibit the Christian spirit, they are lamb-like. 2. Still, this is not the precise meaning of the text. The word "lamb" frequently signifies the young; and our Lord Jesus Christ graciously receives many young persons into His bosom. The ancient teachers of the Jewish law invited no children to gather around them. I suppose there was not a Rabbi in all Jerusalem who would have desired a child to listen to him, and if it had been said of any one of the Sanhedrin, "that man teaches so as to be understood by a child," he would have thought himself insulted. But not so our Master; He always had children among His auditory. Some in our day mistrust youthful piety, but our Saviour lends no countenance to such suspicions. Some cautiously whisper, "Let the pious youth be tried awhile before we believe in his religion; let him be tempted; let him bear the frosts of the world; perhaps the blossoms will drop away and disappoint us." Such was not my Master's way. 3. But, again, by lambs we may quite as properly understand young converts. 4. We shall not strain the text if we say that the lambs in the flock are those who are naturally of a weak, timid, trembling disposition. 5. The lambs are those who know but little of the things of God. II. HOW DOES JESUS SHOW THIS SPECIAL CARE FOR THE WEAK ONES? He does this, according to the text, in two ways—1. By gathering them. The shepherd's kitchen fire is, for the time, the lambs' own nursery. When the flock is on the march, it will happen, unless the shepherd is very watchful, that the lambs will lag behind. So it is in the progress of the great Christian Church; persecuted often, always more or less molested by the outside world, there are some who flag, they cannot keep up the pace; the spiritual warfare is too severe for them. At other times the lambs do worse than this. They are of a skittish nature, and, feeling the natural vigour of new-born life, they are not content to keep within bounds, as the older sheep do, but they betake them-

selves to wandering, so that at the close of the day the lambs cost the shepherd much trouble. So are there many immature Christians whose minds are hung loosely, and are unstable as water. 2. After He gathers them, He carries them in His bosom. That is—(1) The safest place, for the wolf cannot get them there. (2) The tenderest place, where we should put only a poor creature that had a broken bone, and could not bear to be roughly touched. (3) The easiest place. (4) The most honourable place. We would not put into our bosom that which we despised. 3. Our Lord shows His care for His lambs in His teachings, which are very simple, mostly in parables, full of winning illustrations, but always plain. He is pleased to reveal His teachings gradually. His experimental teachings are all by degrees, too. 4. In the solemn curses with which He guarded the little ones (Matt. xviii. 6, 10). 5. How many of the promises are made on purpose for the weak. 6. The Lord Jesus Christ's tenderness to His people is further shown in this, that what He requires of them is easy. 7. He shows His gentleness, moreover, in that He accepts the least service that these little ones may offer. III. WHEREFORE THIS CARE OF CHRIST TOWARDS THE LAMBS OF THE FLOCK? Because they need it, and He loves them, and therefore shall they receive according to their necessities. But why is He so particularly anxious to succour them? Surely, if He lost a lamb or two, it would be no loss among so many, and if one of the feeble minds should perish, it would be no great consequence when a multitude that no man can number shall be saved. The answer is plain. 1. The weak are as much redeemed by the blood of Christ as the strong. 2. In the new-born child of God there are peculiar beauties which are not so apparent in others. 3. Jesus has such care for the weak ones, because they will become strong one day. 4. Our Lord Jesus Christ's suretyship engagements require that He should preserve the weakest as well as the strongest. 5. Besides His suretyship engagements, there are His promises. 6. Compassion argues that if any should be watched it should be these. IV. A PRACTICAL CONCLUSION. 1. Let us gather the lambs for Christ. 2. Learn to carry in our bosoms those who are gathered. (*Ibid.*) "*I like your Jesus*":—A little Moslem child accounted for her preference for the Christian religion by saying, "I like your Jesus, because He loves little girls! Our Mohammed did not love little girls." With unerring instinct she had seized upon at least one of the greatest differences between the two religions. *Christ and children:*—Ruskin has observed that there are no children in Greek art, but that they abound in Christian art—an unmistakable token that it was the eye of Christ which first fully appreciated the attractiveness of childhood. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) **And carry them in His bosom.**—*The saints' final perseverance secured by the tenderness of Christ to the weak:*—I. BY THE "LAMBS" WE ARE CLEARLY TO UNDERSTAND WEAK BELIEVERS. It has nothing to do with their age, either natural or spiritual. Sometimes they are called "babes." Sometimes we are told of "the day of small things"; sometimes of "smoking flax." They are weak believers. We see it in their degree of spiritual knowledge. They little know themselves. They little know the hard warfare they have to maintain. They are surprised because they find the strong workings of nature and of the flesh within them. These are they who live much upon their enjoyments when they have them, and are exceedingly cast down when they have them not. They are, for the most part, persons who are more affected by providences than by God's promises. They have indistinct views of Christ, of His great atonement. They live upon their happy frames. They draw but very feeble distinction between a life of faith and a life of sense. They love to discourage themselves. They think much more of their bitters than of that Branch that can make the bitter waters sweet. And too oft they think more of their own sacrifices than they think of the great Sacrifice. They are weak in knowledge; weak in experience; weak in courage. They fail too oft in the day of adversity. And yet they form a part of the true flock of Christ. There are but few folds in which lambs do not appear a large proportion to the whole. II. THE GENTLE CONDUCT THAT THEY MEET WITH. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." 1. Think who this is (ver. 12). Observe how He is set before us in the tenth verse: Jehovah, Elohim, "will come with strong hand: He shall feed His flock like a shepherd," &c. What! the great Eternal—"the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity"—is this the Being that "gathers the lambs with His arm and carries them in His bosom"? 2. The posture contains in it much for our prayerful meditation; carrying these lambs, these feeble ones,

these ignorant ones, these weak ones, "in His bosom"! What doth it imply? (1) His boundless affection for them. He has given costly proof of that affection. (2) See how He takes notice of their least graces. I love that instance in 1 Kings xiv., in the case of Abijah: it unfolds the tenderness of Him that carries His lambs in His bosom: "And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him; for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." There is His cherishing His "lamb." (3) It implies their tender nearness to Him. The lamb seems to be so near its shepherd, as if nothing could be nearer. And what stands so near to the Lord Jesus Christ as His own people? "In all their affliction He is afflicted." (4) It would seem almost to imply more than this; for as the Lord Jesus is spoken of as lying in the bosom of His Father, as if there He learned anew as man all the heart of the Father, so who can say what there is in that posture of the weak lambs lying in the bosom of the Shepherd? He tells us the secrets of His heart. In this opening of the heart to the Lord Jesus in trouble, and His opening His heart to us in giving us answers of peace, doth consist some of the highest blessednesses to be known on this side heaven. (5) But the posture does evidently bring with it deep conviction of safety. If the lamb is in the bosom of the Shepherd, he that destroyeth the lamb must destroy the Shepherd. There is all encouragement in this verse, to one that feels himself the weakest of all God's children. But there is not in this truth that which encourages a weak believer to remain in his weakness. For what purpose does the good Shepherd cherish? It is to sanctify. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) **And shall gently lead those that are with young.**—*The saints' final perseverance secured by the gentleness of Christ to the burdened:*—I. With regard to THE PERSONS, they are clearly those who are weary and heavy-laden. They are feeble as well as burdened. Various are the burdens that might be placed before you. 1. I need not say how heavy is the burden of sin, when the Spirit of God first unfolds it to us. 2. And even when there is so much perception of Christ as to leave the spirit without any acknowledged hope but in Christ, and yet with so much of self-righteousness still cleaving as to think there must be something of a preparation necessary in order to recommend the soul to God and His Christ—what a burden! The toil of ploughing the rock—of counting the sands—of measuring the mighty waters—of working in the fire, the fire burning our work as soon and as long as we do! 3. But it applies, too, to the established believer, who frequently in his pilgrimage acknowledges himself and feels himself a burdened man. 4. The constant conflict—"putting off the old man," "putting on the new man"; self-crucifixion, mortification of self, self-denial. 5. There is the burden of a burdened conscience; when a man sees so much in his sin as not to see enough in Christ to raise him above it. 6. The heavy weight of afflictions, accompanied as they often are with great and sore temptations. 7. Their very bodies are a burden to them. 8. The constant service of the Lord has a burden in it. "The burden and heat of the day." 9. There is a burden that we are but little prone to look into as we ought to do, and that is—the burdens of others. For we are to bear their burdens. II. THE LORD'S CONDUCT TOWARD THEM. Infinite power is required to control the movements of these burdened ones; so many thousands as He has. But the great truth that it unfolds is His infinite tenderness. He does not drive—He leads. He does not merely lead, but "gently leads." Who can unfold the wondrous tenderness, patience, forbearance, compassion, and love with which He has led each one of us! How doth He wait on His burdened ones! How doth He wait for them! How doth He encourage them! Sometimes He encourages His burdened ones directly. By His Word. How oftentimes do they find their hearts cheered, led onward by a word of promise! He waiteth on them. He waiteth for them. And He suffereth no one to harm them. III. WHITHER DOES HE LEAD THEM? 1. The first object that our Lord has in His leading of His burdened ones, is to lead them out of their own pasture. His great object is to lead them out of the creature and out of themselves. "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." 2. Whither, then, does He lead them? Into deeper discoveries of Divine truth. How little know we of a truth till we have had experience of that truth! 3. Then cometh more close communion with God. 4. And now, it may be, He leads them into deeper afflictions than they have ever known. Oh! what a blessedness to have such a Shepherd for such poor burdened souls! Remember, His great end in leading is holiness. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

Vers. 12–28. **Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?**—*The grandeur of God*:—The prophet's notions of God are diffused through all the verses of the text. The prophet's design in describing the Deity with so much magnificence is to discountenance idolatry, of which there are two sorts. 1. Religious idolatry, which consists in rendering that religious worship to a creature which is due to none but God. 2. Moral idolatry, which consists in distrusting the promises of God in dangerous crises, and in expecting that assistance from men which cannot but be expected from God. The portrait drawn by the prophet is infinitely inferior to his original. Ye will be fully convinced of this if ye attend to the following considerations of the grandeur of God. I. THE SUBLIMITY OF HIS ESSENCE. The prophet's mind was filled with this object. It is owing to this that he repeats the grand title of Jehovah, "the Lord," which signifies "I am" by excellence, and which distinguisheth by four grand characters the essence of God from the essence of creatures. 1. The essence of God is independent in its cause. God is a self-existent being. We exist, but ours is only a borrowed existence, for existence is foreign from us. 2. The essence of God is universal in its extent. God possesseth the reality of every thing that exists. He is, as an ancient writer expresseth it, a boundless ocean of existence. From this ocean of existence all created beings, like so many rivulets, flow. 3. The essence of God is unchangeable in its exercise. Creatures only pass from nothing to existence, and from existence to nothing. We love to-day what we hated yesterday, and to-morrow we shall hate what to-day we love. 4. The Divine essence is eternal in its duration. "Hast thou not known," saith our prophet, "that He is the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth?" II. THE IMMENSITY OF HIS WORKS (vers. 22, 26). A novice is frightened at hearing what astronomers assert. Over all this universe God reigns. III. THE EFFICIENCY OF HIS WILL. The idea of the real world conducts us to that of the possible world. The idea of a creative Being includes the idea of a Being whose will is efficient. But a Being whose will is self-efficient, is a Being who, by a single act of His will, can create all possible beings: that is, all, the existence of which implies no contradiction; there being no reason for limiting the power of a will that hath been once efficient of itself. IV. THE MAGNIFICENCE OF SOME OF HIS MIGHTY ACTS, AT CERTAIN PERIODS, IN FAVOUR OF HIS CHURCH. The prophet had two of these periods in view. The first was the return of the Jews from that captivity in Babylon which he had denounced; and the second, the coming of the Messiah, of which their return from captivity was only a shadow. Such, then, are the grandeurs of God! Application—We observed that the prophet's design was to render two sorts of idolatry odious: idolatry in religion, and idolatry in morals. Idolatry in religion consists in rendering those religious homages to creatures which are due to the Creator only. To discredit this kind of idolatry, the prophet contents himself with describing it. He shames the idolater by reminding him of the origin of idols, and of the pains taken to preserve them. A man is guilty of moral idolatry when, in dangerous crises, he says, "My way is hid from the Lord; my judgment is passed over from my God." God is the sole arbiter of events. Whenever ye think that any more powerful being directs them to comfort you, ye put the creature in the Creator's place; whether ye do it in a manner more or less absurd; whether formidable armies, impregnable fortresses, and well-stored magazines; or whether a small circle of friends, an easy income, or a country house. The Jews were often guilty of the first sort of idolatry. The captivity in Babylon was the last curb to that fatal propensity. Thanks be to God that the light of the Gospel hath opened the eyes of a great number of Christians in regard to idolatry in religion. Ye who, in order to avert public calamities, satisfy yourselves with a few precautions of worldly prudence, and take no pains to extirpate those horrible crimes which provoke the vengeance of heaven to inflict punishments on public bodies; ye are guilty of this second kind of idolatry. Were your confidence placed in God, ye would endeavour to avert national judgments by purging the state of those wicked practices which are the surest forerunners and the principal causes of famine, and pestilence, and war. And thou, feeble mortal, lying on a sick-bed, already struggling with the king of terrors; thou, who tremblingly complainest, I am undone!—thou art guilty of this second kind of idolatry, that thou hast trusted in man and made flesh thine arm. Were God the object of thy trust, thou wouldest believe that though death is about to separate thee from man, it is about to unite thee to God. (*J. Saurin.*) *The incomparableness of the great God*:—"To

whom then will ye liken God?" I. THAT THE GREATEST THINGS IN THE MATERIAL WORLD ARE NOTHING TO HIM. The ocean is great, great in its depths, breadths, contents, occupying by far the largest portion of this globe of ours. But He "hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand." The heaven is great; its expanse is immeasurable, its worlds and systems baffle all arithmetic, but He "meted out heaven with the span." The earth is great, great to us, though a mere speck in the universe, and, it may be, an atom to other intelligences; but "He comprehendeth the dust in a measure," &c. What is the universe to God? You may compare an atom to the Andes, a raindrop to the Atlantic, a spark to the central fires of the creation; but you cannot compare the universe, great as it is, to the Creator. II. THAT THE GREATEST MINDS IN THE SPIRITUAL UNIVERSE ARE NOTHING TO HIM. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counsellor hath taught Him?" &c. (vers. 13, 14). The Bible gives us to understand that there is a spiritual universe far greater than the material, of which the material is but the dim mirror and feeble instrument—a universe containing intelligences innumerable in multitude and incalculable in their gradations of strength and intelligence. But what spirit or spirits at the head or hierarchy of these intelligences has ever given Him counsel, instructed or influenced Him in any matter? He is uninstructible: the only Being in the universe who is so. He knows all. Sooner speak of a spark enlightening the sun, than speak of a universe of intelligences adding aught to the knowledge of God. He is absolutely original: the only Being in the universe who is so. We talk of original thinkers. Such creatures are mere fictions. He being so independent of all minds —1. His universe must be regarded as the expression of Himself. No other being had a hand in it. 2. His laws are the revelation of Himself. No one counselled Him in His legislation. 3. His conduct is absolutely irresponsible, and He alone can be trusted with irresponsibility. III. THAT THE GREATEST INSTITUTIONS IN HUMAN SOCIETY ARE NOTHING TO HIM. Nations are the greatest things in human institutions. But "nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance." What were the greatest nations of the old world, or the most powerful of modern times? What are the greatest nations that have ever been, or are, compared to Him? Nothing, emptiness. Oh, ye magnates of the world, ye kings of the earth, what are ye in the presence of God? Less than animalcula dancing in the sun. IV. THAT THE GREATEST PRODUCTIONS OF HUMAN LABOUR ARE NOTHING TO HIM. "There is," said an eloquent French preacher, "nothing great but God." (*Homilist.*) *The transcendent One:*—The grand object of this sublime chapter seems to be to inspirit and to comfort the Jews in their Babylonian captivity. Their God in His transcendent greatness is brought under their notice for this purpose—I. IN THE EXACTITUDE OF HIS OPERATIONS. He is here represented as "measuring" the waters, as "spanning" the heavens, as "comprehending" the very dust of the earth in a measure, as "weighing" the mountains in scales. As the physician adjusts in nicest proportions the elements in the medical dose, with which he hopes to cure his patient; the engineer every crank and wheel and pin in the machine which he has constructed for a certain purpose, so God—only in an Infinite degree—arranges all the parts of the complicated universe. It is seen in the atmosphere that surrounds this globe; were one of its constituent elements more or less than it is the whole would be disturbed. This is seen in the punctuality with which all the heavenly orbs perform their movements; they are never out of time. It is seen, in fact, in the unbroken uniformity with which all nature proceeds on its march. 1. This Divine exactitude should inspire us with unbounded confidence in His procedure. Because God works with such infinite precision, His works admit of no improvement. 2. This Divine exactitude should inspire us to imitate Him in this respect. When we act from blind impulse, or from imperfect reflection, we risk our well-being. II. IN THE ALMIGHTINESS OF HIS POWER. He is here represented as holding the waters in the "hollow of His hand." In thinking of this power we should remember—1. That all this power is under the direction of intelligence. It is not a blind force, like the force of the storm or the tornado, but it is a force directed by the highest wisdom. Wisdom uses the whole as the smith uses his hammer on the anvil, as the mariner the rudder in the tempest. 2. That all this power is inspired by benevolence. The infinite is here portrayed. III. IN THE INDEPENDENCY OF HIS MIND. "With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him?" From this absolute mental independency of God the following things may be deduced—1. That all His operations must originate in pure sovereignty,

All that exists must be traced to the counsels of His own will, for He had no counsellor. 2. That all His laws must be a transcript of His mind. What they are He is; they are the history of Himself. Conclusion—What an argument is here for an entire surrender to, and a thorough acquiescence in, the Divine will. (*Ibid.*) *The greatness of Israel's God*:—How little the palm of a man takes, how little the space which the span of a man can cover, how scanty the third of an ephah, and for what insignificant measures a balance suffices, whether a steelyard (*statera*), or a retail balance (*libra*) consisting of two scales (*lances*). But what Jehovah measures with His palm and regulates with His span is nothing less than the waters below and the heavens above. He uses a *shalish*, in which the dust composing the earth finds place, and a balance in which He weighs the colossus of the mountains. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *God in relation to earth and ocean*:—Put two tablespoonfuls of water in the palm of your hand and it will overflow; but Isaiah indicates that God puts the Atlantic and the Pacific and the Arctic and the Antarctic and the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and all the waters of the earth in the hollow of His hand. The fingers the beach on one side, the wrist the beach on the other. "He holdeth the water in the hollow of His hand." As you take a pinch of salt or powder between your thumb and two fingers, so Isaiah indicates God takes up the earth. He measures the dust of the earth. The original there indicates that God takes all the dust of all the continents between the thumb and two fingers. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The great God in His relation to heaven and earth*:—There was an engineer by the name of Strasicrates who was in the employ of Alexander the Great, and he offered to hew a mountain in the shape of his master, the Emperor, the enormous figure to hold in the left hand a city of 10,000 inhabitants, while with the right hand it was to hold a basin large enough to collect all the mountain torrents. Alexander applauded his ingenuity, but forbade the enterprise because of its costliness. Yet I have to tell you that our King holds in His one hand all the cities of the earth, and with the other all the oceans, while He has the stars of heaven for tiara. (*Ibid.*) *God weighing the mountains*:—What are all the balances of earthly manipulation compared with the balances that Isaiah saw suspended when he saw God putting into the scales the Alps and the Apennines and Mount Washington and the Sierra Nevadas? You see the earth had to be ballasted. It would not do to have too much weight in Europe, or too much weight in Asia, or too much weight in Africa or in America; so when God made the mountains He weighed them. God knows the weight of the great ranges that cross the continents, the tons, the pounds avoirdupois, the ounces, the grains, the milligrammes. (*Ibid.*) "*Why sayest thou?*"—The devout thought of these paragraphs passes in survey, first the earth (vers. 12–20); then the heavens (21–26); finally, the experience of the children of God in all ages (27–31). I. THE TESTIMONY OF THE EARTH. It seems as though we are conducted to the shores of the Mediterranean, and stationed somewhere near the site of ancient Tyre. Before us spreads the Great Sea, as the Hebrews were wont to call it. Far across the waters, calm and tranquil, or heaving in memory of recent storms, sea and sky blend in the circle of the horizon. Now remember, says the prophet, God's hands are so strong and great that all that ocean and all other oceans lie in them as a drop on a man's palm. And this God is our God for ever and ever. All men may be in arms against thee, encircling thee with threats, and plotting to swallow thee up. But the nations are to Him as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Thou hast no reason, therefore, to be afraid. II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE HEAVENS. The scene shifts to the heavens, and all that is therein. This is the antidote of fear. Sit in the heavenlies. Do not look from earth towards heaven, but from heaven towards earth. Let God, not man, be the standpoint of vision. But this is not all. To this inspired thinker, it seemed as though the blue skies were curtains that God had stretched out as a housewife gauze (see Revised Version, marg.), or the fabric of a tent within which the pilgrim rests. If creation be His tent, which He fills in all its parts, how puny are the greatest potentates of earth! The child of God need not be abashed before the greatest of earthly rulers. And even this is not all—day changes to night, and as the twilight deepens, the stars come out in their hosts; and suddenly, to the imagination of this lofty soul, the vault of heaven seems a pasture-land over which a vast flock is following its Shepherd, who calls each by name. What a sublime conception! Jehovah, the Shepherd of the stars, leading them through space; conducting them with such care and might that none falls out of rank, or is lacking. And will Jehovah do

so much for stars, and nought for sons? III. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SAINTS. "Hast thou not heard?" It has been a commonplace with every generation of God's people, that "the Lord fainteth not, neither is weary." He never takes up a case to drop it. He never begins to build a character to leave it when it is half complete. He may seem to forsake and to plunge the soul into needless trial; this, however, is no indication that He has tired of His charge, but only that He could not fulfil the highest blessedness of some soul He loved save by the sternest discipline. "There is no searching of His understanding." There is another point on which all the saints are agreed, that neither weariness nor fainting are barriers to the forth-putting of God's might. On the contrary, they possess an infinite attractiveness to His nature. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Nature ministers to the suffering*:—Nature has always been the resort of the suffering. Elijah to Horeb; Christ to Olivet. And in these glowing paragraphs, which touch the high-water mark of sacred eloquence, we are led forth to stand in the curtained tent of Jehovah, to listen to the beat of the surf, and watch the march of the stars. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 15. **Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket.**—*The greatness of God and His works*:—I. THE GREATNESS OF GOD AND HIS WORKS. II. GOD CONSTANTLY GOVERNETH THE WORLD WHICH HE HATH MADE. And as all creatures from the highest to the lowest have their subsistence in the power of God, so they are each of them noticed by His eye and governed by His providence; that is, by the immediate energy of His own power, or by agents which are under His direction, and who cannot act but by His power. That care of the Supreme Being, by which this general order or stated course of things is preserved, may not unfitly be called a general providence. Consider the great extent of it. It taketh place not only in the frame of the universe, the regular motion of the vast bodies which compose it, by which we have spring and harvest, summer and winter, day and night; not only in the fruitfulness of the earth, and the state of the several kinds of animals which inhabit it, and the manner in which the kinds and the individuals are preserved; but in human affairs likewise. But it is particularly pleasing to observe how minutely this providence of the Supreme Being descendeth, even to the notice and direction of the smallest and most inconsiderable things. Our Saviour, and this according to the justest philosophy that ever appeared in the world, representeth His Heavenly Father as clothing the lilies of the field, and as feeding the ravens; and argues from this, that if He attends to these things, which are comparatively of the smallest account, surely His providence will not neglect His creatures of a nobler order (Luke xii.). Thus, though God is so great, "He humbleth Himself to behold things which are done in heaven and upon earth," and takes notice even of the lowest orders of creatures, and of every individual. For, besides that general order of causes and effects which He hath established, and maintaineth from age to age, there are plain footsteps of a particular providence regarding individual persons. By the interpositions of providence things are so governed and conducted that His purposes are pursued and carried into execution; and manifold are the means by which this may be effected. How important the events which arise out of things which appear to us purely accidental! III. These reflections naturally lead our thoughts to THE HAPPINESS OF THE SUPREME BEING IN HIS PERFECTIONS AND WORKS, a subject, indeed, as little to be comprehended by us, as we can find out the Almighty unto perfection. Yet we cannot avoid the thought how high, and in all respects perfect, the felicity of the first cause of all things must be; and love to God will make a right heart rejoice and exult in it. Nor let it be objected, that in the universe there is much irregularity, and many evils and sufferings. For what to us hath the appearance of irregularity may be, nay, assuredly is, necessary to the harmony of the whole; and part of a design which was the best and worthiest which could be framed. As for those sufferings which the subjects of a moral government bring upon themselves, they are as necessary as that government itself; which is indeed the glory of God's creation, and without which, and those orders of creatures which are made to be the subjects of such a government, the universe must have been nothing to what it is now. An universe without angels, without men, without any such orders of intellectual and moral beings, what would it have been? But the glorious Head and Regent of that vast body, which is all harmony, all order and beauty, and in which no part of the grand design hath failed, or ever can fail, what happiness must He taste! Concluding reflections—1. If our minds are rightly impressed with a sense of the Divine greatness and

majesty, how little must what we are apt to call great upon earth appear in our eye! 2. Let us in all things meekly and affectionately submit to the supreme Ruler: in humble obedience to His laws, and in unreserved resignation to His providence. 3. Let us put our trust in God. (*J. Duchals, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn.**—*God's independence*:—He is not only independent of the power, but also of the goodwill of His creatures. This general allusion to oblation as an act of homage or of friendship suits the connection better than a specific reference to expiation. The insufficiency of these offerings is set forth, not in a formal proposition, but by means of a striking individualisation. If Lebanon could not suffice, what could? (*J. A. Alexander.*)

Ver. 18. **To whom then will ye liken God?**—*The Trinity*:—I. THE CARNAL NOTIONS MEN ARE APT TO ENTERTAIN OF GOD. 1. We find that the knowledge of the true God soon faded from the minds of Noah's descendants. That patriarch had been favoured with a clear revelation; and he had offered a pure worship. But even among his sons depravity began to manifest itself. And in a generation or two very gross ideas prevailed. Men were not satisfied with the fact of a Being, pure and spiritual, dwelling in the highest heaven, apart from the mortal eye. And they chose to represent Him by sensible figures. Some practices of this kind are described in verses 19, 20. 2. We find the same temper at work in the Jews. They, too, imitated the heathen in desiring idols, gods whom they might see. They were continually prone to let their carnal reasonings interfere with their reception of the Divine Word. 3. We may trace similar consequences even down to our times. There have been men, of great natural parts too, who, because they never witnessed a miracle, have boldly denied that miracles were ever performed. He who will credit nothing that is not apparent to his senses, cripples himself with the most enervating chains. He who does not allow that the Deity is incomprehensible, is in truth the most irrational of reasoners: for he would make out that this vast universe was created and is upheld and governed by one whose mind he, a puny worm of the dust, is able to comprehend. And he that would reject the truth of the Trinity because it is higher than his thoughts, would compare the likeness of God to a finite creature. It is not intended to say that Scripture asserts or that the Church maintains anything that is contrary to reason. We are every day obliged to admit as truths things, the reasons of which we are unable to explain or account for; and no one imagines that this is irrational. Why should it appear so in spiritual things? II. THERE IS THUS A WHOLESOME TRIAL OF OUR FAITH. God might, had He so pleased, have revealed His will so plainly that men could no more be ignorant of it than they can of the fact that the sun is shining in the heavens. To take the case of our blessed Saviour, He might have been shown openly to the world, and have been pointed out so evidently as the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, that none even of the Pharisees or the Sadducees could have denied it. Or, take the fact of His resurrection. It might have been performed before multitudinous witnesses, and Christ might again have lived openly as He did before His death, teaching and preaching. But where, in such a case, would have been the trial of faith? The whole system of God's dealings would have been changed; and we should have walked by sight and not by faith. In regard to providential circumstances it might have been the same. God might have disclosed to Abraham His purpose of providing a ram for a sacrifice instead of Isaac. Had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego learned at once that the fire would not kindle upon them, different indeed would their emotions have been; but what trial would there then have been of faith? God's dealings are secret, because He would prove men, and make evident what is in their hearts. In no other way, it is clear, could the graces of humility and trust, of patience and faith and hope and long-suffering, of self-denial and spiritual-mindedness, be wrought out. And so with regard to the revelation of doctrines. The Scripture gives us this most remarkable announcement (1 Pet. ii. 6–8). It is thus that God severs the precious from the vile: it is for this reason that He has allowed difficulties in His sacred Word, at which the worldly and the self-sufficient are offended; while they who with a humble spirit wait patiently upon Him, and meekly seek His guidance, are admitted into the secret place of the Most High. It is not that God throws difficulties into men's ways or delights to perplex them, but that in pursuing His great plan of moral government He does find it needful to train and lead onward by degrees, thus letting it be seen who will be teachable scholars in His school, and

who rebelliously refuse His gracious lessons. There is a point, too, which must not be lost sight of. The revelation of the Gospel, such as we find it, is of expanding character. As ages roll on, more and more light beams upon it; and thus the Bible is seen to be the book not of untutored nations only, but of those farthest advanced in civilisation; not merely of the world in its infancy, but of the world come to matured age. Other books are soon exhausted. But in all those things to which I have adverted, there is spiritual food for the humble mind. The full development of God's mysteries must patiently be waited for. Herein are some of the good things which He has prepared for those that love Him. Concluding reflections—1. There is an unfair use made of human language by those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity. Language is always imperfect; more especially so when, by terms taken from human things, it is used to describe those that are Divine. 2. But, after all, the best knowledge is a practical knowledge. And this we should strive to attain, especially in respect to such deep things of God. No one will stumble at the doctrine of the Trinity, who, enlightened and quickened by the Spirit, comes to the Father by the Son. Vain speculations will be cast aside as we become acquainted with what each blessed person in the Godhead has done, and is doing, for us. In this way seek to know the Triune God. The Father's love, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, experimentally known, will be sure to be the Christian's stable foundation and his richest joy. (*J. Ayre, M.A.*)

Ver. 20. **A graven image.**—"*An image that will not totter*":—If an idol leant over or fell that was the very worst of omens; *cf.* the case of Dagon. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The absurdity of idolatry*:—A wooden image, planed smooth below and heavier than above, so as not to upset at every push, is to be a god! (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *The helplessness of graven images*:—When John Knox was a prisoner in France, "the officers brought to him a painted board, which they called Our Lady, and commanded him to kiss it. They violently thrust it into his face, and put it betwixt his hands, who, seeing the extremity, took the idol, and advisedly looking about, he cast it into the river and said, 'Let Our Lady now save herself; she is light enough; let her learn to swim!' After that was no Scotsman urged with that idolatry." (Knox, *History of the Reformation.*)

Ver. 21. **Have ye not known?**—*Isaiah's questions*:—His sharp questions are as hooks to draw from his hearers' hearts their timid and starved convictions, that he may nourish these upon the sacramental glories of nature and of history. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Ver. 22. **It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth.**—*The circle*:—While yet people thought that the world was flat, and thousands of years before they found out that it was round, Isaiah intimated the shape of it. The most beautiful figure in all geometry is the circle. God made the universe on the plan of a circle. There are in the natural world straight lines, angles, parallelograms, diagonals, quadrangles; but these evidently are not God's favourites. Out of a great many figures God seems to have selected the circle as the best. "It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth." The stars in a circle, the moon in a circle, the sun in a circle, the universe in a circle, and the throne of God the centre of that circle. 1. The history of the world goes in a circle. If the world stands long enough we may have a city as large as they had in old times—Babylon, five times the size of London. You go into the potteries at Burslem, England, and you will find them making cups and vases after the style of the cups and vases exhumed from Pompeii. The world is not going back. But it is swinging in a circle, and will come back to the styles of pottery known so long ago as the days of Pompeii. The world must keep on progressing until it makes the complete circuit. 2. What is true in the material universe is true in God's moral government and spiritual arrangement. That is the meaning of Ezekiel's wheel; the wheel means God's providence. But a wheel is of no use unless it turns around, and if it turns around it moves in a circle. These bad or good actions may make the circuit of many years, but come back to us they will, as certainly as that God sits on the circle of the earth. Jezebel, the worst woman of the Bible, slew Naboth because she wanted his vineyard. While the dogs were eating the body of Naboth, Elijah the prophet put down his compass, and marked a circle from those dogs clear around to the dogs that should eat the body of Jezebel the murderess.

But it is sometimes the case that this circle sweeps through a century, or through many centuries. People got tired of a theocracy. They said—"We don't want God directly interfering with the affairs of the world; give us a monarchy." The world had a monarchy. From a monarchy it is going to have a limited monarchy. After a while the limited monarchy will be given up, and the republican form of government will be everywhere recognised. Then the world will get tired of the republican form of government, and it will have an anarchy, which is no government at all. And then, all nations, finding out that man is not capable of righteously governing man, will cry out again for a theocracy, and say, "Let God come back and conduct the affairs of the world." But do not become impatient because you cannot see the course of events, and therefore conclude that God's government is going to break down. History tells us that in the making of the pyramids it took two thousand men two years to drag one great stone from the quarry and put it into the pyramids. If men short-lived can afford to work so slowly as that, cannot God, in the building of the eternities, afford to wait? What though God should take ten thousand years to draw a circle! But it is often the case that the rebound is much quicker than that. The circle is sooner completed. You resolve that you will do what good you can. In one week you put a word of counsel in the heart of a Sabbath-school child. During that same week you give a letter of introduction to a young man struggling in business. During the same week you make an exhortation in a prayer-meeting. It is all gone; you will never hear of it, perhaps, you think. A few years after a man comes up to you and says, "You don't know me, do you?" You say, "No, I don't remember ever to have seen you." "Why," he says, "I was in the Sabbath-school class over which you were the teacher; one Sunday you invited me to Christ." What is true of the good is just as true of the bad. You utter a slander against your neighbour. It has gone forth from your teeth; it will never come back, you think. You think it will never do you any harm. But I am watching that word, and I see it beginning to curve, and it curves around, and it is aiming at your heart. You maltreat an aged parent. You begrudge him the room in your house. But God has an account to settle with you on that subject. What are those rough words with which your children are accosting you? They are the echo of the very words you used in the ear of your old father forty years ago. Retribution in a circle! I would like to see Paul, the invalid missionary, at the moment when his influence comes to full orb—his influence rolling out through Antioch, Cyprus, Syria, Corinth, Athens, through Asia, through Europe, through five centuries, through twenty centuries, through all the succeeding centuries, through earth, through heaven, and at last, the wave of influence, having made full circuit, strikes his great soul. I should not want to see Voltaire when his influence comes to full orb. No one can tell how that bad man's influence girded the earth, save the One who is seated on the circle of the earth. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) **The inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers.**—*Men as grasshoppers:*—1. So little and inconsiderable. 2. Of such small value. 3. Of such little use. 4. So easily crushed. Proud men's lifting up themselves is but like the grasshopper's leap; in an instant they must down to the earth again. (*M. Henry.*)

Vers. 23, 24. **That bringeth the princes to nothing.**—*Great men reduced to nothing:*—Earth has its great men. Social distinctions grow out of the constitution of things, and are, therefore, Divine in their foundation. I. EARTH'S GREAT MEN GOD REDUCES TO NOTHING. 1. Death is the destruction of all mere worldly distinctions. 2. Death is effected by the agency of God. "He bringeth," &c. Not chance, fate, accident, &c. II. Earth's great men He reduces to nothing NOTWITHSTANDING THEIR DETERMINED EFFORTS TO BE SOMETHING. "Their stock shall not take root in the earth." 1. The implied tendency of earth's great men in relation to life. They seek to "root" themselves here. 2. The manifest folly of earth's great men. They are trying to do what they cannot accomplish. Heaven's decree is against it, and there is no overcoming that decree. The roots of our earthly life, such as they are, are only like those of certain marine plants, that spring up from one floating wavelet to be destroyed by the next; or rather like the roots of those atmospheric plants that strike only into a wave of air; that roll swiftly on, Heaven only knows where. III. HE DOES THIS WITH THE GREATEST EASE. "He blows upon them and they wither," &c. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 26. **Lift up your eyes on high.**—*Looking up and pressing on:*—A man's

vision broadens as it lengthens. Look straight down at your feet; what do you see? A few inches will measure the diameter of the circle within which your sight has play. Look up at the blue which spans the heavens, and what see you then? Your circle of vision takes a sweep which demands astronomic computation. The circumference widens with the distance. But that is not all. Within the near and narrow circle there is room only for small details and severed parts—mere fractions and fragments, whose drift is not clear. The distant and wide outlook shows great and harmonious aggregates, shows their movement and drift, shows their obedience to the time-beat of a sovereign purpose. Herein lies the explanation of our text. It was a call to men to look at the stars, and to get therefrom a larger and more inspiriting conception of God's providence. The downward look throws an exaggerated emphasis on local details and passing experiences. It shows a complexity of events and movements whose design is not clear. The outlook is too confined to reveal the great issues which give meaning and value to details. Life sinks to a series of disjointed commonplaces. Man is robbed of the vision which inspires creative thought and heroic endeavour. Hope, faith, courage are the fruit of a loftier and far-reaching vision. The present finds its interpretation in the eternal, the local in the infinite. The soul of the seer expands with his vision. Narrow thought and hasty judgment become impossible to him. Essentially, then, our text calls us to a broader outlook, bids us to form our judgments and to feed our impulses on larger views of life and providence. This is far enough from bidding us to become visionaries and star-gazers in the sense usually associated with those terms. It is vision in order to labour, not vision in place of labour, to which we are called. By rising in vision above the present, we shall more adequately fill the present with wise thought and toil. I. THIS THOUGHT GUIDES US TO THE PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF PROVIDENCE. God works on a large scale. His purposes, like Himself, inhabit eternity. In His government there is nothing small, arbitrary, merely local. Every passing movement is part of a big design. And the man who would read even the plainer words of that purpose must get his light from a wide study of God's ways. Providence cannot be interpreted by details. We get a glimpse of this truth when we engage in retrospect. Looking back over a long stretch of years, we are enabled to perceive merciful meanings in crises which at the time perplexed and burdened us. The same truth impresses us when we take a panoramic view of nations and movements in history. To the man of downward look and narrow view, few things are more perplexing than the oftentimes apparent breach between moral worth and material progress. He sometimes becomes cynical over it. He has been heard to say that righteousness has nothing to do with prosperity. He looks down at the few facts lying near his feet, and this is what he makes of them. Think you that the resources of civilisation have banished for ever the dispensations of righteous, all-controlling providence? Read history. You will find that virtue, truth, honour, are more than mere sentiments—are vital elements of victorious power. God works on a grand scale. We must look far if we would adequately see. To this grandeur of purpose, which is the glory of providence, must be traced our many perplexities. Higher intelligence and larger aims must ever work in a manner ill understood and misunderstood by lower capacity. There will ever be need for trust and patience, but there may be moments of insight and realisation. But these can only come to the man who attains the broad outlook. In this matter we multiply our inevitable perplexities by the persistence of our downward look. Our thoughts and interests are so centred in the passing day and the current event as to narrow both our views and our sympathies. The things of to-day are what we are eager for; and on God's relation to us through them do we often misjudge His character and purpose. Give scope to your eyes. The tree will then sink to small proportions. It will become a pleasing detail on the broad expanse which stretches away to the horizon. The men to whom the text was first spoken needed this exhortation. They had been trying to see the landscape while placing their eyes upon the tree. II. THIS THOUGHT GUIDES US TO THE PROPER STANDPOINT FROM WHICH TO LOOK AT MAN. The downward look tends to the denial of God. It tends equally, and as a consequence, to the degradation of our thought of man. It is by enlarging our vision, by taking in a wider view of facts, that we shall rightly see God, and through Him, ourselves. In a word, as we must look at life's facts in the light of God's great purposes, so must we look at man, not as he merely is, but as he is ideally in the redeeming thought and design of the Father. Man, looked at only from below, does not inspire great

expectations or reverential regard. Before us looms a being of measurable height, of weight and bulk definable, acting under the impulse of appetites and desires which he holds in common with the brutes, showing now and again the possession of genius and virtues clearly not brutish, but for the most part failing to rise above sheer commonplace alike of power or sympathy. The natural man of ordinary proportions is not impressive. And the observer who looks downwards at him will soon lose all heroic conceptions of life, all sense of man's high origin and destiny. We become the victims of a delusion. The eye tricks us into the belief that we see, and under that belief we begin to cherish low views of man's worth. Man, like providence, to be seen aright must be looked at on high. Here we come under the tyranny of his too obtrusive parts. It is "in Christ" that we must look at our life, judge its possibilities and its worth, its character and destiny. Looking at man in Him, we behold a being God-like in the proportions of power and quality. If God, looking upon the very imperfect disciples of His Son, calls them "saints," while yet they are a long way from sanctity, I will be guided by the example. III. THIS THOUGHT GUIDES US TO THE PROPER INSPIRATION OF WORK. Never yet was great work done by the man of mere downward look. The eye, to be sure, must look steadily at the object and instrument of its toil, must look down and around at the place and conditions of the work to be done; but nothing much will come of it till the eye kindles the soul, and the soul rekindles the eye to wider vision. The artist who painted for eternity had mastered the secret of most patient and potent work for time and man. In the same spirit of lofty consecration did the men work who planned and reared our great cathedrals. Not for pay, not for fame, not by regulating rule of trade society did the chisels chip, and the hammers ring, and the trowels ply their busy task. The workmen consciously worked for God. And nothing less than a renewal of this vision can redeem the work of to-day from insignificance or degradation, or lift men into the confidence and joy of patient well-doing. The busy housewife, engaged in an endless round of detailed tasks, would surely fail through very weariness, did not the large vision and love of home and family give great value to small activities and lifelong significance to patient fidelity. It is when the preacher or the Sunday-school teacher looks at his work from on high, and sees before him not so many recognisable people about whom he knows everything, but a company of immortal spirits whose life passes measurement or comprehension, that he is strengthened for the drudgery attaching to his vocation, and rises to the height of passionate enthusiasm. The commerce and industry of the day are to some extent smitten with debility through the narrowing of their outlook, consequent upon hot competition and vigorous clashing of rights and claims. The downward look has resulted in the blight of worldliness. Only the broader vision can raise the tone and quality of life. It is the business of the poet, the preacher, the leader, to bring and keep these loftier inspirations within the practical spheres of life. The tendency of work is always towards absorption in its own immediate occupation. IV. THE PROPER EFFECT OF THIS UPWARD LOOK IS THE RENEWAL OF OUR FAITH AND RESOLVE. It is to grace we must look for the secret of all that is beneficent in providence and bright in the prospects of man. And as we recall these blessings, we do but emphasise the work of Jesus, through whom man is crowned with favour and immortality. We lift up our eyes on high, and there we behold Jesus crowned with glory and honour, all dominion granted to Him, holding the reins of power while bearing the marks of conflict. In Him we see the Father. (*C. A. Berry, D.D.*)

The universe and man:—These words remind us of an incident in the life of the first Napoleon. On board the ship which carried him across the Mediterranean to his campaign in Egypt, there were French *savants* who had convinced themselves, and thought they could convince others, that there is no God. The great commander found them discoursing boastfully on their favourite theme, and, calling them upon deck, while the heavens above were bright with innumerable stars, he said to them, "Tell me who made these." Napoleon was no philosopher, no metaphysician, no theologian. But he was a man of great common sense. We are not content to be told conjecturally of any processes through which things have passed into their present forms of existence. Nebular hypotheses and atomic theories explain nothing. If assumed as true, we demand to know whence the nebulæ and whence the atoms came. Nor are we content to be cheated out of an answer to the question, "Who made these?" by a metaphysics which ends by leaving us in doubt as to whether these stars have any existence except in our own thoughts and thought-processes. There was a time when the children of

men, lifting up their eyes on high, saw in the hosts of heaven not creatures of God, but gods. And we scarcely wonder. The living God once forsaken and forgotten, who or what so worthy of adoration as sun, moon, and stars? I. IT IS THIS OLDER FAITH WE FIND IN OUR TEXT—not obscurely, but with the positiveness of knowledge. And it is not in this text alone, but from the beginning to the end of our Bible. Its writers, in succession to one another, explicitly maintain the faith of a living God, Maker and Ruler of all. And in doing so, they stood alone in the world. The wisdom of Egypt and the wisdom of Assyria gave them no countenance. The teaching of these Hebrew writers, through all the ages, from Moses to Christ, is like a pure crystal stream flowing through a vast desert, unabsorbed by sand or sun, and undefiled by the ten thousand impurities on its banks. The old Hebrew faith stands as firmly in the light of modern science as it did when science in its modern sense was a thing almost unknown. Sir Isaac Newton, in closing his exposition of the system of the universe, worshipped and declared that its cause could not be mechanical; it must be intelligent, it must be found in a voluntary agent infinitely wise and mighty. But while these men of the old Hebrew race knew less of the vastness of the universe than we do now, they did not feel it less. The man of science, with his telescope and mathematical reckonings, must feel himself utterly bewildered when he attempts to imagine the distances which his demonstrations reveal. But it does not follow that his impression of that vastness, or his awe in the contemplation of it, is in proportion to his knowledge. A child, with a true child's heart, may be more deeply impressed with the glory of the over-hanging heavens, than a full-grown man who exercises all his intellectual power in endeavouring to understand them. The Hebrews knew enough and saw enough to produce the profoundest feeling. Perhaps the chief explanation of the feeling with which the Hebrews contemplated nature is that they saw God in everything. II. THIS IS THE SECOND POINT TO WHICH OUR TEXT INTRODUCES US. "He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might; for that He is strong in power not one faileth." But what of the laws of nature? The Hebrew Scriptures, instead of denying the constancy of nature, seem to affirm it more consistently than some modern scientists. Take, *e.g.*, these primitive statements: "God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so. And God saw that it was good." But the Bible, while explicit in regard to the constancy of nature, asserts with equal explicitness a continued Divine agency in nature (Psa. civ. 14; John v. 17). III. ALL THIS IS MADE THE FOUNDATION OF AN ARGUMENT OF COMFORT PRIMARILY TO THE ANCIENT ISRAEL OF GOD, AND EQUALLY TO ALL THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel?" &c. Galileo approached this idea, whether he got it from Isaiah or not, in a very significant form. "I would not that we should so shorten the arm of God in the government of human affairs, but that we should rest in this, that we are certain that God and nature are so occupied in the government of human affairs, they could not more attend to us if they were charged with the care of the human race alone." The prophet goes a step beyond this, and draws an argument from God's care over the universe to assure us of His care over us. Christ said, "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" But the prophet seems to argue from God's care over the greater to His care over the less. As if he said, He watches over suns and stars, therefore He will watch over you. More than this, the Bible story of creation gives us the keynote of the Bible idea of man. Man is not merely one of innumerable living creatures made to people the earth; the earth was made for him. He was the end for which and towards which progressive changes, spread over vast ages, were effected. Glorious as that star may be, and wonderingly as I contemplate its brightness, I am more to God than it is; I am nearer of kin to God than it is; and if God cares for it, much more will He care for me, His own child. (*J. Kennedy, D.D.*) *The heavens testify of God*:—Cicero could ask, "When we look at the heavens, first in all their unclouded beauty, and then with such rapid changes passing over their face; when we consider the alternations of day and night, and the succession of the four several seasons; when we behold the sun which regulates all these, and the moon and stars all keeping their courses with unfailing constancy, can we doubt that some present and efficient ruler is over them?" And Seneca says, "They all continue, not because they are eternal, but because the watchfulness of their Governor protects them: imperish-

able things need no guardian; but these are preserved by their Maker, who, by His power, controls their natural tendency to decay." And Hume, though his philosophy was irreligious in comparison with that of either Roman, could raise his hands to the starry sky and show that he too had a human heart, by exclaiming to Fergusson, "Oh, Adam, how can a man look at that and not believe in a God!" (*Sir E. Strachey, Bart.*)

Vers. 27–31. **Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord?**—*The attributes of God: a reply to unbelief:*—I. THE UNIVERSAL DISPOSITION TO UNBELIEF. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel?" &c. II. THE ACCOUNT WHICH GOD HIMSELF GIVES OF THE GREATNESS OF HIS ATTRIBUTES. Well to Israel might the Almighty put the inquiry, "Hast thou not known?" He spake to His peculiar people. In Jewry is God known; His praise is great in Israel. How could they but know His attributes, to whom He had Himself manifested His glory? And to us the same upbraiding queries might well be put. III. HOW THE LORD EMPLOYS ALL HIS MIGHTY ATTRIBUTES FOR THE CONSOLATION AND REFRESHMENT OF HIS PEOPLE WHO CALL UPON HIM. "He giveth power to the faint," &c. 1. Consider the case of those who are convinced of their own natural sin and helplessness, but who have not as yet sought their Saviour. 2. The consolations of the text belong also to those who, after they have found their Saviour, are mourning under peculiar sin, or walking in peculiar darkness. 3. By temporal sorrows, too, He may sorely grieve thee, but much more mayest thou trust Him in them. (*T. Scott, B.A.*) *When the way seems hidden:*—I. THE WAY WHICH SEEMS HIDDEN. "My way is hid from the Lord"—what a common cry! Samuel Taylor Coleridge said he was sure the Bible was the Word of God because it found him at deeper depths than any other book. How surely and how deeply does this cry, "My way is hid from the Lord," "find" each of us in many a mood! 1. It is into the future that the prophet is looking. Plainly, by the vision-giving Spirit, he discerns the great catastrophe which is to afflict the Jewish nation. The Babylonian captivity is to drag them into exile. By the severe chastisement of the captivity the Jews are to be cured of an almost unchecklable tendency towards idolatry. A human waywardness needs sometimes a bitter medicine to compel it back to paths of loyalty to God. But the prophet not only foresees the captivity, but also the way in which the exiled Hebrews are enduring it. It is as though he heard them talking together there in distant Babylon. 2. But that the way seems hidden from the Lord is not anything peculiar to those ancient captives. How surely and how deeply does that ancient cry "find" every one of us. (1) Delayed answers to prayer sometimes make our way seem hidden from the Lord. (2) The strangeness of the way makes our way sometimes seem hidden from the Lord. (3) Our mistakes sometimes make our way seem hidden from the Lord. (4) Our moods sometimes make our way seem hidden from the Lord. (5) Our sins sometimes make our way seem hidden from the Lord. II. A GREAT AND ENDURING TRUTH ABOUT OUR WAY WHICH SOMETIMES SEEMS TO US HIDDEN FROM THE LORD. This is that our way is not and cannot be hidden from Him. And there are reasons firm and towering as the mountain peaks for this. 1. Our way cannot be hidden from the Lord because He is everlasting—His purpose cannot fail. 2. Because He is powerful—"the Creator of the ends of the earth." 3. Because He is actively Lord—"He fainteth not, neither is weary." 4. Because He is actively wise—"there is no searching of His understanding." 5. Because He is beneficent—"He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." III. SEIZE THE PRECIOUS PROMISE FOR YOUR HELP, even though your way may seem hidden from the Lord. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew," &c. God is coming to your help. Even while the captive Jews were crying, "My way is hidden," &c., God was preparing Cyrus to be their deliverer. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Spiritual despondency:*—I. ISAIAH'S DESPONDENCY. It arose from a two-fold source. 1. The sense of a Divine desertion. "My way is hidden from the Lord." It was the necessary result of the prophet's office that all the nation's sorrows must press home on his spirit, and must wound with their keenest anguish his sensitive soul. Now, remembering this union of deep sympathy with the people, observe the tremendous power with which, for fifty years, the wickedness of the land, and God's great judgment upon it, must have pressed on his large and tender heart. It made his very office often seem a vanity. Many men have had the same experience; perhaps all earnest men must undergo it. 2. The absence of Divine recompense. "My judgment is passed over from my God." The prophet

unquestionably spoke these words as a cry uttered only by himself. The people were buried in God-forgetting repose. The priests were dead in formalism. The spiritual life of the land was decaying; and thunders of woe were muttering in the nation's future. What had his life been worth? Apparently nothing! All great men think that they die in failure. Is it not hard for a man who has given to God his all, and worn out his life in His service, to go out into the eternal silence and see no reward? II. THE TRUTH THAT REMOVED ISAIAH'S DESPONDENCY. In the verses following our text we perceive that the double manifestation of God's greatness in Nature, and the tenderness of His revealed will, dispelled the gloom. 1. The greatness of God in Nature. He speaks not only of the unsearchable Creator, but of the everlasting God. Thy recompense is sure—thy work, and conflict, and toil are for eternity; then "why sayest thou, O Jacob, that thy way is hidden from the Lord?" 2. The tenderness of the revealed will. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, He increaseth strength." The revelation of God's tenderness is far more full for the Christian man, and has, therefore, far greater power to remove our despondency. We know how the Great Shepherd gave His life for the sheep. III. THE RESULTS OF ITS REMOVAL. 1. Strength in weakness. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Feebleness is transformed into power when God has taught His great lesson of "glorying in infirmity." 2. Immortal youth. "They shall mount up on wings as eagles." You have heard the old Jewish fable, that the eagle in dying recovered its youthful power. (*E. L. Hull, B.A.*) *Faith in the living God*:—I. Isaiah here reaches and rests upon THE VERY FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAITH, TRUST, AND HOPE OF MANKIND—the living God. Creation rests on His hand; man, the child of the higher creation, rests on His heart. What His power is to the material universe His moral nature and character are to the spiritual universe. "Have faith in God." Creation lives by faith unconsciously, and all her voices to our intelligent ear iterate and reiterate "Have faith in God." II. WHAT DO WE KNOW OF GOD THAT WE SHOULD TRUST HIM? What aspects does He present to us? We have two sources of knowledge—what He has said to, and what He has done for, man. 1. There is something unspeakably sublime in the appeal in ver. 26. It is heaven's protest against man's despair. Nor is Isaiah the only sacred writer who utters it. There is something very strikingly parallel in Job (Job xxxviii.). In both cases God's appeal is to the grand and steadfast order of the vast universe, which He sustains and assures. God tells us that all the hosts of heaven are attendant on the fortunes of mankind. They all live that God's deep purpose concerning man may be accomplished. 2. God declares here that we are not only involved inextricably in the fulfilment of His deepest and most cherished counsels, but that we are needed to satisfy the yearnings of His Father's heart. III. WE MAY APPLY THESE PRINCIPLES to the seasons of our experience when faith in the living God is the one thing which stands between us and the most blank despair. 1. The deep waters of personal affliction. 2. The weary search of the intellect for truth, the struggle to comprehend the incomprehensible, to know the inscrutable, to see the invisible, which is part, and not the least heavy part, of the discipline of a man and of mankind. 3. Dark crises of human history, when truth, virtue, and manhood seem perishing from the world. (*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.*) *The unbelief of the Jews reproved*:—I. THE TITLES GOD HERE GIVES THEM WERE ENOUGH TO SHAME THEM OUT OF THEIR DISTRUSTS. "O Jacob; O Israel!" Let them remember—1. Whence they took those names—from one who had found God faithful to him, and kind in all his straits. 2. Why they bore those names—as God's professing people, a people in covenant with Him. II. THE WAY OF REPROVING THEM IS BY REASONING WITH THEM. "Why?" Consider whether thou hast any ground to say so. Many of our foolish frets and fears would vanish before a strict inquiry into the cause of them. III. THAT WHICH THEY ARE REPROVED FOR IS AN ILL-NATURED, ILL-FAVOURED WORD THEY SPOKE OF GOD, as if He had cast them off. There seems to be an emphasis laid upon their saying it. It is bad to have evil thoughts rise in our mind, but it is worse to put an *imprimatur* to them, and turn them into evil words. David reflects with regret upon what he had said in his haste when he was in distress. IV. THE ILL WORD THEY SAID WAS A WORD OF DESPAIR CONCERNING THEIR PRESENT CALAMITOUS CONDITION. They were ready to conclude—1. That God would not heed them. "My way is hid from the Lord." 2. That God could not help them. "My judgment is passed over from my God," *i.e.*, my case is so far past relief that God Himself cannot redress the grievances of it. (*M. Henry.*) *A challenge to despondent unbelief*:—"Why sayest thou," &c., that all the dis-

pensations of providence and grace with which you are connected appear so intricate and inexplicable that you cannot attain any comfortable acquaintance with them; that God doth not seem to regard your condition, and to manifest His tender care of you, but acts toward you as if your forlorn circumstances were unknown to Him? This mournful complaint is adopted by them that fear the Lord, on one or other of the three following accounts—I. When they do not perceive THE PROCURING CAUSES from whence their troubles proceed. This perplexing circumstance greatly increases their uneasiness, and induces them to request with Job that God would show them wherefore He contendeth with them. II. When they do not discover THE IMPORTANT PURPOSES to which they are especially directed. Uncertainty as to the particular ends which afflictions are sent to accomplish augments not a little the pressure of distress, and disposes good people to bemoan themselves in the language of the dejected Church, "He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out." I can neither see the reason nor the end of my affliction; my way seems to be hid from the Lord. III. When they do not discern WHAT IS PRESENT DUTY. Notwithstanding the blessed God hath clearly taught in His word what He requires, yet there are particular situations wherein the best of men have been perplexed as to what course they ought to follow. In such cases they have said with the good King of Judah, we know not what to do; and have lamented that their way was hid from the Lord. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Doubt and encouragement:*—Israel had suffered in exile so long that there were many who thought that their case had escaped God's eye, and that their "judgment" (*i.e.* their cause) had passed beyond His notice: the prophet replies, Jehovah is no local, limited God, as you imagine; His power embraces Babylon not less than Palestine; His strength is not exhausted; "there is no searching of His understanding"—some inscrutable purpose must guide Him in delaying, if He do delay, the redemption of His people; only continue to trust! (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *God the comfort of His people:*—Sorrow ever brings God nearer to us, if it do not bring us nearer to God; and whilst Isaiah was pondering the greatness of his apparent failure, God was preparing to chase away his darkness and to rekindle his hopes. Above him in the silent vault of night God was bringing out His solemn stars. And from that heaven where God numbered and named and watched over His stars, the eternal chorus swept down into the prophet's soul—"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel?" &c. Now, from a like despondency of heart, not one of us is entirely free. But some there are who dwell always in the region of gloom. The language of their whole life is, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." Or, perhaps, it is that the shadow of a long-past grief is upon their life. Or, maybe, it is that they walk in a labyrinth of difficulty. Or, like Isaiah, they mourn apparent failure; they see life's highest purpose ingloriously defeated. I. GOD'S POWER THE COMFORT OF HIS PEOPLE. Certain it is that our only true comfort is found in God. Life, when we can turn to God, is never cruel and hard; however full of trial it may be it never seems unkind; for we know that a hand of love appoints what a heart of love designs, and that all things must work together for good. And God has surrounded us on every side with reminders of what He is. When the heart is sad and low go out and be a witness of God's power; go out in the quiet evening when the gold and fire and purple of the sunset have paled away, and see God bringing out His stars. And as you remember that the infinite mind, your Father, knows their number, calls them all by names, as the Eastern shepherd used to call his sheep, and so follows each with His love, surrounds each by His care, so bathes each in His smile that "not one faileth"—do they not with a loud shout of song pour down upon your soul the same consolation? Not only God's power as manifested in the sky, but His power as seen on earth may be our hope. God is about you on every side. No star, no bird, no flower is hid from Him. Never, then, can we say, "My way is hid from the Lord," &c. II. But a further source of consolation is GOD'S TENDERNESS. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." God's tenderness is only rightly seen when viewed in conjunction with His greatness. We see the tender in contrast with the *mighty*. And this is real tenderness. Tenderness is strength in gentle action. When the power that might crush heals, uplifts, and strengthens, then we see tenderness. Gentleness is not weakness, but it is calm, quiet, loving strength. When the wind—which might wrench the oak from its moorings, snap the cables it has thrown around the rocks, and carry it away on its wings—lifts the hair and fans the cheek of the dying child, it is gentle. When the sun—mighty in his strength, pouring his scorching light on far-off worlds—

shoots down a golden ray to cheer the drooping plant, or to "increase strength" in the little seedling which a raindrop would almost crush, it is gentle. And such is the God of whom we speak. The great Father has also a mother's tenderness. "He giveth power to the faint." He who Himself is never weary stoops to those who have no might, that He may increase strength. The faint and weak, they are the children of the strong and mighty! And to the faint He giveth "power"—power to suffer, to endure. To the weak He giveth "strength"—strength to labour, to accomplish. There is nothing in this world so mighty as the weakness which takes hold of the Divine strength. Yonder the ocean is white with foam. Wave chases wave across the dark surface of the deep as cloud chases cloud across the blackened sky. No ship could live in such a storm. The mightiest anchor ever forged could give no safety in such an hour. But out, where the storm is fiercest, on those dreadful rocks against which the waves dash themselves into clouds of spray, is a tiny, helpless shell-fish. Its very strength is weakness. It clings simply by its emptiness; but, clinging to that rock, not all the thunders of the ocean dislodge it thence. It is weakness taking hold of strength. Tender and yet mighty is our God, and His tenderness is His people's comfort. Whilst we bow in reverence before that power which holds untold worlds in their shining courses, we bow in profounder reverence and love before that power when we behold it in gentle exercise, giving power to the faint. III. There is a further source of consolation open to us—GOD'S WISDOM. "There is no searching of His understanding." To say merely that man cannot understand God is to say very little; but the language is the statement of an eternal fact. There is no searching of His understanding; not by the brightest intellects of earth nor by the grandest intelligences of heaven. And God's infinite wisdom is to us the needful complement of His infinite power. Power, uncontrolled by wisdom, is rather to be feared than worshipped and loved. And shall He who has conceived that mighty plan—that plan which embraces all worlds in its grand conception—not understand the plan of our short life? Never let us think "our way is hid from the Lord"; to Him every circumstance of our life is known. (*H. Wonnacott.*) *Providence*:—I. THE DOCTRINE OF A GENERAL PROVIDENCE. The doctrine of Providence in general is alike supported by reason and revelation. 1. It is necessary to creation. If the world were from eternity, then might it go on self-sustained, as it had ever been: if it were of chance, it might be supported by the same contingency which produced it. If a first cause was necessary to the production of these things, He is also essential to their preservation; and the same voice of nature which proclaims the being of a God, declares His Providence. 2. We must take the testimony of Scripture on this subject. 3. From prophecy. II. THE DOCTRINE OF A PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE. 1. As consistent with the Divine character. The grand objection against a particular Providence has been, that it reduces the Deity to the necessity of superintending such minute concerns as are beneath His dignity—reduces the Deity to a necessity! What necessity can subsist but in His will? The objection proceeds upon principles entirely erroneous. It is an erroneous calculation to call anything great or little in such connection. All affairs are not to us of equal importance—the bursting of a bubble and the ruin of an empire. But, in reasoning thus, we are reducing the Deity to a finite standard, and making Him altogether "such an one as ourselves." With Him the affairs of an empire and of individuals are equally manageable. The reasoning is false, also, upon the principle of dignity. It deteriorates nothing from the dignity of God to form a mite, with all the vessels and organs adapted to its existence: mere minuteness of operation surely cannot be deteriorating. What it was no degradation to God to create, it can be no degradation to God to preserve and manage. 2. As necessary to the general arrangements of Providence. Here we notice the operations of God, as demonstrating His government. The constitution of nature is of parts: systems compose the universe—worlds compose systems—a conglomeration of particles compose a world. Take the world of waters: seas form oceans—rivers, seas—streamlets, rivers—drops, streamlets—and the atom is infinitely divisible. Take the human frame; made up "of that which every joint supplieth." Apply this scale of operations to Providence, and then we affirm that no concern can be so little as to be below the superintendence of God; for none can be so small as not to form a part of the grand scheme of Providence. Our ignorance on this subject can be no objection against its reality. I cannot, indeed, trace the link which knits my little concerns with the "ways of eternal Providence"; but neither can I trace the invisible

chain which holds all created things together in its remotest parts: some of the larger links I discern, but more are invisible to me. He who admits the doctrine of a general providence and denies that of a particular one, is a being whose obliquity of intellect allows him to conceive of a whole, while he denies the existence of the parts of which that whole is composed. 3. As demonstrated in the course of providential dispensations. Review the circumstances of your separate lives. That life will furnish each of you with the desired evidences on this part of the subject. How frequently have the best concerted plans proved unavailing! 4. As harmonising with our prescribed duties, it is supposed, in the prescription of prayer. Where would be the utility of prayer, or the propriety of prescribing it, if the world was governed by a fate superior to the will of the Supreme Being? The prescription of prayer supposes, on the part of the Deity, a will as well as a power to govern. And this doctrine is reconcilable with the use of means; nay, it requires them. 5. As revealed in the Scriptures. 6. As most consolatory. (*W. Patten.*)

Unbecoming speech:—It is well in times when feeling is strong to say little, lest we speak unadvisedly with our lips, murmuring at our lot, or complaining against God, as though He had forgotten to be gracious, and had shut up His tender mercies in anger. Speech often aggravates sorrow. We say more than we mean; we drown in the torrent of our words the still small voice of the Holy Ghost whispering comfort; we speak as though we had not known or heard. It is wise, therefore, not to pass grief into words. Better let the troubled sea within rock itself to rest. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel?" (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

"*My way hid from the Lord*":—The flower which follows the sun does so even in cloudy days: when it doth not shine forth, yet it follows the hidden course and motion of it. So the soul that moves after God keeps that course when He hides His face; is content, yea, is glad at His will in all estates, or conditions, or events. (*T. Leighton.*)

Vers. 28–31. **The Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not.**—*The unwearied God and wearied men*:—For nations and for individuals in view of political disasters or of private sorrows, the only holdfast to which cheerful hope may cling, is the old conviction, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." I. ISAIAH'S APPEAL TO THE FAMILIAR THOUGHT OF AN UNCHANGEABLE GOD, AS THE ANTIDOTE TO ALL DESPONDENCY, AND THE FOUNDATION OF ALL HOPE. "Hast thou not known; hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" To whom is he speaking? The words of the previous verse tell us, in which he addresses himself to Jacob, or Israel, who is represented as complaining: "My way is hid from the Lord." That is to say, he speaks to the believing, but despondent part of the exiles in Babylon. There is wonder in the question, there is a tinge of rebuke in it. The prophet takes his stand upon the most elementary truth of religion. His appeal to them is: "What do you call God? You call Him the Lord, do you not? What do you mean by calling Him that?" The life of men and of creatures is like a river, with its source and its course and its end. The life of God is like the ocean, with joyous movement of tides and currents of life and energy and purpose, but ever the same, and ever returning upon itself. "The everlasting God" is "the Lord"; and Jehovah, the unchanged, unchangeable, inexhaustible Being, spends, and is unspent; gives, and is none the poorer; works, and is never wearied; lives, and with no tendency to death in His life; flames with no tendency to extinction in the blaze. "He fainteth not, neither is weary." Here is a lesson for us to learn, of meditative reflection upon the veriest commonplaces of our religion. There is a tendency among us to forget the indubitable, and to let our religious thought be occupied with the disputable and secondary parts of revelation. The commonplaces of religion are the most important. Everybody needs air, light, bread, and water. Meditate, then, upon the things most surely believed, and ever meditate until the dry stick of the commonplace truth puts forth buds and blossoms like Aaron's rod. We all have times, depending on mood or circumstances, when things seem black and we are weary. This great truth will shine into our gloom like a star into a dungeon. Are our hearts to tremble for God's truth to-day? Are we to share in the pessimist views of some faint-hearted Christians? Surely as long as we can remember the name of the Lord, and His unwearied arm, we have nothing to do with fear or sadness for ourselves or for His Church or for His world. II. THE UNWEARIED GOD GIVING STRENGTH TO WEARIED MAN. "Even the youths shall

faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall." Earth knows no independent strength. All earthly power is limited in range and duration, and, by the very law of its being, is steadily tending to weakness. But though that has a sad side, it has also a grand and blessed one. Man's needs are the open mouth into which God puts His gifts. The low earth stretches, grey and sorrowful, flat and dreary, beneath the blue arched heaven, but the heaven stoops to encompass—ay! to touch it. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." Notice the preceding words, "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things," &c. In the simple astronomy of those early times, there was no failure, nor decay, nor change, in the calm heavens. The planets, year by year, returned punctually to their places; and, unhasting and unresting, rolled upon their way. Weakness and weariness had no place there, but, says Isaiah, God's power does not show itself so nobly up there as it does down here. It is not so much to keep the strong in their strength as to give strength to the weak. It is much to "preserve the stars from wrong," it is more to restore and to break the power into feeble men. III. THE WEARIED MAN LIFTED TO THE LEVEL OF THE UNWEARIED GOD, AND TO HIS LIKENESS. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." That phrase means, of course, the continuous bestowment in unintermitting sequence of fresh gifts of power, as each former gift becomes exhausted, and more is required. That continuous communication leads to the "perpetual youth" of the Christian soul. According to the law of physical life, decaying strength and advancing years tame and sober and disenchant and often make weary because we become familiar with all things and the edge is taken off everything. My text goes on to portray the blessed consequences of this continuous communication of Divine strength: "They shall run and not be weary." That is to say: this strength of God's poured into our hearts, if we wait upon Him, shall fit us for the moments of special hard effort, for the crises which require more than an ordinary amount of energy to be put forth. It will fit us, too, for the long, dreary hours which require nothing but keeping doggedly at monotonous duties—"They shall walk and not faint." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Energy and wisdom*:—I. THE DIVINE BEING AS POSSESSED OF INFINITE ENERGY. "He fainteth not, neither is weary." His most stupendous works are rather the "hidings of His power," than the manifestations of His might. The fact of God's possessing infinite energy supplies us with four guarantees—1. A guarantee of the regularity of the physical universe. 2. A guarantee of ability to fulfil His promises. Of what avail are promises if there be no executive energy? 3. A guarantee of His power to realise His threatenings. 4. A guarantee of Christ's final enthronement. Feeble instrumentality is no argument against this view. Nor is the guilty indifference of the Church. II. THE DIVINE BEING AS POSSESSED OF INFINITE MENTAL CAPACITY. "There is no searching of His understanding." In God, therefore, there is a combination of infinite strength and infinite mind: power is under the government of intelligence! The universe is an embodied idea. Its minutest members are parts of one glorious thought. The infinite understanding of the Divine Being furnishes—1. An assurance that the darkest providences are under the direction of infinite wisdom. 2. That no plot against His government can succeed. 3. That His plan of salvation is alone sufficient. Possessed of an understanding that is infinite, God knew the exact necessities of the human race, and provided that economy which alone could satisfy the cravings of human nature. 4. That He understands the peculiarities of every case. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" These words rebuke the idea that anything can escape the Divine notice. Christ knew all the springs of life, He saw the maladies which tainted the blood and crippled the faculties of man, and at the issue of His fiat the most malignant affection retreated as if in haste and shame! 5. An assurance of eternal variety in the study of His nature. "There is no searching of His understanding." The eldest born in eternity may at this moment employ this same language; for those who have seen most of the Divine glory, confess most loudly the infinitude of His resources. Application—(1) What is your relationship to this all-glorious Being? (2) If you are out of sympathy with this all-glorious Being, what is your hope for eternity? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The inexhaustibleness of the Divine Power*:—Power is a faculty for producing changes and performing works. There are three kinds or manifestations of power—physical, intellectual, and

moral. I go into St. Paul's Cathedral when some grand religious service is performed, the choral part is of the highest order, the sermon is delivered by the grandest preacher of the day. Here I receive an impression of three manifestations of power. The bringing together and adjusting the stone, marble, iron, timber that compose the enormous structure, impress me with physical power—power to act on material bodies. In the architectural symmetry of the whole I am impressed with the intellectual power—power of planning and contriving so as to give utility, stability, and beauty to the whole. In the sacred music that floats around me and the eloquent sermon that is addressed to me, my nature is brought under the influence of moral power—power that rouses the conscience, that stirs the deepest sentiments of the soul. Out in open Nature these three kinds of manifestations of power appeal to man. God's power is inexhaustible in all these phases. I. HIS PHYSICAL POWER IS INEXHAUSTIBLE. This will appear if we consider—1. The nature of His work in the material department. He is the Originator of all. 2. The effect of His work in the material department. 3. The constancy of His work in the material department. II. HIS INTELLECTUAL POWER IS INEXHAUSTIBLE. Intellectual force is as visible in nature to a thoughtful eye as physical. Science shows that everything—the minute and the vast, the proximate and the remote, is formed, sustained, and directed according to plan. "In Thy book all my members were written." Think of the boundless variety amongst all the flowers and trees that have ever grown. Amongst all the men of all the generations that are gone, have there been two in face and figure exactly alike? Here is intellectual fertility! The little intellectual force of contrivance possessed by the bee or the bird is very soon exhausted. Man, too, soon reaches a culminating point in inventive skill. But not so with God. But in the creations of the spiritual world the same inexhaustibleness of intellectual energy is displayed. Each spirit involves something of a new plan. On this little planet fresh souls appear every hour. III. HIS MORAL POWER IS INEXHAUSTIBLE. 1. Look at His moral power in nature. Nature is brimful of the moral power of God; power appealing to the souls of men. 2. Look at His moral power in the Gospel. What is moral power? "Truth and grace." (*Homilist.*) *The inexhaustible energy of God*:—I. HIS ENERGY IN THE SPHERE OF CONTRIVANCE IS INEXHAUSTIBLE. 1. Look at His contrivance in relation to matter. The rushing currents, the surging sea, the furious tempest, the revolution of planets, and the recurrence of the seasons—all give us the impression of power. But to the thoughtful, the intellectual force is as clearly developed in nature as the material, nay, is implied in the material. 2. Look at His contrivance in relation to spirit. Observe—(1) Unceasing creation of new spirits. (2) The government of spirits. (3) The moral restoration of human spirits. What contrivance is here! II. HIS ENERGY IN THE SPHERE OF EXECUTION IS INEXHAUSTIBLE. His power of working out His plans is equal to His power of invention. 1. It is so in the material. In the material realm God seems to develop His plans in two ways—directly and indirectly; without means and by means. 2. It is so in the spiritual. Let us look at His power to save. What is moral power? It is the power of truth. But the Gospel is the most powerful of any truth—(1) Because it is moral truth. (2) Because it is remedial truth. (3) Because it is divinely embodied truth. Example is stronger than precept. The truths to be deduced from the whole are—(1) That the delay of punishment must not be referred to incapacity. (2) That the urging of difficulties against the fulfilment of Divine promises is an absurdity. There are two classes of promises against which we urge this. One relates to the conversion of the world. The other to the resurrection of the dead. It is not only possible for these promises to be fulfilled, but impossible for them not to be. (3) That if we are immortal we shall witness new manifestations of Divine power for ever. (4) That the interest as well as duty of every man is to cultivate friendship with God. You are safe if you have God as a refuge. (*Ibid.*) *Profitable reflection in dark hours*:—Was it a true thing these exiles said? They suggested that they had worn out the Divine patience. They were ready to admit that He had been the God of their fathers; but He had now withdrawn from His covenant relationship, and would be favourable no more. That, they said, was the reason why they were allowed to languish year after year on the plains of Babylon. They spoke as though they had never known nor heard some of the most rudimentary facts about the nature and ways of God. "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard?" In our dark hours we should revert to considerations which have

been familiar to us from childhood, but have of late ceased to exert a definite impression. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *God's power the comfort of His people:*—The terms by which God is described are not what may be termed the gracious designations which are often employed to describe Him; it is not the Father, the Redeemer, the Gentle One; it is the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, as if Divine comfort were not a sentiment only, as if Divine comfort did not come only out of the Divine emotions, but poured itself down upon us from all that is majestic, dominant, mighty, immeasurable, royal, and grand in the Divine nature. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's moment the perfect miniature of His everlasting days:*—It is said to be the property of a crystal to assume precisely the same form into however many fragments it may be broken up. The infinitesimal particle, for the study of which a magnifying glass must be used, is a precise facsimile of the parent crystal from which it came. If we could take God's eternity and break it up into æons, if we could take the æons and break them up into ages, and the ages into centuries, and the centuries into years, and the years into days, and the days into hours, and the hours into moments, we should find each separate moment of God's life to be just as resplendent with benignity, compassion, redeeming grace, and helpfulness, as His sublime eternity itself. (*T. G. Selby.*) *God never grows weary:*—A story is told of a little girl whose faith in God may teach us a lesson. The lamp had just been put out, and the little girl was rather afraid of the dark. But presently she saw the bright moon out of her window, and she asked her mother, "Is the moon God's light?" "Yes, Ethel," the mother replied; "the moon and stars are all God's lights." "Will God blow out His light and go to sleep too?" she asked again. "No, my child," replied the mother, "God's lights are always burning." "Well, mamma," said Ethel, "while God's awake, I'm not afraid." **There is no searching of His understanding.**—*Heartening conceptions of God:*—How to reconcile the approving verdict of creative wisdom, "God saw that it was good," with that condition of things of which St. Paul speaks as the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together; how to reconcile the idea of Almighty goodness with the existence of universal and apparently aimless conflict and struggle for destruction, is a question that, in itself, would seem incapable of exaggerated statement. It is the old, old question, which we shall see solved in the day, and not before the day, when He, the Son, the Creator, shall have put all things under Him; the question between life and death. Still if wisdom is to be justified of her children, we cannot bear as her children not to try to justify her; and although we know that we shall not attain to the answer, we cannot help hearing and thinking of the question. We look first at the possibilities which lie in what God has not revealed, and secondly for the particulars which, in developing His message and expanding our power of receiving it, and in regulating our conduct under and in consequence of it, it has pleased Him to make known to us about Himself. We may without presumption, certainly with nothing short of the most timid tentativeness, approach such mysteries as the travailing of creation, the gradual character of Divine revelation, the delay of the consummation of the mediatorial work, the agency of external and previous influences on the will, the conduct and the responsibility of human beings. All these four matters are of vivid and universal interest, ancient questions, older than Genesis, older than Socrates, older than Archimedes, older than Enoch; questions that no new theories can answer, problems that admit of constant new illustrations, but lie in the very *incunabula* of human thought. Take them in order. 1. In that beginning of which the first verse of the Bible speaks, the Creator, Almighty and All good, called matter into being: the material world, in that conformation which science reveals to us, may be the result, not only of immensely long periods of energy, but of immensely varied methods of agency; when it comes within our ken it is seen to be the result of operations into which pain and death largely enter, and in which, so far as we can see, they are still, with no traceable connection with mankind, actively at work. In our contemplation of pain and death in human morals, we trace back both to the effect of sin, and sin to the depravation of the free will at the fall of man. What hinders us from conceiving that the existence and continuance of such measures of pain and death as are found anterior to the existence of man, and external to the operation of his moral agency, are the results of a freedom granted to pre-existent, or continued, perverted, and fallen agencies, about which we have no other knowledge? It may surely be as likely that the creation or developing of man on earth, for the

vanquishing of evil and the working out of blessing in redemptive and restorative work, may, mixed as are its effects now, be a step in a very gradual victory, by which pre-existent and continuing evil, arising from a pre-existent and continuing perversion, is being brought under the feet of the Only Begotten of the Father? Interminable cycles of the years measured by the revolutions of the earth, by the working of our system, and by the cosmic movements of the universe, might be required, but what obstacle does such a calculation place in the way of such a possibility with an Agent Infinite and Eternal? There is the evil, there is the slowness of the working of law, but there is eternity before and behind. Who shall say to Him, What doest Thou? There shall be no more pain: but it shall be when the former things are passed away. 2. Then, the slowness of revelation and its gradual character? We can either account for that by the reason of law that works so, or by the absolute necessity, the terms and conditions of the situation being such that it should be so; that is, we may either assume the law or justify the law. We have no more right to lay it down, as an axiom, that the perfect God could or would reveal Himself entirely by one act of revelation, than that He would give men free will and always keep it in conformity with His own will. The revelation, to be a part of the victory, must be a revelation that would expand with the expansion of the receiving minds, giving them the choice between light and darkness, and suffering and enabling them to rejoice in the light rather than the darkness. It must have a beginning: the words of revelation must be spoken in the language that the receiver can comprehend; must be weighted with elements that will hold them fast in his mind; must be seasoned with a stimulus that shall provoke his appetite for knowledge. And now that, in the fulness of time, grace and truth are come by Jesus Christ, and in Him, the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His Person, we recognise the perfection of the revelation by which He guides many sons unto glory, we yet are warned that the guide of our life is faith; and heaven itself, in which we trust to know more, and love more, and be conformed to the likeness more, in wonderful growths of the finite into the knowledge, love, and likeness of the Infinite, shall be a perfection of revelation, but even so a revelation of new vistas of perfection, of knowledge, love, and likeness. But glorious as this prospect is, and humble, prostrate, as we lie now on the threshold of the vision, we know that we have not come so far as we have come, but by a long series of dispensations and disciplines; a method, a law of enlightenment, that ages and generations, rising and falling nations, tested and discarded philosophies, have exemplified. God could have revealed the plan of Redemption, could have redeemed the world as soon as Adam fell, as He might have kept him from falling, or stayed the propagation of evil in the first generation: but He would overcome evil with good, and bring out the victory in His own way, preparing the world by the experience of vanity, disciplining the world by the struggle against the causes of misery, and at the last sending His Son. 3. How about the twilight, and those who wandered in it to their fall, before the Daystar arose? How about those who are sitting still in darkness? Does not He care? Are they not safer in His contemplation than in our perplexed hearts? But now that grace and truth are come;—eighteen hundred years ago He founded His Church, and for all that time she has been working; with some drawbacks that she might have overcome, but still working; and three-quarters of the globe are full of heathendom still, and seventy generations of souls have passed away under the cloud of darkness. Is not this strange? Is it all the effect of a neglect that, if it be unmodified by other causes, must be accounted nothing less than a failure of a purpose that assumes to be Divine? Here again we come upon a trace of law that is not to be broken. For fifteen hundred out of the eighteen hundred years of Christianity, one-half of the inhabited world was unknown to the other half; no revelation of God opened up the new world; it was left for discovery to human enterprise, under a guidance, active, certain, but by no means exceptional to the recognised movements of society; and when discovered it was full of strange languages, and of people so framed and disciplined as to have none of the special training by which the old world has been broken up for the reception of the seed of the Word; and when it had been claimed and appropriated and made intelligible and opened up, no part of the process seemed to be overruled for the rapid progress of Gospel light; no new miracles, no new manifestations; all had to be done line upon line, precept upon precept, with lisping voice and stammering tongue. If that ancient strange darkness is indeed evil—and who

shall say it is not in the face of the true light?—surely there is some secret in the hand of the Lord that shall justify the delay, and shall vindicate the means in the day of victory. 4. But once more. We are told, and we know it in its measure to be true, that in the course of this world causes and consequences, multiplying and intensifying from generation to generation, do so mould the minds and thoughts of men as seriously to endanger the sense of personal responsibility, and practically to limit anything like free moral agency. We are told, in fact, that we are what our forefathers, our circumstances, our manners and customs, our teaching and religion make us, and scarcely anything more; and so, if we are vicious it is something over which we have no control that makes us so; or, if we are virtuous it is something for which we have no credit; and if we are betwixt and between, we are as God, if there be a God, let circumstances, heredity, the accidents of life, and the stream of family history make us. There is much truth in the statement of facts. There are at least two considerations to modify it: first, the influence of circumstance and cause is not unmixed; there is good as well as evil in the force that impels us; secondly, there is in every one of us, weak, wavering, as we may be, enough of freedom to determine our choice between the good and evil of the circumstance. Each man who has ever lived, and each action of his life, has contributed something; something that of course only the Divine knowledge can discriminate or appreciate, but which is a contribution to the course of this world for good or for evil, and so we have to do the same. God has great purposes to serve, and blesses what little we can consciously do towards the victory of His Son. When we look at the chart of human history, even for the six thousand years that the old chronology delimits for us, and see how great the expanse of ages, in which we know that there were human lives, making experience and influence, and yet whose experience and influence had, so far as we know, nothing to do with the existing conditions of modern society, and see how all that consciously constitutes what we know as modern society falls into a comparatively insignificant section of the chart; and if we take the map of the earth and stretch our compasses across the breadth and length of Christendom, and then look at the heavens, the work of His fingers, and the stars that measure His times and seasons for us, and beyond all that into eternity and infinity of energy; surely we must feel that we cannot limit possibilities or impossibilities, the measure of Goodness and Almightiness, by the line and plummet of our own intelligence. What is man that Thou visitest him? Yet Thou hast visited him, and made him lower than the angels to crown him with glory and power. (*Bishop of Chester.*)

Vers. 29-31. **He giveth power to the faint.**—*The Divine Helper*:—I. OUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION IS INTIMATELY KNOWN TO THE DIVINE FATHER. He knows the strong and the faint alike. As a wise Shepherd, He is acquainted with the state of His entire flock. 1. There is our inherent antagonism to evangelical truth. Man is prone to self-leaning. When we leave the Cross we faint; while we glory in its Sufferer we are armed with irresistible might! 2. There is the seductive influence of worldly association. 3. There is the fierce battle for daily bread. 4. There is our ever-recurring unbelief. II. MORAL FAINTNESS DOES NOT INVALIDATE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. Were all the "faint" to be excluded, how many of you would remain as children of God? Does the parent cast off the crippled child? It will be necessary, however, to guard this assurance with two explanations—1. It contains no encouragement to moral indolence. You are not to exonerate yourselves from the stern duties of life on the plea that you are "faint." The toiler grows strong; exercise develops muscle. 2. It affords no palliation for inconsistency. We are never allowed to plead weakness as a reason for sin. III. INFINITE POWER IS ACCESSIBLE TO THE MORALLY FEEBLE. 1. God never communicates surplus power. "As thy days so shall thy strength be." 2. God's method of communicating power teaches the dependence of humanity. God's alone is original; but it is enough for man if he can shine with radiance borrowed from the Fount of uncreated light. 3. God's willingness to communicate power fearfully increases the responsibility of the Church. What power we might have! I regard the declaration in the following aspects—(1) As the sublimest encouragement to the Church. "He giveth power to the faint." Who is this Being represented in the pronoun? (2) As the tenderest assurance to the penitent. "The bruised reed He will not break, the smoking flax He will not quench." (3) As the highest tribute to the work of Christ,

(4) As a glorious pledge of God's interest in humanity. (5) As a presumptive proof of man's immortality. But how so? Can they who faint be immortal? Why all this feeding like a shepherd? Why this gentle tending—this inspiration of life—this sustaining of vigour—this communication of power? Is the mysterious process undertaken when God has determined that all shall end in dust? Does the Divine Being sustain merely that earthly life shall be prolonged? Why should Jehovah stoop to impart power to the faint, when He knows that in a few brief years the faint one will have crumbled to dust? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Almighty God helps the weak* :—The arguments which demonstrate the folly and guilt of worshipping false gods, and of confiding in them, equally demonstrate the duty and obligation of worshipping the true and living God, and of placing our confidence in Him. Indeed, to remove our adoration from an idol is doing but little, unless at the same time it be given to the Holy and Great Jehovah; it is but renouncing polytheism—a grievous and horrible delusion—for atheism, a delusion still more horrible and grievous. I. JEHOVAH, THE TRUE GOD, IS A BEING OF UNLIMITED POWER (ver. 26). II. THE POWER OF JEHOVAH, THE TRUE GOD, IS LIKE HIMSELF, UNDIMINISHABLE AND ETERNAL. "He fainteth not, neither is weary." That the power of Jehovah, the true God, is undiminishable and eternal, is proved by the conservation of nature, as the existence of that power is proved by nature's production. Were the hand which framed the universe utterly withdrawn, the universe would return to its original nothing. The motion, order, and safety of all things depend upon God. What a contrast does this perfection of undiminishable and eternal power form to the weakness of the creature—of fallen and helpless man especially! Weakness is the attribute of the human body. Man is no less weak as it relates to his mind. Sublime therefore in the highest degree is this account of Jehovah. He never lets fall the reins of dominion; He never retires, overcharged, by attention to His friends, resistance to His enemies, or the superintendence of all! III. THE POWER OF JEHOVAH THE TRUE GOD IS CONDESCENDINGLY EMPLOYED IN BEHALF OF FALLEN, HELPLESS MAN. "He giveth power to the faint," &c. Let us attend to some instances in which this truth is illustrated. 1. In His providential interpositions in favour of the more helpless of men. Some persons constitutionally feeble in body, or perhaps made so by disease, are often mysteriously succoured. The victim of oppression also ever finds a Friend in heaven. 2. In the work of our redemption by Christ Jesus. "When we were yet without strength Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. v. 6). One of the most afflictive circumstances attending man's fallen state is that of utter helplessness. When sin entered into the world it not only erased from the soul of man the image of his Creator; it also annihilated, as far as man was concerned, all the means of his recovery. The nerves of obedience were cut, and the spirit of reverence and love utterly blasted. 3. In that invigorating peace communicated to the heart of man, when he believes to the salvation of his soul. Perhaps we are never fully prepared for the mercy of God, through the sacrificial merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, until we see that there is mercy in no other way. 4. In that successful resistance which is made by the faithful Christian, to the assaults of our great spiritual adversary, the devil. 5. In the season of personal affliction. 6. In the case of every one who dies in the Lord. (*J. Bromley.*) *The aid of the Holy Spirit* :—No words can do justice to the feelings of joy and gratitude which this gift should excite in all those who partake in its inestimable benefit. When the heathen sage had sketched out virtue in her goodliest forms; when he had pointed to the steep and arduous path which must be trodden by her successful votaries; when he had urged his disciples to enter upon it by the most stimulating motives with which the light of nature could supply him, what could he do more? What words of cheering import could he address to them, when sinking with dismay under a sense of their own infirmity, when trembling with apprehensions of failure, from a comparison between their strength and the task allotted to them? He had no authority to refer them to one who "giveth power to the faint, and increaseth strength to them that have no might." What he could not, the Christian philosopher can say. (*J. Marriot, M.A.*) *A spiritual tonic* :—I. THE SPIRITUAL HEALTH OF THE HEBREW CHURCH HAD FALLEN BELOW PAR. 1. They felt they had lost the favour of God. Their way was hidden from Him, and they walked in darkness, as if they were the sport of chance or the victims of fate. 2. They felt they were left to the mercy of man. It appeared as if judgment upon them and their way was transferred to caprice of men. II. THE IMPAIRED

SPIRITUAL STRENGTH OF THE HEBREW CHURCH MIGHT BE RESTORED. The people needed—1. Faith in the power of God. 2. Hope in the pity of God. He does not crush the feeble and the faint, but increases their power. 3. Love for the service of God. As the hearts of the people became enthusiastic for the worship of Jehovah, and longed to get back to Zion to restore the temple and rebuild the city, their energies would revive as an incoming tide; revived spirit would bring revived strength. III. WITH RESTORED SPIRITUAL HEALTH THE HEBREW CHURCH WOULD RESUME ITS WONTED ACTIVITIES. The people are promised—1. Renewed vigour. Strength would come from waiting upon God. 2. Renewed vivacity. The people are told they shall "mount," "walk," "run," without weariness or sense of exhaustion. 3. Renewed vitality. Though the body may grow old, and physical life decline, the soul shall remain young. (*F. W. Brown.*) *God's power in the heavens and on earth* (with ver. 26):—These two verses set forth two widely different operations of the Divine power as exercised in two sadly different fields, the starry heavens and this weary world. The one verse says, "He is strong in power"; the other, "He giveth power." In the former verse, "the greatness of His might" sustains the stars; in the latter verse, a still greater operation is set forth in that "to them that have no might He increaseth strength." Thus there are three contrasts suggested; that between unfailing stars, and men that faint; that between the unwearied God and wearied men; and that between the sustaining power that is exercised in the heavens and the restoring power that is manifested on earth. There is another interlocking between the latter of these two texts and its context, which is indicated by a similar recurrence of epithets. In my second text we read of the "faint," and in the verse that follows it again we find the expression "faint" and "weary," while in the verse before my text we read that "the Lord fainteth not, neither is weary." So again the contrast between Him and us is set forth, but in the verse that closes the chapter we read how that contrast merges into likeness, inasmuch as the unfainting and unwearied God makes even the men that wait upon Him unwearied and unfainting. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Unfailing stars and fainting men* (with ver. 26):—I. A SAD CONTRAST. The prophet in the former of these verses seems to be expanding the thoughts that lie in the name, "the Lord of hosts," in so far as that name expresses the Divine relation to the starry universe. The image that underlies both it and the words of my text is that of a commander who summons his soldiers, and they come. Discipline and plan array them in their ranks. The plain prose of which is that night by night, above the horizon, rise the bright orbs, and roll on their path obedient to the Sovereign will; "because He is strong in might, not one" is lacking. Scripture bids us think of God, not as a creative energy that set the universe in motion, and leaves it to roll or spin, but as of a Divine Presence. But in our second text we drop from the illumination of the heavens to the shadowed plain of this low earth. It is as if a man looking up into the violet sky, with all its shining orbs, should then turn to some reeking alley, with its tumult and its squalor. Just because man is greater than the stars, man "fails," whilst they shine on unwearied. For what the prophet has in view as the clinging curse that cleaves to our greatness is not merely the bodily fatigue which is necessarily involved in the very fact of bodily existence, since energy cannot be put forth without waste and weariness, but it is far more the weary heart, the heart that is weary of itself, weary of toil, weary of the momentary crises that demand effort, and wearier still of the effortless monotony of our daily lives. It is ever to be remembered that the faintness and the ebbing away of might, which is the truly tragic thing in humanity, does not depend upon physical constitution, but upon separation from the Source of all strength. II. ANOTHER SAD CONTRAST, MELTING INTO A BLESSED LIKENESS. "He fainteth not, neither is weary." "He giveth power to the faint." Is that not a higher exercise of power than to "preserve the stars from wrong"? What are the consequences that the prophet traces to this restoring power? "They shall mount up with wings as eagles," &c. III. THE WAY BY WHICH THESE CONTRASTS CAN BE RECONCILED, AND THIS LIKENESS SECURED. "They that wait upon the Lord"—that is the whole secret. What does waiting on the Lord include? Keep near Him; keep still: expect. (*Ibid.*) *Two operations of God's power* (with ver. 26):—1. The strength that restores is greater than the power that preserves. 2. The power that is given to the faint is greater than the strength that keeps the stars from falling, because there is in it an actual

communication of actual Divine strength. God keeps the planet in its course by an act (for we must not speak about "effort" in regard to Him) of power brought to bear upon it. But He brings strength to us, not by ministration from without, but by impartation within. 3. Once more, this mirror gives us back the reflection of a power which is not only restoration and communication, but multiplication. "To those that have no might He increaseth strength." 4. The power that redeems, ministers not only restoration and communication and multiplication, but assimilation. There is in the context a very remarkable play upon words. "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" He stoops to the faint, and gives them strength, and what is the result in them? "They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." What God is, God's child in his measure becomes, unfainting and unwearied like his Father in the heavens. God gives, not omnipotence, but something that is a kind of shadowy likeness of it. "All things are possible to him that believeth." (*Ibid.*) *Encouragement to the weary:*—I. THE LORD SPEAKS OF HIS PEOPLE AS BEING SOMETIMES "FAINT." The expression is very significant; it implies that there is life, yet life for a time dormant, inactive, powerless either for defence, service, or enjoyment. There is one, for instance, who has watched long by the bedside of a beloved sick one. Others, again, are sorely tried by anxieties connected with their business; by the difficulty of providing daily bread. There, again, is another deeply vexed and grieved with the plague of his own heart. Of such as these the Lord seems to be speaking. "He giveth power to the faint." His people are further described as having "no might." Self-sufficiency is one of the plainest marks of the ungodly. And thus are they led truly into the third mark of His people, which the Lord here mentions, "They that wait upon the Lord." II. HOW HE DEALS WITH THEM. Three expressions are employed to describe this. 1. To the faint "giving" strength, because, under their sore trials and afflictions, they have utterly fainted; their strength has for a time entirely departed—to them the Lord "gives" strength. 2. Then observe the other word describing His dealings—"He increaseth strength." That is a very suitable word. It is the experience of every gracious soul, that his own strength decreaseth. He learns more fully that he hath in himself no strength. Wherever the Lord removes any of the props of the believer's earthly pride and self-sufficiency, there He reveals Himself as the believer's strength. So that growth in humility is necessarily connected with growth in spiritual strength. 3. They that wait on the Lord shall "renew" their strength. They renew their strength because the Lord renews it. He manifests Himself to them just at those times and in that manner in which they are led to see their need of Him. III. THE BLESSED RESULTS OF THE LORD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE. These also are described as threefold—1. "They shall mount up," borne aloft heavenward, with a power in comparison with which the eagle's mighty wings are powerless. And why? Because they are borne aloft by omnipotent grace. This is one blessed result to those who wait upon the Lord—heavenward tendency. 2. There is also promised zeal and rapid progress in their heavenly course. "They shall run and not be weary." Waiting upon the Lord, they shall be so renewed in strength, that not only their affections, desires, and hopes shall be lifted up to heaven, but they shall also be carried forward swiftly and mightily in their gracious course. They shall run in the way of God's commandments, and not be weary. Look at all mere human strength; how soon it fails, how quickly it is exhausted. 3. This is the third blessed result—a steady perseverance in the way to Zion. Whilst their progress is "running" for zeal and success, it is "walking" for steady persistency unto the end. It is harder sometimes to walk than to run. There are many who would gain heaven if it were to be won by a hasty run; but when the heavenly course requires not merely a short, quick, impulsive run, but the slow, weary, painful walk, they soon grow tired, and ready to give all up. (*G. W. Hills.*) *The influence of the Holy Ghost: the doctrine abused by neglecting means:*—The grand subject here is, "waiting upon the Lord." The term is of frequent occurrence in God's Word. It sometimes means nothing more than a quiet, restful frame of soul; and sometimes it will be found to set forth a waiting for the Lord, a patient waiting on Him in expectation of deliverance. But "waiting on Him" seems to imply more than this; it implies a diligent use of those means that He has appointed for the communication of

His grace—waiting on Him in the use of those means. It is not an indolent waiting. I. GOD'S GRACIOUS COMMUNICATION OF NEEDFUL HELP TO HIS POOR, TRIED, WEAK, AND HELPLESS PEOPLE. 1. Every creature is of necessity weak; it is not his fault—it is his nature. When Adam left his hold on God he necessarily fell; as necessarily as any branch would fall if cut off from the parent stem. The creature has no power to sustain himself, nor to help himself; and it was never intended that he should have. 2. If man as an unfallen creature is weak; well may we say, that as a fallen creature, he is altogether weakness. 3. But even as a renewed creature he is weak, and if left to himself, unable to cope with one enemy, or to maintain his own standing for one single moment. "Without Me ye can do nothing." 4. Besides this, there are certain periods in which the believer is more than ordinarily faint and weak. There are many things that try him. 5. Oftentimes too, through want of watchful, prayerful, holy seeking and turning over the page of conscience, he weakens his little strength. But it is to these very souls that the Lord communicates strength. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." The necessities of God's people seem to touch the very heart of God. But there is something in the very glory of God that constrains Him to grant them His help in their hours of need. This was David's plea: "pardon mine iniquity, for it is great," but "for Thy name's sake," he says. II. OBSERVE THROUGH WHAT CHANNEL IT COMES. It is not a natural channel; it is not the strength of nature, but it is in the way of waiting dependence on Himself. There is a wondrous analogy between the operations of God in grace and in nature. God has given to us the promise that "seed-time and harvest shall never fail" while the world remains; but does this hinder the necessity of casting in the seed? Does it hinder the necessity of ploughing the land before it, and of harrowing it in, and protecting it? The more I look at this appointment of God, the more I see of infinite wisdom in it. I am in great distress, in great need, no one knows of my pressure. Perhaps I tell my friend, but I find no relief at all. And now I cast myself on the Lord—God reveals Himself to me as my Father—it quiets me, it comforts me. See how the Lord makes one step preparatory to another, and makes one thing the means of obtaining another. Prayerfulness leads to strength; that leads to courage; that leads to submission; that leads to patience, and that leads to praise. Observe the same, too, of all other means of grace. Talk we of the Bible, or hearing the Word unfolded? In prayer we speak to God; in His Word He speaks to us by His Spirit. Look at the very means of grace themselves: there is the unfolding of the same wisdom in the means appointed. What a suitable and reasonable ordainment it is! III. THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY OF THIS CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION. "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength." When God puts forth His promise He pledges all that is in Himself to fulfil that promise. This is God's appointed way. Perhaps we can say there are no instances upon record in which it was otherwise, but I dare not say that God may not in one moment so break in upon a man's soul, by the holy anointing of the Spirit, as to give him the most perfect conviction that he is a child of God. See the greatness of the communication. They shall "run"; they shall "walk"; and they shall "mount up." Concluding remarks—1. Would that the saints of God did more deeply feel that they are fainting and full of weakness! 2. Though it is no small mercy to be deeply conscious of our utter weakness before God, take heed how you abuse this glorious doctrine of the blessed Spirit by living a life of ceaseless and useless complaint. There is an observation, I think in Owen, that the religion of some consists in little more than in going from house to house, from friend to friend, from saint to saint, telling one's nothingness, sinfulness, and wretchedness. They make a sort of secret balm of it. 3. What vast encouragement is here! (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Causes and cure of fainting:*—I. WHAT MAKES US FAINT? 1. We will consider the case of the awakened sinner. (1) They may very well faint, for they have made a most alarming discovery. (2) They have tried to escape from their dangerous position, but they have not succeeded. (3) We have known some grow so faint through a sense of sin and a dread of its punishment and a consciousness of their own inability to save themselves, that they have even wished to die; yet, when they have looked at their condition aright, they have asked themselves what use death would be to them? (4) Perhaps also, at such a time, a sore trouble may happen to the man; for, in the parable of the prodigal son, it appears that he

was quite as much influenced by the peculiar circumstances without as by his sense of sin within. 2. I pass on to another character, namely, the child of God in his fainting fits. There is a degree of sinfulness about some of those faintings which is not found in others. (1) Sometimes the children of God faint through want of faith (Psa. xxvii. 13). So the cure of fainting is faith, and the best way to prevent fainting is to believe. (2) Some are brought into a state of faintness through a selfish want of resignation. *E.g.*, Jonah and the gourd. It was not alone the heat of the sun that caused him to faint; it was also the heat of his temper. Some of those who have lost dear children seem as if they will not forgive God for taking them. (3) There are children of God also who fall into faintness through trusting in themselves. "Even the youths shall faint," &c. Why is that? Because the youths felt themselves able to do anything. (4) Faintness may also arise from another cause which is sinful, namely, neglect of prayer. (5) Children of God fall into faintness because of the length of the way. (6) The heaviness of their burden. (7) A sense of weakness. (8) Another frequent cause is the spirit itself sinking (Psa. xlii.). (9) Some get faint through lack of spiritual food. (10) Sometimes God's children faint when they are in adversity. (11) There are some who faint through increasing infirmity. II. HOW THE LORD DEALS WITH HIS FAINTING PEOPLE. "He giveth power," &c. 1. See how tenderly the Lord deals with His fainting people. He does not desert them, saying, They are no longer any use to Me; they can do nothing for Me; I will leave them where they are. He gives them power. 2. What sort of power? (1) You may be sure that He does not give them any of their own. That has all gone from them. (2) It will be sufficient for the emergency, for He has all-sufficient power. "As thy days," &c. (3) It is a power that the devil can neither defeat nor take away. 3. Why is it that He gives power to the faint? (1) Because, in His great goodness, He looks out for those who need it most. (2) Because they will praise Him most for it. (3) Because they will be sure to use it. When a person who has been faint receives power from God he will be likely to be sympathetic, tender, and gentle towards others; at least, that is how he should be. Conclusion—1. If God gives power to the faint, let us be thankful if we have fainted and have been revived by Him. 2. Let us have done with fainting in the future, because we ought to have no more fainting now that we have received God's power. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Strength attracted by weakness:*—We have seen a little weakling child draw to its cot some strong and burly man, the champion athlete of the country-side. Such a spell can weakness exert over might, and helplessness over helpfulness. It is the burden of Scripture that the strong should bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please themselves. Such is the law of God's existence. All that He is and has He holds in trust for us, and most for those who need most. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *God's strength for the weak:*—Many of us are too strong, self-reliant, and resourceful to get the best that God can do. Jacob must halt on his thigh ere he can prevail with God and man. (*Ibid.*) *God's untiring patience:*—God is ever blotting out sins from His remembrance—never tiring. I will tell you what it is like. It is like the infinite, tireless patience of the sea. The children ply their spades upon the sands, to make work for the sea. They heap the sand up, they dig deep into it. Hundreds of them disfigure the hard, golden surface, and leave their scars upon it; and then quietly the old sea turns upon its course, and rolls its waves across the sands, and every trace of scar is obliterated, becomes as if it had never been; when the tide ebbs again there is no trace upon the smooth, shining surface of the sand to show that it had ever known disturbance. Day after day, day after day, the scene is repeated, and the sea is never tired of putting things to rights; it never complains, it never resents the new work imposed upon it. And the secret is that there is such infinite reserve of power that all that man can do frets it no whit. It is only a question of time, and it will put all things to rights again. Again and again, as I have stood by the sea, this sense of its tirelessness has come over me. It fainteth not, neither is weary. And it has seemed to me an emblem, as the stars are emblems, moving on their courses, as the world is an emblem, swinging through space, as nature is an emblem, pursuing so patiently and unweariedly her age-long business—of that mighty God whose glorious characteristic it is that He fainteth not, neither is weary; but He giveth power to the faint, and increaseth strength to him that hath no might. (*C. Silvester Horne, M.A.*)

Vers. 30, 31. **Even the youths shall faint.** — *The unfainting spirit* : — The Hebrew tendency to lean upon the most muscular arm accessible, to buy up horses from Egypt in imitation of the warriors of the plains, to form alliances with neighbouring peoples in a neighbourly, instead of acting in the true Israelite spirit—was a tendency not confined to Hebrew blood. It is in human nature to live by eyesight, and to go on doing so even although everything should go to wreck under our very eyes. The true Israelite spirit felt—wherever that spirit prevailed—that God's assuring word had more muscle in it than an army of Philistines; that Egyptian cavalry was an encumbrance; that Assyrian spears might be turned into withered blades of grass in a night's time; and that the only solid ground that never quaked was the Rock that faith stood upon. For the unseen is harder, stronger—has more vitality and power of renewal in it—than the youngest, freshest, fairest, and most select powers that are seen. Our desire is to show wherein lies the power of renewed life and force in a soul and in a Church, so that the vigour shall be real and elastic, being the very strength of God. I. THE PROPHET EXPECTS THE NATURAL FAINTING AND FALLING OF THE SELECT MEN. "Young men" reads literally "the select men,"—those picked out for an enterprise on account of their youthful vigour. II. A SPIRITUAL EMPOWERING OF ALL MEN IS PROVIDED THROUGH WAITING ON GOD. Panic seized our Lord's disciples on the arrest of their Master, and their flight revealed their lack of power. They were converted men, but they fainted and failed. They were young and select, but they fled. When about to part from them, Jesus bade them remain where they were, and not attempt the discipling of the world until they should receive power. The word "renew" in this place signifies "change." The strength sufficient for one day, and its duty, may need to be exchanged for something larger, deeper, swifter for the next day and its severer trials. The same Spirit works, changing the force and form of His working. How is the Spirit of God working in the renewal of strength to-day? What are the best people feeling the need of, but a closer union among themselves through an intenser, completer fellowship with God? III. ISAIAH DESCRIBES THE MANIFESTATIONS OF A NEW AND STRONG LIFE IN GOD. A cheering succession of Saxon sentences, precious powers, most desirable energies. 1. There is heavenly elevation. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." Theodore Monod says: "If you want to do something, do not try to be somebody." Certainly, self-exaltation is not heavenly. It ensures your poor wings being clipped or broken very soon. We speak exclusively of the spiritual realm. Live looking unto Jesus, and He will ere long set you with Him upon His throne. 2. There is quickened activity. "They shall run and not be weary." 3. There is the unfainting every-day walk. "They shall walk and not faint." The unfainting walk, the steady march from hour to hour, is the sharpest, truest, final test of a strong life. It is in trifles that character is revealed. It is in small, monotonous duties that we oftenest break down. (*G. H. Dick.*) *The secret of immortal youth* :— I. THE DREARY CERTAINTY OF WEARINESS AND DECAY. 1. The words point to the plain fact that all created and physical life, by the very law of its being, in the act of living tends to death; and by the very operation of its strength tends to exhaustion. There are three stages in every creature's life—that of growth, that of equilibrium, that of decay. You are in the first. If you live you will come to the second and the third. 2. The text points also to another fact, that, long before your natural life shall have begun to tend towards decay, hard work and occasional sorrows and responsibilities and burdens of all sorts will very often make you wearied and ready to faint. In your early days you dream of life as a kind of enchanted garden. Ah! long before you have traversed the length of one of its walks you will often have been tired of the whole thing, and weary of what is laid upon you. 3. My text points to another fact, as certain as gravitation, that the faintness and weariness and decay of the bodily strength will be accompanied with a parallel change in your feelings. We are drawn onward by hopes, and when we get them fulfilled we find that they are disappointing. Do you not think that, if that is so, it would be as well to face it? Do you not think that a wise man would take account of all the elements in forecasting his life, and would shape his conduct accordingly? II. THE BLESSED OPPOSITE POSSIBILITY OF INEXHAUSTIBLE AND IMMORTAL STRENGTH. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," &c. The life of nature tends inevitably downward, but there may be another life within the life of nature which shall have the opposite motion, and tend as certainly upwards. Look on this possibility a little more closely. 1. Note, how to get at it. "They that wait upon the Lord" is Old

Testament dialect for what in New Testament phraseology is meant by "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." For the motion expressed here by "waiting" is that of expectant dependence, and the New Testament "faith" is the very same in its attitude of expectant dependence. The condition of the inflow of this unwearied life into our poor, fainting humanity is simply the trust in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of our souls. True, the revelation has advanced, the contents of that which we grasp are more developed. No matter where we stand on the course of life, there may come into our hearts a Divine Indweller, who laughs at weariness and knows nothing of decay. 2. What is this strength that we thus get, if we will, by faith? It is the true entrance into our souls of a Divine life. We who have Christ in our hearts by faith shall share, in some fashion and degree, in His wondrous prerogative of unwearied strength. So here is the promise, God will give Himself to you, and in the very heart of your decaying nature will plant the seed of an immortal being which shall, like His own, shake off fatigue from the limbs, and never tend to dissolution. The life of nature dies by living; the life of grace, which may belong to us all, lives by living, and lives evermore thereby. The oldest angels are the youngest. The longer men live in fellowship with Christ the stronger do they grow. And though our lives, whether we be Christians or no, are necessarily subject to the common laws of mortality, we may carry all that is worth preserving of the earliest stages into the latest; and when grey hairs are upon us, and we are living next door to our graves, we may still have the enthusiasm, the energy, and above all, the boundless hopefulness that made the gladness and the spring of our long-buried youth. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." 3. The manner in which this immortal strength is exercised. There is strength to soar. Old men generally shed their wings, and can only manage to crawl. They have done with romance. Enthusiasms are dead. For the most part they are content, unless they have got Christ in their hearts, to keep along the low levels, and their soaring days are done. But if you and I have Jesus Christ for the life of our spirits, as certainly as fire sends its shooting tongues upwards, so certainly shall we rise above the sorrows and sins and cares of this "dim spot which men call earth," and find ampler field for buoyant motion high up in communion with God. Strength to soar means the gracious power of bringing all heaven into our grasp, and setting our affections on things above. Life on earth were too wretched unless it were possible to "mount up with wings as eagles." Again, you may have strength to run—that is to say, there is power waiting for you for all the great crises of your lives which call for special, though it may be brief, exertion. Such crises will come to each of you, in sorrow, work, difficulty, hard conflicts. And there is only one way to be ready for such times as these, and that is to live waiting on the Lord, near Christ, with Him in your hearts, and then nothing will come that will be too big for you. Strength to walk may be yours, *i.e.*, patient power for persistent pursuit of weary, monotonous duty. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *How to grow strong*:—I. We have here UNAIDED NATURE AT ITS BEST PROVING A DISMAL FAILURE. Youths and young men are the personification of activity, agility, vigour, and "go." Their eye is not dim, nor their natural force abated. Moreover, the word here employed signifies the pick of the people, the flower of the youth, the very first and foremost. These are the strongest of the strong, the bravest of the brave. But what happens to them? Even these shall faint and be weary; even these shall fail and fall. It is in spiritual things that this disappointment is most to be deplored. 1. This is a picture of those who, starting in their own strength, are presently disillusioned. Here, then, is a picture of ourselves in our unregenerate condition. 2. This is a picture, too, of how we were when, having been convicted of sin, we began to try to cleave our own way to heaven, and to pave it too; when from self-complacency we turned to self-righteousness. 3. I see here, also, an all too accurate picture of some true Christians. The boastful Christian is represented here, the man who fancies that his native courage will carry him through, who imagines that his wide experience will suffice in his extremity, who supposes his rigid orthodoxy is enough. 4. There are some well-nigh prayerless Christians, too, who seem to imagine that since they are already converted to God, and have had great experience of His dealings, they need no longer be as fervent and as frequent at the mercy-seat as in early days. II. PRAYERFUL DEPENDENCE UPON GOD MEANS UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS. "They that wait," &c. 1. What is this waiting upon God? (1) It involves humiliation and lamentation, a consciousness of need, a confession of weakness, an acknowledgment of sin. Do not think to get to the other stages

except by this route. It is most unwise to seek to build a castle in the air, or even on the sands. Deep digging must precede lofty building. (2) Then comes supplication, an earnest pouring out of the inmost heart to God. (3) Mingled with the supplication is expectation. (4) Yet with supplication and expectation there is resignation. (5) There is not necessarily inaction; indeed those that wait upon the Lord are the very ones who are most in earnest, and most active. 2. What is the result of waiting upon God? (1) "They shall renew their strength." This means that they shall change their strength. They shall put off their own thread-bare, worn-out, poverty-stricken strength, and they shall be clad with strength as with a garment, a garment that has been woven in celestial looms. It means among other things, that the strength they have, God-given, shall be adapted to special circumstances, and applied to peculiar conditions. I know how possible it is to have a goodly measure of strength, and yet not know how to use it. Those who wait on the Lord are taught spiritual economy. They make the most of the little they have, and by using it, it is increased. They are as those who, having a long journey to undertake, have made arrangements previously that at each stage there shall be a fresh horse awaiting them. (2) "They shall mount up with wings as eagles," that is, they shall fly. I have often wondered what the sensation of flying may be like. I have nothing to guide me except sundry dreams. It is a most delightful sensation, except when it ends, and then you wish you had not gone in for it at all. Alas! that so many of our fellow-men have set their minds on flying. They have invented flying machines, so-called, with which they have almost invariably till now courted disaster. I know a flying machine worth all of these. I will not soar to heaven on wings of wax, which melt as they get near the sun, but on wings which God supplies, wings of hope, and faith, and prayer, and praise. (3) "They shall run," and however much they run, and however fast they run, they shall not be weary. What wonderful progress those make who trust God. (4) "They shall walk and not faint." Divine strength enables us for patient continuance in well-doing. What is the secret of all this? God is at the bottom of it. Compare verse 6 with verses 10, 12, &c. There is nothing impossible to those who love God. (*T. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 31. **But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.**—*Strength for the returning exiles*:—There was a real climax in the prophet's statement. And its application, in his thought, was to the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. God's helpfulness would be adequate to their needs in all the stages of their return. In the first flush of joy, and in the first flights of eager anticipation, "on which we see them rising in the psalms of redemption as on the wings of an eagle"; again, in the rush and excitement of their hurried departure, the running to and fro in hasty and exhausting preparation; but finally, when they wanted it most, in the long tramp, tramp, tramp of those seven hundred weary miles, day after day, week after week, when their pace must be adapted to those of the heavily-laden beasts of burden, and of the little ones whose strength would often fail and who would need to be lifted up and carried in the father's arms. How often on that tiresome journey would the sweet music of the prophet's words return to their memory, "they shall walk and not faint." Then it was that their trust in Jehovah would be put fully to the proof. It was in the walking and not in the flying that their faith would triumph. (*J. Halsey.*) *The Gospel of the Exile*:—I. THIS IS THE GOSPEL OF THE EXILE; the "Gospel before the Gospel" (Cheyne); the good news of the swift accession of power and deliverance to the Jewish people, humiliated, dispirited, and tired out by monotonously waiting in their Babylonian captivity for a long-delayed good. II. Like all Gospels, THIS GOSPEL OF THE EXILE IS GOD'S. Every true prophet's great appeal is, "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard" of God! The whole air rings with His name. The universe is lit up with His glory. The stars speak His power. In His ceaseless activity, fatherly solicitude, and unsleeping watchfulness for His people, He fainteth not, nor is weary. The Exile is not a mistake. You are not in the wrong school. He knows what He is doing. There is no searching of His understanding. Believe in Him, wait on Him, wait for Him, and you will become younger and stronger than ever. So God in His loving care for, and constant education of souls, is the Alpha and Omega of this whole Gospel for captive Israel. We cannot have any good news for any age, or for any people, or for any soul, without Him. All flesh is as grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the revelation of the inexhaustible God liveth and abideth for ever. The strength of God is the salvation

of men. III. Like all Divine evangels, THIS GOOD NEWS FOR THE CAPTIVES OF BABYLON IS ADDRESSED IMMEDIATELY TO A SPECIAL NEED, AND ADAPTED BY ITS FORM TO EFFECT A PARTICULAR RESULT, namely, that of patient endurance of acute affliction. The Gospel is for men and women who have lost their strength in living, and are losing it more and more, day by day, till they fear its utter extinction by the presence of thickening despairs, and the ceaseless gnawing of spiritual fibre by silent misery and unutterable grief. Nothing tires like hopelessness. Nothing makes the heart sick like long delays. Unto them, therefore, is the word of this salvation sent. "Wait for God." "Wait upon the Lord." "Trust in Him at all times." He will come. He cannot help coming, His nature urges Him towards you with all the tenderness of His love, and all the helpfulness of His omnipotence. Faith in God takes multitudinous forms in the long story of the soul's life with God. It is a Divine law on which this direction rests. God must be waited for. We cannot anticipate Him. While the soil is frozen and hard we cannot compel the crop; we wait for the spring. The farmer of the Nile waits till the waters rise and then casts his bread upon them, hoping to see his harvest after many days. There is a time for growth, and we must take facts according to God's plan. Even young men faint in the conflict because they will not wait for God. Defeated and overwhelmed with despair you say, "It avails nothing, I am no forwarder to-day than I was last week, I am as far from the kingdom of God as ever; my passions are as wild, my mind as untameable as it was when I started for a better and manlier life." Recall Moses. Did he not in his impatience lift up the standard of freedom forty years too soon? But is not waiting for God cowardly indolence and fatalistic apathy? Cowardly indolence, indeed! Nothing will more test any fibre you've got! IV. Like all Gospels from the heavens, THIS ONE FOR THE HEBREW EXILES OBTAINED ITS FULL AND COMPLETE VERIFICATION FROM THE UNCONTRADICTED FACTS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE. The captive people waited for God and on God, and they did not wait in vain. The ransomed of the Lord returned: but the return was the least good they received, and deliverance their smallest boon. Grace and strength came by the prophets and by prayer in unbroken continuity, and fresh gifts of power and light and zeal and joy enlarged and enriched their lives. They were born again. They renewed their youth, and became a regenerated, pure, missionary people; found Babylon a better school than Jerusalem, and the severities and perils of captivity a healthier discipline than the luxuries and security of freedom. The sevenfold blessing of the Exile stands written in the unimpeachable Chronicles of Israel, and the world. 1. First and most distinctive of the gains of the Jews from their captivity, stands their advanced and perfected knowledge of God. The Divine idea was lifted above all the restrictions of race and locality to the throne of the universe; the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was recognised as the Saviour of the ends of the earth. We fret and chafe in our sufferings and under our chastisements, when to patience and meekness the God of all comfort comes with His sweetest and most refreshing revelations. 2. Next comes up out of the Exile the more definitely shaped and clearly conceived image of the Anointed of the Lord, the Daysman or Mediator, the Lord our Righteousness, the Herald of a New Covenant, the suffering and conquering Servant of God, who is to realise the ideal Jerusalem, and bring a new heaven and a new earth. 3. Fired by this hope of a personal Redeemer, and controlled by a spiritual conception of Jehovah, the worship of God entered on that final spiritual phase which has never been wholly eclipsed, though it has suffered, and still suffers, many painful obscurations. (1) There is such a signal and hearty recognition of the power of prayer in the individual and in the community, as to warrant the idea that the Exile was the origin of the prayer-meeting. (2) There is a total detachment from all ritual, and the cheerful acceptance of "little sanctuaries," synagogues, or "meeting-houses," and even of quiet spots by the river-side, in place of the gorgeous temple and its arresting and impressive symbolism. (3) The spell of idolatry is broken for ever. 4. Bound up with this we see the generation of a higher ethic; the birth of a nobler conception of life, as the sphere for rightness of aim and righteousness of character. Through this gate of tribulation Israel enters into the kingdom of holiness. 5. The temporary limitations and restrictions of Israel being annulled, it is forthwith lifted into the stream of universal history, never to be taken out again. It is proved that Hebraism can exist without a temple and without a priest, without an altar and without a land, without anything or anybody save the soul and God. 6. With glowing ardour and intense enthusiasm these elect souls go forth on this service, seeking to establish

a knowledge of the true God, urging the heathen to accept the light they enjoy, and sharing with them as proselytes the peace and prosperity brought by truth and righteousness. The missionary spirit, as well as the missionary idea, glows and throbs in the oracles and songs which represent the highest thought and the purest emotion of this time. 7. This was completed by the enlargement and recension of that unique and marvellous missionary agent, the Old Testament literature, so splendidly enriched with some of its most pathetic and consolatory contributions, so carefully transcribed and sacredly guarded by the "Scribes," who started into existence in these days; and so diligently pondered by those choice spirits who had learnt to sigh for God as their exceeding joy, and to serve Him as their chief delight. It was the Great Missionary Book. "Salvation is of the Jews." Believe it, then; exhausted men get fresh strength by trustful longing for God; renew their spiritual energy, their faith in goodness, their power for self-sacrificing work, for fleet-footed missions of mercy, by waiting on God and for God. It is history, and actual experience. V. THIS GOSPEL, LIKE ALL ITS FELLOWS, NEVER DIES. It endures for ever and ever as a living message, not effete though old, not wasted though abundantly used, but partaking of the unwearied energy and eternal reproductiveness of its infinite source. Man's wants are too diverse to be met by any one messenger. God speaks at sundry times, and by different voices; but no voice ever dies out, no message is ever wholly lost, and if not for one soul, yet for another and another, it is quick and powerful, renewing faith, and hope, and zeal. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*) *Waiting upon God*:—I. A DUTY SUGGESTED. 1. We are reminded of the solemn and formal acts of devotion, as implied in the words—"wait upon the Lord." (1) This language is borrowed from the custom of subjects entering into the presence of their monarch with petitions, acknowledgments, or gratulations. They presented themselves and their offering. (2) God invites and encourages the attendance of His subjects. Opportunities of waiting upon an earthly sovereign are rare: but God has rendered the way to the throne plain, and the access easy. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly." (3) But as in approaching an earthly sovereign there is required an attention to the prescribed usages and decorum of a court, so, in order to our acceptable waiting upon God, we must observe the defined forms, and cultivate the sacred proprieties of His worship; those which belong to "the place where His honour dwelleth." Much of the benefit of worship is lost by many, simply from the absence of a due preparation of the heart, or from a thoughtless neglect of the decencies of God's house. These are auxiliaries to religion, if not a part of it. Too many professors overlook the obligation to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." 2. The words of the text are descriptive of the state and exercises of the mind; of the feelings and aspirations of the heart in Divine worship. They imply—(1) The spiritual recognition of God. The object of all profitable worship is God, and the end is intercourse with Him. The phrase, "wait upon God," represents a devotional heart. If vanity share the sacrifice, or irreverence desecrate it, God will turn away our prayers and His mercy from us: our service will be an abomination unto Him. Spiritual worship requires a strict and holy discipline over the mind, constant vigilance and heartfelt dependence upon Divine grace. (2) Earnest desire for God; a keen sense of want. (3) Confident expectation of the Divine mercy and grace; reliance upon the Divine word and faithfulness; assurance of the acceptance and answer of prayer through Christ. (4) Patient and submissive perseverance. (5) There is an intimate and important connection between the outward acts and the inward feelings in devotion. II. WE ARE ASSURED OF THE BENEFIT RESULTING FROM THE DISCHARGE OF THIS DUTY. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," or change their strength; its measure shall be adapted to their different claims. 1. The Christian's strength may fail amid the many trials and temptations of life, and its revival become necessary. The soul may lose its energy, its decision of purpose, its promptitude of action, its confidence in God, and become weak, irresolute, and fearful. 2. Our situation may demand additional strength. We may be summoned to a post of great responsibility, to the performance of arduous duty. 3. Where are we to obtain this power,—this reviving of strength? 4. With pleasure contemplate the animating result of this renewal of strength. In conclusion, our text suggests—(1) Instruction. We are taught where we must go in times of trouble. (2) Consolation. Circumstances may change; man may change; but God never changes. (3) Reproof. To the presumptuous—those who seek strength and comfort and satisfaction in the creature, who forsake the living God. (*H. H. Chettle.*) *Waiting*

upon the Lord :—I. WHAT IT IS TO WAIT UPON THE LORD. Three things make it: service, expectation, patience. We must be as those Eastern maidens, who as they ply their needle or their distaff, look to the eye and wait upon the hand of their mistress, as their guide which is to teach them, or their model which they are to copy. Our best lessons are always found in a Father's eye. Therefore, if you would "wait upon the Lord," you must be always looking out for voices—those still small voices of the soul,—and you must expect them, and you must command them. But service, however devoted, or expectation, however intense, will not be waiting without patience. Here is where so many fail. II. THE ACTION. Elevation, rapid progress, a steady course—soar, run, walk. Is it not just what we want—to get higher, to go faster, and to be more calmly consistent? 1. Elevation. What are the wings? Beyond a doubt, faith, prayer; or, if you will, humility and confidence in a beautiful equipoise, balancing one another on either side, so that the soul sustains itself in mid-air and flies upward. 2. The servants of God in the Bible—from Abraham and David to Philip in the Acts—whenever they were told to do anything, always ran. It is the only way to do anything well. A thousand irksome duties become easy and pleasant if we do them with a ready mind, an affectionate zeal, and a happy alacrity. 3. To maintain a quiet sustained walk, day by day, in the common things of life, in the house and out of the house, not impulsive, not capricious, not changeable,—that is the hardest thing to do. Let me give four rules for this walk: (1) Start from Christ. (2) Walk with Christ. (3) Walk leaning on Christ. (4) Walk to Christ. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Communion with God* :—I. THE SECRET OF LIFE'S POWER. II. THE SUPPORT OF LIFE'S JOURNEY. "They shall run," &c. III. THE BASIS OF LIFE'S EXALTATION. They shall "mount up," &c. (*J. T. Harwood.*) *Waiting upon the Lord* :—I. THE DUTY HERE RECOMMENDED. "Waiting upon the Lord." This expression may include many acts of the mind, but the connection of the words shows that here it principally refers to prayer. Waiting on the Lord implies—1. A sense of our own weakness, and our need of Divine help. 2. A persuasion of the power and goodness of God; His readiness to stretch out His almighty hand to help us, amidst the difficulties, infirmities, and temptations to which we are exposed. 3. That Divine help is to be sought by prayer. 4. If we hope for His interposition, we are to be diligent in the use of those means which He hath appointed, and to which He hath promised His blessing. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN. Such devout, humble souls shall "renew their strength." They shall grow more steady and established in religion. They shall find a supply of Divine help proportioned to their trials. As their work and their difficulty are renewed, so shall the vigour of their souls be renewed. How far this strength shall operate, and what noble effects it shall produce, may be seen by the following words. III. WAITING UPON GOD HATH IN ITSELF A NATURAL TENDENCY TO ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN THE SOUL. It promoteth that humility which is our greatest security, and restrains that pride which goeth before a fall. It will also lead us to exert our best endeavours, and put forth all our own strength, as we would not be chargeable with the guilt of affronting God by asking His help without them. The nature of the blessed God strengthens this encouragement. Therefore the prophet had suggested to Israel this thought, that "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary." His power is vast and unbounded, and nothing is too hard for Him. His understanding is infinite; there is no searching it. Therefore He can never be puzzled with any difficulties, but must know how in every possible case to deliver the godly out of their temptations. Consider also His promises and His covenant. (*Job Orton.*) *The encouragement of true worshippers* :—Nothing can give a better conception of the strength and the weakness of human nature, than by comparing what man has done in subduing the material powers by which God has surrounded him, and in providing for his own temporal comfort, and his utter helplessness in those things which relate to the life of the soul. When he has to contend with the powers of nature, he is strong and victorious; but when he has to contend with the powers of spiritual wickedness, and with his own ungodly desires, he is helpless. The lord of nature, he is the slave of sin. The helplessness of man in spiritual things is a disease for which no remedy has been discovered, and for which no remedy ever will be discovered but that which the Word of God points out. I. WHAT IS MEANT BY WAITING UPON THE LORD? Waiting upon God is a duty very frequently enforced in Scripture, and to which the highest blessings are annexed. "Because of His strength," says the Psalmist, "I will wait upon Him, for God is my defence."

"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart." "Our soul waiteth for the Lord; He is our help and shield." "Wait on the Lord," says Solomon, "and He shall save thee." "Keep mercy and judgment," says the prophet Hosea, "and wait on thy God continually." It is an expression peculiar to the Old Testament; but in the New Testament the same duty is repeatedly inculcated, though in different language. The precept is the same in substance with the exhortation of St. Paul, "Be ye followers of God, as dear children"; or with that of St. James, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." The expression denotes a feeling of need, and a sense of dependence upon the Almighty, without whom nothing is strong or holy. For one to wait upon another implies inferiority, and a desire of protection and assistance. In many circumstances we require the protection and assistance of our fellow-creatures, but in all circumstances we require the protection and assistance of our Creator. He is ever ready to extend to us that protection and help without which we are powerless and defenceless. But He requires, as the condition of our receiving His grace, that we sincerely feel and humbly acknowledge our need of it; and that, ceasing from our own wisdom, and confessing from the heart our own weakness, we throw ourselves unreservedly upon His wisdom and strength. This sense of entire dependence upon the grace of God will naturally express itself in prayer, and in a devout and regular use of the appointed means of grace. Not only in the immediate exercises of religion, but at all times the Christian will be animated by a spirit of devotion. He will keep himself constantly near to God. But waiting upon God not only implies worship, it also implies obedience. In short, to wait upon God is to be a religious man. II. The NATURE OF THIS GREAT BLESSING WHICH GOD HAS ASSURED TO ALL THAT WAIT UPON HIM. In the weary pilgrimage which they have to finish, in the sore warfare in which they are engaged, He will strengthen and uphold them. Not merely is help found for the weakness of believers, but a provision is also made for relieving and substituting for it a buoyancy and joyful exaltation of spirit, so that he is enabled to hold on his way with gladness as well as with constancy. The pious man is compared in Scripture to the sun—"his path is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The Gospel is a message of joy. (*W. Ramsay.*) *Soul-growth* :—What are some of the methods by which men, in the Divine economy, advance in spiritual impulse, and rise permanently higher? 1. We must not be biassed by any theory of Church or ordinances, nor by any preaching, to suppose that we are shut up to the dealings of God with us through these channels. The Church is a very powerful instrument, and will be indispensable through ages. Does not the village common school work upon the human soul? Do not books? Do not newspapers? Do not men in all the ten thousand struggles of business? Do not all the influences which go to make up the ever-teeming society? Is there anything which God does not use in operating upon the reason, the affections, and the moral sentiments of men? 2. It pleases God to make the spiritual development of men depend on time-growth. We know how it is with children. We know that they develop first by the body. Then come the social affections, with the elementary forms of the intellect. Nor can you force things in a normal and healthy child. You must take it in the hour of God's appointment. Third in the order of time, and last, is the spiritual nature. We rejoice in the earliest flower because it is the earliest, and we rejoice in the latest flower because it is the latest; but do what you will, you cannot make the aster blossom in spring. You must wait until the time for it to blossom arrives. Now, among men the same thing happens. There are those who have a premature development of spiritual impulses. But because the higher nature of some people is unfolded early, are we to make them the criterion for other people? It is better not to seek to produce ecstatic experiences in anticipation of the normal methods. 3. Then there are many persons who renew their strength, who develop into a higher spiritual life, into more fervour, more joy, and more stability by reason of the removal of false or imperfect views of truth. 4. There are many persons who fail to come to the light of truth, and to the inspiration of the higher views of religion, by reason of worldly prosperity, which tends to satisfy their lower nature. Under such circumstances it is that, in the Divine ordering of things, what are called distresses, infirmities, and even great sorrows, are blessed of God to the opening of their nature and to the renewing of their spiritual strength. Men never could see the corona of the sun—the red flame that surrounds that orb—until the sun was eclipsed; and the corona, the light, the glory of God is seen when men are under eclipse and in darkness. There are revelations made to men then,

which prosperity never brings to them. We are rich and strong, not by the things which we possess, but by the amount of true manhood which is developed in us. 5. It pleases God, also, to employ the companionship of friends and neighbours in developing men in the direction of their higher manhood. There is nothing that is so helpful to a soul as the contact of another soul. 6. When, by the use of these various instrumentalities our souls have grown, and have come into the possibility of a higher spiritual disclosure, then there is a further soul-growth in us. We come to a state in which there is a direct influence of the soul of God exerted upon us—as direct as sight and voice are to the bodily senses. The Divine Spirit comes into the hearts of men in ways that are inexplicable to the lower understanding, and that, therefore, men who are on the lower plane of life do not comprehend. When men come to a higher Christian life they have days of spiritual insight: and those days grow longer and longer, like the days of the coming summer, when the sun goes down later and later, and rises earlier and earlier. As the result of a whole life of education and practice in Divine duties men may come, at last, into that state in which the Spirit of God shines with a steadfast lustre upon them. Then there is the triumph of grace in the soul. Then intuitions become truths—not fitful, nor irregular, not based upon inchoate and undigested knowledge, but constant, regular, and founded on sound judgment. (*H. Ward Beecher.*) *The strength of believers, and the renewing of it*:—I. GOOD MEN ARE POSSESSED OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH. 1. It is that spiritual vigour of mind by which sin is overcome. 2. And by which the world is overcome. 3. By this strength, spiritual duties are acceptably performed. 4. This strength is that qualification of mind by which the followers of Christ are enabled to endure trials and bear the cross. 5. "A deathbed is a detector of the heart." But death does not "make cowards of us all." He who said this, knew but little of the courage which the grace of God communicates to the minds of the most timid of the disciples of Jesus. II. THIS STRENGTH REQUIRES TO BE RENEWED. 1. It is possible for the best of men to lose much of the influence of religion from the heart, and for a time to be very unconscious of it. 2. The corroding cares of the world should excite them to obtain the renewal of their strength. 3. Their strength requires to be renewed, because it is not innate, but communicated. 4. And because the servants of God have gone awfully wrong when it has not been renewed. 5. Good men have done wonders when their strength has been renewed. III. THE RENEWAL OF STRENGTH IS TO BE OBTAINED BY WAITING UPON THE LORD. 1. Prayer is the waiting posture of the soul. 2. Waiting upon the Lord includes expectation. "My eyes are unto Thee; my expectation is from Thee." 3. Watchfulness is implied in waiting upon the Lord. IV. THE BLESSEDNESS OF WAITING UPON THE LORD. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles," &c. This is expressive of—1. Steady attachment to the ways of God. "Walk without fainting." 2. Rapid progress. "Run without weariness." 3. Elevated devotion. "Mount up with wings as eagles." "They shall put forth fresh feathers as the moulting eagle." No doubt the allusion is to the velocity with which the eagle soars towards the sun, after the renewal of his feathers. (*W. Jones.*) *The waiting Christian strengthened*:—I. THE DUTY ENJOINED. To wait upon God. This implies the recognition of God as the supreme Arbiter and Disposer of all human events. It is the posture of expectancy for every blessing of which we stand in need, temporal and spiritual. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH WE ARE TO WAIT UPON GOD. 1. The way of public ordinances. 2. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper. 3. The exercise of domestic worship and private prayer. 4. Seeking to become wise unto salvation out of His written Word, and in meditation on its soul-inspiring contents. III. THE TEMPER AND FRAME OF MIND INVOLVED IN THE EXPRESSION, WAITING UPON GOD. 1. It implies the existence of an invincible faith, which nothing can destroy, although for a moment it may be disturbed. 2. This calls into action another principle closely connected with faith, and emanating from it,—the principle of patience and Christian resignation to the will of God. 3. Obedience. IV. THE ENCOURAGEMENT HERE BESTOWED ON THE FULFILMENT OF THE DUTY REQUIRED,—renewed strength shall be imparted. This implies a declension of strength, fainting, and fatigue; to all of which the Christian pilgrim is more or less exposed. 1. In consequence of the exhausted spirits of the weary traveller never being renewed, some who did run well are hindered, and halt in their career; while others adopt altogether a retrograde movement, return to the path of their former delights, apostatise from the faith, and become worse than infidels. 2. But here we have a direct promise from a covenant-keeping God, that our strength shall be renewed adequate

to all the demands which a perilous enterprise can render necessary. 3. We must speak in the language of reproof to all those who are strangers to this operation in the soul; who never do humbly wait upon God, but when chastised and rebuked of the Lord are disposed to resist His authority, to impugn His character as merciful and gracious; who give utterance to all the outbreaks of a rebellious, unsanctified heart. They are both to be censured and pitied. 4. But we speak encouragement to those who have already assumed the waiting position, and are thus tarrying the Lord's leisure. Endeavour in every possible way to cultivate this holy, humble, dependent spirit. (*H. S. Plumptre, M.A.*) *Exhaustion and renewal, in nature and in grace*:—As it is the same God who works in nature and in grace, so a most interesting analogy may be traced between His operations in both. When the earth is parched with the heat of summer, and its productions begin to languish from excessive drought, it is watered and refreshed by the showers of heaven, and its various plants and fruits not only resume their former health and vigour, but spring up and flourish with greater luxuriance than before. The flower, too, that had drooped and withered at the close of day, is revived by the cool and the dews of night, and in the morning puts forth its buds, and expands its leaves anew, delighting the eye with the beauty of its colours, or perfuming the air with the sweets of its fragrance. For every degree of exhaustion in nature, indeed, the wisest and most adequate provision is made by its all-pervading and beneficent Author. When, in like manner, the spiritual strength of the Christian is impaired, and he is ready to sink under the pressure of temptation or distress; when his consolations appear to be nearly exhausted; or when, through the prevalence of remaining unbelief and corruption, he becomes languid in duty, or faint under affliction—his decays of strength are recruited from above; new fountains are opened for his comfort; he rises as from the ground, on which he was sitting in feebleness and sorrow, and no longer with faltering, but with firm and steady steps, pursues the course of active duty, or of patient suffering, in which he is appointed to move. The stores of Divine grace provided for him are inexhaustible, and the communications of this grace imparted to him are most suitably proportioned to his need of them (Phil. iv. 19). (*D. Dickson, D.D.*) *Waiting on God*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE CONCERNING WHOM THE DECLARATION OR PROMISE IN THE TEXT IS MADE, considered as "waiting on the Lord." 1. They earnestly desire the enjoyment of His favour. 2. They diligently attend to, and take peculiar delight in, all His service and will. II. THE IMPORT OF THE DECLARATION, that they who thus wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; or, as the words might be translated, shall be renewed in strength. 1. That the principles of the spiritual life within them shall be gradually strengthened and increased. 2. That increased communications of Divine grace shall be made to them. III. THE INTERESTING EFFECTS OF ITS BEING SO RENOVATED OR INCREASED. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles," &c. This may intimate—1. That their devotions shall become more elevated and intense. 2. By that renovation and increase of spiritual strength which is the effect of waiting on the Lord, His people acquire greater alacrity and perseverance in doing His will. They shall run, or march on, and not be weary. Here the metaphor is varied, and changed into one that is more common in the sacred writings, as expressive of Christian duty, which is frequently compared to running or marching. "I will run in the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart." 3. Fortitude and patience under affliction is also the effect of that renewing and increase of spiritual strength, which is received from waiting on the Lord. "They shall walk, and not faint." Even when incapable of being active in the service of God, grace is promised for enabling them to move forward without fainting in the path of submission and suffering. (*Ibid.*) *Strength by patience*:—"New strength" is often our deepest need. The machinery of the steamship, the locomotive, or the factory may be perfect in itself, its parts exquisitely adjusted, and all ready for action; yet it is inoperative until the steam is generated and applied. So, what a human being often needs is just—motive power. Not new faculties of body or of mind; not new opportunities for action, or new fields of enterprise; not so much new knowledge either; not even new desires and affections; but "new strength"—fresh inspiration. It is painful to be in that condition in which we feel that we can, and yet cannot; that we have faculty, yet lack inspiration; that we have wings of heavenward desire, with but little power to use them. The prophet here points us to the source of all true inspiration: "He giveth power to the faint." He points us also to the condition on which this Divine energy is to be recovered: "They

that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." 1. What, then, is meant by this "waiting upon the Lord"? We use the word "wait" with reference to service: a servant "waits" upon his master or his master's guests. We use it, too, with reference to the holding of an interview with a superior: a deputation "waits" upon the Prime Minister; the Prime Minister "waits" upon His Majesty. We use the word also with reference to a state of expectation, more or less prolonged: as when we say that we are "waiting" for some friend. It is in this last sense—the sense of continuous expectancy—that the word is used in the Bible. To "wait" is more than to pray. It is to keep looking for the answer to our prayers. It is the opposite, therefore, both of despair and of impatience. Hence the Psalmist says, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." And again, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope," &c. So here the prophet does not mean to say that if we would "renew our strength," we have simply to seek an interview with God and lay our request before Him; but that if we keep looking to God with a believing and patient expectation, new vigour will come to us, our very patience will be a source of strength, and the God in whom we hope will not disappoint us. 2. "Waiting" is often the only means of receiving fresh energy. "Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening." But when the evening comes, he is exhausted. All the organs are there, but they want new strength. The man lies down on his bed, and "waits." Sleep comes upon him; and through its influence the waiting body recovers all its vigour, so that the man rises again in the morning ready for his toil. Often, too, the very best prescription which a physician can give is, "Rest and cheerful society." Wait,—wait with the confident and cheerful hope that you will by and by be stronger; and even whilst you are thus waiting the new strength will come. And that fresh life which stirs at the roots of trees and plants in the opening spring-time,—does not even that follow a period of waiting? The prophet would here encourage his countrymen to look for a similar "renewal" of their national life. A godly patience, then, is the grand secret of spiritual might. For such patience not only carries within itself the germs of strength, but also places the soul in that condition in which it is most susceptible of quickening influences and can most readily take advantage of fresh opportunities. Power is hidden in patience, as the subtle force of the lightning slumbers in the brooding cloud. Despair paralyses. Impatience, too, weakens. Magnetise a needle, and it becomes much more sensitive to the force of the magnet. And so a human heart which is constantly looking to God will be much more susceptible of all influences that come from God. The soil is ready for the vitalising shower. The sails are unfurled to catch the heavenly breeze. The ear is listening for the whispers of the Divine voice. Whereas the man who has worn himself out by impatience, or yielded himself up to despair, is too inert or too distracted to take adequate advantage of the fresh opportunities which may come at last. On the other hand, the blended eagerness and calm of the soul that is "waiting upon the Lord" make it the more receptive of all Divine influences, and keep it at least strong enough to take advantage of fresh sources of strength. (1) The calm of a believing soul may be heightened into a kind of ecstasy. Patience has sometimes a dull, torpid, chrysalis aspect; but, when the time is ripe, patience passes into a winged rapture which rises gladly into the sunshine of heaven. In all godly "waiting" there lies the capability of Godward soaring. A patient spirit has the wings of faith and hope. "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life," &c. There is the eagle again—keen-eyed and strong as before, but soaring now into the blue, bearing itself up on exultant wing, and gazing into the heavenly radiance! Exuberance of holy feeling is not a thing to be manufactured. These loftier moods have sometimes come even when you least expected them! Although we cannot always account for these moods of the soul, we might all experience them more frequently if our habitual attitude were more of a "waiting upon God." We cannot, indeed, manufacture inspiration; but what if the "breath of God" comes upon us and finds our souls too dull or too distracted to respond to its subtle influences? At the best, however, these lofty flights can only be occasional. (2) There are races to be run down here upon the earth, special duties to be performed, for which a man must gird himself by special effort. Fatigue will oppress us long before the goal is reached,—our running in the path of duty will be a thing of fits and starts,—if we do not keep expecting that God will bless our endeavours. New strength will come to us for all holy enterprise in proportion as we trust in God for results. Be sure that, in "waiting on" Him to do what we cannot, we receive all the more

energy to do what we can. (3) There is also "walking" to be done here on earth, the ordinary routine of life to be trudged through every day. And perhaps it is in this region that a godly patience is needed most for the constant renewal of our spiritual strength. There is little or no effort in holy ecstasy, and its very joy is an inspiration. Any special duty, also, tends, by its very specialty, to brace us for the doing of it; there is, moreover, the goal in view, and the prize to be won. But the ordinary homely duty of the work-day world—the monotonous path which must be daily trod, this indeed requires the most abiding patience. Men who live far from God are apt to grow sick and weary of the humdrum monotony of their daily life, especially if they have to bear some continuous burden from which they see little hope of escape. Even the drudgery of life can be transfigured in the light of the Father's love. And those who believe that their ordinary life has a Divine significance—that it is as the rough scaffolding within which a very temple may be built—and who are striving to live daily as under the eye of the heavenly Friend, have within their souls a peace which keeps them from "fainting." (*T. C. Finlayson.*) *The renewal of strength* :—I. THE MEANS OF RENEWING OUR STRENGTH, as expressed in the phrase, "they that wait on the Lord." 1. There must be approach to God. 2. Expectation. 3. A patient continuance in an expecting attitude, until we actually receive the fulfilment of the Divine promise. This phrase is descriptive, not merely of an occasional exercise, but of what is, or ought at least to be, the constant temper and frame of the believer's mind. II. To those who live in this spirit is given AN EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISE. They "shall renew their strength." Our spiritual strength seems to include chiefly three things—1. Clear and comprehensive views of the truth of God. We often say that "knowledge is power": certainly, ignorance of the truth of God is weakness. 2. A correspondence between our will and affections and the truth existing in our minds. 3. Divine consolation. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." III. THE HAPPY RESULT OF THIS RENEWAL OF STRENGTH. (*J. Entwisle.*) *The blessedness of Divine service* :—There are three blessings suggested as consequent upon this waiting—I. RENEWED VIGOUR. "They shall renew their strength." This is not arbitrary, but necessary. 1. The intellect is strengthened by holy exercises upon Divine themes. 2. The affections are strengthened by holy exercises on right objects. 3. The will is strengthened by holy exercises in godly purposes. The whole soul gets strength by such exercise. II. SOUL ELEVATION. "Mount up with wings as eagles." 1. Holy gratitude is a wing that will bear the soul aloft to its Benefactor. 2. Holy love is a wing that will bear the soul upward to its object. 3. Holy hope is a wing that will bear the soul above to its anticipated possessions. III. INTERESTING PROGRESS. "Run, and not be weary," &c. 1. Godliness is progress. It is not a stationary state. It is a running and a walking. "Forgetting the things that are behind," &c. 2. Godliness is progress without fatigue. There is no weariness in love. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The highest strength derived from the highest service* :—I. THE HIGHEST STRENGTH IS DERIVED FROM THE HIGHEST SERVICE. 1. The highest strength is not physical nor intellectual, but moral. Strength to resist the wrong, to pursue the right, to honour God and bless humanity. 2. What is the highest service? Waiting upon the Lord. To wait upon Him implies a practical recognition of His existence, personal superintendence, and absolute authority. This service must be—(1) Spiritual. (2) Supreme. II. THE HIGHEST STRENGTH IS DEVELOPED IN THE HIGHEST ACTIVITY. What is this activity? 1. Soul devotion. 2. Soul progress. (*Ibid.*) *Waiting on God* :—The Lord's people must wait—1. In simplicity of intention. On Him only (Psa. lxii. 5). 2. In faith. They "wait for the Lord, and in His word do they hope" (Psa. cxxx. 5). Even when He hides His face (Isa. viii. 17). Their faith at one time is supported only by the promises,—at other times by their own experience (Psa. xxvii. 14; Lam. iii. 25, 26; Isa. xxx. 18, xlix. 23). 3. They wait with patient perseverance. It is not only an act, but a gracious habit of mind (Psa. xxv. 5). 4. They wait with humility and self-denial. They wait on God, asking counsel, seeking strength, and imploring pardon and peace. This posture of mind becomes the ignorance and guilt and unworthiness of the creature; the perfection, the wisdom and love of such a Being. 5. They wait with submission and resignation. They wait His time, acquiesce in His methods. (*J. Cooke.*) *Waiting upon the Lord* :—These consolations are suited to men in all ages, and in all countries. We are precisely in the same position in which the Jews were found—we are equally apt to faint when under God's rod; and He seeks to inspire us with hope and confidence. I. Let us notice

THIS WAITING UPON THE LORD. And the first thing that strikes us is the language used by the prophet—language so far removed from mere formal expression. There is no mention here of the use of many words, or of certain external marks of devotion; it is simply, "Waiting upon the Lord!" Evidently the prophet uses it as representing an act of devotion, looking to God for help in the time of need. True waiting upon the Lord seems to have three features, which we suppose to be contained in the words here used. 1. Desire. 2. A collected frame of mind. 3. Trust in the Lord. II. "They that wait upon the Lord SHALL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH." We are altogether dependent upon God for our natural, as well as for our spiritual strength. God seems to observe in spiritual things a similar order to that which exists in natural things. Our natural strength requires constant renovation by the food that is convenient for us. So it is in the spiritual life: we can make no provision of grace for the future; we are called to depend upon God day by day. There are various reasons why we should constantly apply to God for a renewal of our spiritual strength. There are conflicts to be endured with our spiritual foes, within our own hearts; we live in a world that is lying in wickedness; we have to do with matters concerning the present life that are often very trying and perplexing in their nature, and often is our courage likely to fail. In an indirect manner, then, this encouraging passage of Scripture reminds us of the cause of our spiritual declensions. It is because we do not constantly wait upon the Lord. (*J. Hocart.*) *Waiting upon the Lord*:—I. THE GENERAL PROPOSITION. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." II. THE DEMONSTRATION OR CONFIRMATION OF THIS. "They shall mount up," &c. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Waiting in patience*:—Profane and desperate persons fly off in a discontent and impatience, like Jehoram (2 Kings vi. 33). The more willing we are to wait upon God the better it is for us; for He pays for time and gives us the more because we have waited. (*Ibid.*) *Strength for strength*:—"Change their strength" (marg.). This seems to be the proper sense and meaning. There is a double kind of change to be observed. 1. In quality. They shall have a new kind of strength bestowed upon them, over what they had before conversion, as Caleb had another spirit, and Saul another heart. For even before conversion there is a kind of strength which does appear, and that also in reference to religion, and the duties of it, but it is not such a strength as any are to rest themselves contented with. There is the strength of temper, and natural constitution, and a man may be able both to do and suffer very much by it. This is that which does for the most part extend itself to the outside and form of religion. The strength of wit, and reason, and understanding, and memory, and the like, while their heart and will and affections have no saving work at all upon them. There is the strength of custom, and religious education. There is the strength of civility and moral principles. This was the strength which was in Paul before his conversion. They that wait upon the Lord shall "change," that is, they shall have another strength bestowed upon them, and such as will be more useful to them. Instead of this natural, and moral, and customary strength, they shall have a supernatural and spiritual given unto them. This is different, and surpassing the other. (1) In regard of its Original, as coming from the Holy Ghost (Eph. iii. 16). (2) In the subject, for the former strength is only in the outward, this in the inward man. (3) In the effects, for this supernatural strength is able to do greater matters than the other can do, helping a man to deny himself, to overcome the world, to mortify lusts and corruptions, &c. 2. In quantity and degree. Good Christians shall through God's grace grow stronger and stronger. (1) There are some cases and conditions, especially wherein a Christian has most need of having his strength renewed unto him; as, against a new service; against some new temptation and conflict with Satan; against some new trial and affliction. (2) For the means, we may take them thus: In the renewing of their repentance; in the renewing of their covenant; in the renewing of their obedience; in the renewing of their faith. (*Ibid.*) *The strength of a Christian* is amplified by a resemblance to a threefold motion. 1. Flying. (1) The eagle is an emblem of strength renewed (Psa. ciii. 5). (2) The eagle soars aloft. (3) Here is the swiftness and agility of the motion. A good Christian performs good duties with some life and fervour in them. 2. Running. (1) The motion itself. This is a pace which is very requisite for the Christian. (*a*) Because he has a great way to go, much ground to be despatched; therefore there is need of speed for the passing over it. (*b*) But a little time, and much time lost already. (*c*) The vehemency of desire to the thing itself which we run for. It is a crown (1 Cor. ix. 25). (2) The continuance of this motion. There

are many who run, but run themselves out of breath (Gal. v. 7). There are some kinds of people in the world who all on a sudden will amend their lives. But let them meet with some strong temptation and they are presently weary of those purposes and endeavours. What is the reason of all this? Because they wanted this principle of spiritual strength. 3. Walking. Walking is less than running, and fainting is more than weariness. If then those who run are not weary, the same when they walk shall not faint. There are divers things which we are liable to faint at, which yet the Scripture takes us off from fainting at. (1) The delay of answering our prayers (Luke xviii. 1). (2) Our manifold afflictions (Heb. xii. 5). (3) The afflictions of others, and the scandal of the Cross (Eph. iii. 13). (4) The many businesses in religion—so much work to be performed. How shall we avoid it? Get a renewing of this spiritual strength day by day. (*Ibid.*) *Renewing strength* :—This it nearly concerns us to do upon these considerations. 1. In point of honour, and that especially with God Himself. Spiritual weakness is a disparagement, especially as a relapse, and after some former degrees of strength. The excellency of dignity and the excellency of strength go both together, and he that falls from the one does, with Reuben, fall also from the other. Becoming weak as water, he shall not excel (Gen. xlix. 4). 2. In point of ease. A weak Christian is a burden to himself as meeting with many difficulties which he cannot grapple with, but which prove too hard to him. There are many temptations to resist, and many afflictions to endure, and many duties to perform. 3. In point of comfort. A weak Christian will be an uncomfortable Christian. (*Ibid.*) *Waiting upon the Lord* :—I. "THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD SHALL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH." 1. This sounds as if they were in danger of becoming weary and faint in their minds. Is this really so? What do you say, Christian tradesman—you upon whom God hath laid the responsibilities of home and family—you Christian citizen—you whom the arrows of affliction have wounded—you proclaimer of the Lord's message? 2. The least that it can mean is they shall stand their ground. 3. But the margin speaks of this renewal as a change of strength, as if it would remind us of the manysidedness of the grace of God, and its perfect adaptability to our everchanging needs. II. "THEY SHALL MOUNT UP WITH WINGS AS EAGLES." This seems to say that the life of communion with God is not a long series of vapid and unemotional hours, a dead level of mechanical and spiritless employments, but a life that has rare and glorious experiences, holy aspirations, ennobling thoughts, ecstatic emotions, spirit-stirring hopes. 1. Purer air. 2. Clearer vision. 3. Untroubled quiet. 4. Rare landscape. 5. Unclouded sunshine. III. "THEY SHALL RUN AND NOT BE WEARY." Capacity for the most strenuous exertion. IV. "THEY SHALL WALK AND NOT FAINT." Is this the same as saying that we shall have the power of steady perseverance, of patient endurance under protracted trial? Did the prophet put this last in his brief summary because patience is one of those Christian graces that has its perfect work the latest? (*J. H. Anderson.*) *The strong in danger of exhaustion* :—It is a great mistake to suppose that only the puny are liable to downfalls. The truth lies the other way! The more alert and bold a youth will be, the more certainly he will at some time overtask his strength. The boy who never knew what it was to be fagged out at school is not worth much. The young man who never overdid himself and felt utterly exhausted through some strenuous exertion in a great contest will never do much in the world—he is not worth much. Not the tame, slow idlers, but the forceful men, the men who rejoice in their strength and to use their strength, the men who would rather drop than give in while another yard can be run, or another step be made, or another blow be struck for victory—these are the men who will assuredly be carried on in the great enterprise until they are weary, and when weary will be carried on by their indomitable spirit, while others are seeking rest, until at last they reel and stagger and collapse. Hence it is for these that the prophet chiefly writes. For the old, for the young, for the sick and infirm, and even for such as may be tottering into the grave, he writes for them, and all he says is true and needful for their case. But more than all, in view of the great work to which he is calling his countrymen, he writes for those who feel called upon to do something in the world, for those who are conscious of high powers, and are in the purest sense of the word ambitious. (*T. V. Tymms.*) *Waiting upon God* :—I. WHAT IS THIS WAITING? 1. It means prayer—much more than an occasional supplication, however real; it means persistent, persevering, continual prayer; it means an abiding attitude of trustful dependence upon God; it means all that is wrapped up in those beautiful words, "Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him";

it means trust in the Lord and do good; it means trust in the Lord at all times, for with Him is everlasting strength, and have no confidence in self. 2. But the prophet has a deeper thought than this. There are many things for which we can only ask and then wait in quiet stillness, things which we cannot help God to give us, things which God Himself bestows without our aid, if we are ever to possess them. Renewal often comes to men in their extremity like this. 3. But while we cannot pass over such times and such experiences, it would be unhealthy to be dwelling upon them as if they were the whole of life. They are not. We are not always faint. Usually we have, at any rate, just a little strength, and then waiting upon Him means not only prayer and uplooking, but doing His commandments like the angels, who because they do them excel in strength. II. WHAT IS THE ISSUE OF SUCH WAITING UPON GOD? The prophet's imagery is startling, and some critics would presume to call his figures somewhat mixed; but the thought conveyed is clear. The older Jewish commentators imagined they discovered here a reference to an ancient belief that at a certain time the eagle plunged into the sea and bathed off his worn-out plumage, and that afterwards new feathers grew. The Septuagint translators of the Old Testament were so sure of this bit of false science that in order to square their Hebrew Scriptures with the fashion of thought in Alexandria, they ventured to alter the words of our text, and to read, "They shall put forth new feathers like eagles," and so the old Greek version reads to-day. But we have good reason to believe that the prophet drew his imagery from familiar objects in the land of exile. There could be little doubt but that from childhood he had often looked upon some of those carved tablets on which men with wings of eagles fastened to their shoulders were common, that he had often looked on those colossal images of winged bulls and lions and men such as may be seen in our British Museum to-day. Now those composite figures had subtle meanings. They could not suggest to the prophet his religious thought, but his inspired genius laid them under tribute to assist the utterance of a thought of higher inspiration. At any rate he found in the matchless wing-power of the eagle a sublime image of an inspiring and God-seeking man. The figure of one flying through the heavens, coupled strangely with the promise of running without being wearied, represents the godly man as ever having courage to entertain great hopes. Never failing to seek and obtain fellowship with God in the highest, always daring to attempt great actions, this heavenly minded man has thoughts and yearnings which raise his mode of life above the level of common things. This man, however, has this double life. There is the soaring Godward, and there is the common drudgery of daily walk and conversation, the practical common life. (*Ibid.*) *Renewal of strength*:—As we look back on history we can see positive evidence that the promise of this text was historically fulfilled, and in the cases of the men to whom the message came first. The national life was restored, and that restoration of national life in the Jews is unique in the history of mankind; you cannot point to anything like it since man walked this earth, but it took place. It seemed impossible that these few exiles could escape from those nations, and go back to their own land and restore their institutions, but they did. And who did it? The men who were making themselves rich in those days in Eastern cities stayed there. The men who led the remnant back were God-fearing men like Ezra and Zerubbabel, men who waited on God. The wall of Jerusalem, of the second temple, would never have been built but for men like Nehemiah and Haggai, men who had their times of fear and depression and weakness, but who went to God and came back not only strengthened themselves, but able to strengthen their brethren, so that the great work was done. So to-day in every Christian Church, in every Christian enterprise, in every modern fight for righteousness and truth, there are some men who never know when they are defeated; there are some men who, because of this, are invulnerable men; and the men who, when cast down always say there is lifting up, the men who can live and die for Divine ideas, the men who to-day are converting savage races into Christian peoples and working out in painful and prosaic details, and with much danger to their lives in some cases, the glowing dreams of ancient seers respecting the transformation of mankind, these are they who wait in secret on their God. (*Ibid.*) *Exhaustion and recovery*:—1. If anything were needed to teach men the necessity for connecting their own spirits with the Divine, it is the quick exhaustion of individual resources. Even "as the stream of brooks they pass away." Faith and hope and love itself, so dewy fresh in the morning, spend themselves in noon-day's scorching heat, and run low at eventide. Sometimes, indeed, long before

the shadows are stretched out, in manhood's very prime the wasting is manifest. I can strive no more, says the tired heart. Who does not know the temptations of reaction, and the days when the lights burn low? 2. In such moods we need to look away from the crowds, and from the glaring lights of the city, to the calm glories of the moon, and the stars above our heads. All these evils, so full of fierce and destructive energies, will soon be as the dust beneath our feet. Truth and holiness and right abide for ever. To "look off" unto the eternal, to get behind the veil into the realm of true being is the need of the fevered and exhausted soul. Hidden in that secret pavilion we see things as they really are. Wrong may prosper for a time. Greed, unrighteousness, sensuality, may appear to be more stable than granite. But they are only painted cloud. We see the years move on, and the everlasting truth subdue all to itself. Maybe in revolutions and bloodshed, for the wheels of God grind inexorably and small. But at the last, evil is found to be in its nature only decay. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Such a vision restores the heart of faith. To think that we are labouring in vain is the thought that paralyses. But whatever is done for right is done for God and endures eternally. 3. But there are other thoughts that come to us in the quietude of the Divine fellowship. We are shown the infinite powers that lie concealed in the heart of a solitary man of faith. Faith is like a spark. Though it seems tiny, it is real fire, and it can set the world ablaze. Faith can work miracles. Our Lord trusted to faith to subdue humanity. It has already conquered half the world, and controls the whole. Luther changed the course of the centuries by faith. Wesley fashioned modern England by faith. Booth by faith has changed the drunkard and the sensualist into saints. All things are possible to him that believeth. If, then, truth is eternal, and faith is omnipotent, why should any difficulties, however stupendous, or failures, however extensive, lead us to despair? (*Sunday School Chronicle.*) *The source and design of spiritual strength*:—I. SPIRITUAL STRENGTH, HOW IS IT TO BE OBTAINED? There was a time when our human nature seemed to possess much spiritual strength, but there came a time when it was all lost; and from that time, in the experience of every human being, it has had to be renewed. This renewing influence must come from God; surely that is a statement in harmony both with reason and with Scripture. To speak of a man as able to strengthen himself, so as to dispense with Divine aid, is as unreasonable as it is unscriptural. As well might you talk of a leafless tree clothing itself with verdure without the vernal sun—as well of an enfeebled body recovering tone and energy without the reviving air of heaven. Who can bring strength out of weakness? who can bring life out of decay? How is this renewing influence, then, to be obtained? By waiting upon the Lord. You see the progression of ideas; it is strength that has to be renewed, and it has to be renewed by God, and God gives it when we wait upon Him. Some who like to trace the analogy between the works of nature and the works of grace, may perhaps have seen a flower which the storms of night have severely shaken, towards the morning turn wistfully to the dawn, and seem to be waiting for the coming day. Nor does it wait in vain. Beneath that bright beam the moisture that encumbered it is exhaled; its bent stalk raises itself again, its shrivelled petals expand into beauty, and it diffuses around a cheering fragrance in gratitude to the power that has renewed its strength. Your stalk may be a broken one, and your petals may be shrivelled, but by waiting upon the Lord you shall renew your strength. II. HOW SHOULD SPIRITUAL STRENGTH BE EXHIBITED? 1. In rapturous contemplation of the things of God. The eagle is a bird that soars upwards towards heaven: so is the Christian to mount upwards in holy contemplation. He has powers adapted to this exercise—powers with which he can glorify his Maker; and he must not point those eagle faculties to the dust, but let them take wing and rise. The most vigorous pinion will never reach the sun, but yet it may reach so high that earth-bound creatures shall fail to track its flight, and lose it in the glare of the excellent glory. 2. In untiring activity in the direct service of God. In common daily duty we are to run in the ways of God's commandments; but the word is more frequently employed to denote some direct obedience to some special command. We are not to spend all our time in rapturous contemplation. We are not to devote all our lives to lonely musing. It is well to rise up on wings of eagles, but now and then we must come to the level of our fellow-creatures, and in their service we are to run and not be weary. I may be very busy in connection with the Church of Christ and the advancement of the knowledge of Christ. But who is not weary, sometimes, in well-doing? It is one

thing to begin, and another thing to go on. 3. They shall walk and not faint—words which seem to denote consistency in common daily life. In vain all my lonely musing, in vain all my bustle in the kingdom of Christ, if consistency of daily life does not accompany the whole. The world expects it of me; Christ demands it of me. This is the religion of the Bible: is it not a noble thing? There is many a young man who thinks, "I find plenty of occupation for my energy in the service of the world, but if I become a religious man, then I am sure to become a poor, lifeless, morose character." Not so; for the religion of the Bible is this: mounting up with wings of eagles, running and not wearying, walking and not fainting. All your youthful energy will be useful in the service of religion, and you will find it much more happily employed than in the service of the world and of Satan. (*F. Tucker, B.A.*) *The privileges of those who wait upon God*:—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN WAITING UPON GOD? 1. Waiting, in Scripture language, is a term used to denote dependence. "These wait all upon Thee; that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season." The meaning is obviously, They all depend upon Thee; men and beasts alike. 2. Another sense in which the word "waiting" occurs in Scripture is, a willingness to be directed by the person waited upon. Thus Job says, "Unto me men gave ear, they waited, and kept silence at my counsel": which is as if he had said, "I had only to speak, and they were ready to obey my directions." And when a contrary disposition is charged upon Israel, the Psalmist expresses it by saying, "They waited not for His counsel": that is, they wanted it not, nor meant to follow it, and therefore would not wait to receive it. This sense of the word gives us another part of the character of those that wait upon the Lord. They are willing to receive direction and instruction from Him. 3. Waiting, in the Scriptures, sometimes includes the idea which we affix to it in common life; namely, that of attendance or service. II. THE SEVERAL BRANCHES OF THE PROMISE. (*S. Knight, M.A.*) *Despondency and hopefulness*:—1. The despondent are unhappy and weak, and they shrink from effort; but the hopeful are joyous and strong, and they delight to put forth their strength in action. The inertness of the despondent continually deepens their despondency, increases their weakness, and aggravates their misery. But hope feeds upon every act to which it prompts, and it grows thereby. 2. There are various kinds of hopefulness, which differ greatly in their nature and their effects. The nature of each man's hopes will be in accordance with his ruling desires, and the amount of his hopefulness will depend on that to which he trusts for the fulfilment of his desires. One man's desires, and therefore his hopes, will go forth in the direction of the pleasures of sense. What has he to trust in for the continuance of the hope that these desires shall be gratified? But, for the most part, these exhaustive pleasures rapidly fret away that on which they depend. Health, hope, and desire pass quickly away together, and a loaded table becomes an object of revulsion. If, however, his desires are set on the more refined pleasures of sense, such as the enjoyment of works of art, his hopes depend on the retention of the delicate sensibility of the organs by which he receives his impressions. But in time the eye becomes dim, and the subtle beauties of a fine painting cannot be seen; the ear becomes dull, and the sweetest music charms no more. When, again, we think of those whose pleasures are more purely intellectual, we know that an enfeebled memory puts an effectual check on the acquisition of knowledge. 3. The slight and shifting nature of the foundations on which worldly hopes are built makes it evident that they can do but little towards giving abiding and progressive strength to character, while frequent failures and disappointments depress and enfeeble. Let us, therefore, see what there is in reserve for us in the large world into which Isaiah is prepared to conduct us. We are at once made aware of its vastness, to the expanding and refreshing of our spirits, for we are brought face to face with God in all the majesty of His perfections: the infinite Greatness, to which the nations are as the small dust of the balance. This large world, the spiritual, into which Isaiah has ushered us, includes all worlds, for it is as limitless as its Ruler. We all, therefore, belong to it in one sense or another, and cannot pass out of it. (*W. Howells.*) *Strength of soul made perfect by hope in God*:—I. THE HOPES THAT ARE BASED ON FAITH IN GOD GIVE STRENGTH ENOUGH TO APPROACH HIM. This is the highest of all exercises of spiritual strength, and effectually prepares for all the rest. This is a mounting up on wings, as compared with which the rest are but running and walking. Who, then, shall give wings to a heavy laden sinner, strong enough to sustain him in his upward flight? We have not far to search for the answer. 1. He receives strength to confess his sins to the God of truth from the hope of pardon founded on God's merciful promise. 2. Hope

and strength rapidly grow when faith clearly sees and steadfastly rests on the firm ground of forgiveness in the death of Christ. 3. The justified believer derives strength to advance to closest fellowship with God from the hope that he may meet Him in likeness of character. 4. Who can measure the unfailing strength which inspires the Christian when he feels that he is safe in the threefold grasp of the Triune God? II. THE HOPES THAT ARE BASED ON FAITH GIVE STRENGTH TO LIVE FOR GOD. If we take the running of the text to mean the rendering of active public service to God, and the walking to mean steadfast advance in character, the Christian requires the strength needed for both in the approach to God. He comes down from the mount made ready, like Moses, for work in the camp at large, or in the retirement of his tent. In so far as the spiritual life is one, it is a life in God. The energy of this life manifests itself in various ways. It puts forth its utmost strength in rising towards its Source when the Christian enters into fellowship with the Father and the Son. 1. The Christian makes a hopeful start in his course of service when he clearly realises the spiritual security of his own position. 2. All the motives which the Gospel presents before him feed his hopefulness and increase his working power. "I can do all things," said Paul, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." Our deepest affections are stirred when we are told that redemption was made in love. Once more, the Christian is prompted to strenuous and persevering action by the appeal made to his desires. The highest point in his destiny is to be conformed to the image of the Son of God. "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." (1) Thus moved, the believer strives above all things, and in all things, after perfect likeness to his Saviour in personal character. (2) Keeping this high mark ever in view, he becomes strong enough to regulate by it all his social action. If called upon to act a public part, he will seek to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, that thus, while serving the Master, his own character may continually grow. (3) He also regards all the incidents of his outward history in their relation to his eternal future, and glorifies God by steadfastly acting accordingly. His largeness and clearness of view give corresponding elevation and decision to his character. Have we made the hope that is laid up in God our own? If not, some other hope will be cherished, for not to hope is not to live. But without God, without true hope. (*Ibid.*) *Mounting up; running; walking*:—Mount up with wings as eagles, run, walk. That is a very lame finish. Surely there must be some mistake. The man with so keen an eye for rhetorical effect as this writer shows could not have ended this matchless oration so tamely. It is quite clear that the order in which the prophet wrote was, "They that wait upon the Lord shall walk and not faint, shall run and not be weary, shall mount up with wings as eagles"! That is the way to finish. It's a sorry thing to begin with the eagle's flight and come down to four miles an hour! "So I saw in my dream that he went from running to going, and from going to scrambling on his hands and knees, because of the steepness of the place." You know who wrote that, and how true to the experience of a Christian is his picture. Perhaps that is the commentary on this verse. The order, then, may be the correct one, after all—not so good as a rhetorical finish, but true to life. And, at any cost, let him who speaks from the mouth of the true God himself be true. And this is true to life: "They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run; they shall walk." The flash of inspiration brings eager enthusiasm; you actively pursue your ideal for a time, and then, because of the steepness of the place, you come down to a painful walk. Is not that the history in a nutshell of what is called the progress of nearly every society or opinion that you know? Whether it be philanthropic, political, social, or religious, that seems to be true. "Mount up with wings as eagles, run, walk," and one might almost dare to add a fourth—"stand still!" (*F. L. Wiseman, B.A.*) *Untiring progress*:—But is the prophet translated rightly? Our revisers have left this text exactly as it stands in the A.V., "Mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and walk," and yet I do not think it is what the prophet meant. As we read his words the image they call up is of three modes of motion, three rates of progression—the flight of the eagle, the swift foot of the deer, and the ordinary pace of man. But the idea in his mind is not one of comparative motions. Let me translate that last word again, translate it by a word that is about as wide in its English significance as the word used by the prophet in his own time, "They shall mount up, they shall run, they shall go." The word does not say anything about the rate at which they go, and is used of the flight of the arrow through the air, or of the way of the ship driven before the wind, or of the gait of a swift-footed animal, or of the ordinary

pace of man. The prophet is not speaking of three rates of motion, but he is rather speaking of the active motion and then onward continuance. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall go on and on and not faint." This is the truth on which he is insisting before these downhearted and enfeebled Babylonian captives whose hands hang down, whose knees are feeble. The man of God, the man who waits on God, is equal to any emergency, is equal to any strength. If you want the flash of a new inspiration the man of God will receive it; if you want swift progress the man of God is equal to it; if you want steady perseverance you shall find it in the man of God also. With a stronger stroke than the eagle's wing will he be able to beat the air and penetrate to the third heaven; he will run before the chariot of the king and get to the city sooner than the fleetest horses of which even the king of Israel can boast; like Asahel he shall be lissom of limb and light of foot; and when far in the trackless desert even the endurance of the camel gives out, shall the man of God hold on his way. The man who waits upon God has three cardinal qualities which above all others will tend to the conquest of the world—buoyancy of spirits, activity, and perseverance; the man who can command these is the man who will win. (*Ibid.*) *Recuperative power*:—But it is said the prophet gives us the natural order. Then I have a question to ask. What did your man of the natural order stop running for? He stopped running because he was tired. It is precisely because he is not tired that the man of God does not stop. "They shall run, and not be weary." The whole point is there. He walks and does not faint, and he will not have to stop and take rest and food because he is faint, but goes on and on. There is no need for the word of inspiration to tell us that you can begin with a big inspiration and go on fast for a time, and then slow down to the ordinary tramp. You have learnt that to your sorrow by the bitter teaching of experience. But the message of the recuperative power, that you shall mount up with wings as eagles, run and not be weary, and go on and on knowing neither weariness nor faintness, this is the word of inspiration alone. It is a power that is not your own, a power that comes from no earthly source, a supernatural power, power from on high which the prophet is here offering. (*Ibid.*) *Strength helping weakness*:—At a certain junction the train by which I was travelling was divided into two parts. One part was taken on by the engine to the higher end of the platform, the other and hinder remained where it was. Some carriages standing on the middle line of rails were to be attached to our train. An engine came down and gave them a push, sending them towards the stationary carriages at such a rate that it seemed as though they would crash into the train with violence. But as they came round the curve from one line to the other friction and gravitation asserted their power. Every moment the speed was reduced, and finally the carriages came to a standstill a foot away from those to which they were to be attached. Then the engine and carriages of the detached front part of the train came back and all were coupled up. And away went those weary, dilatory carriages as fast as the rest. They were now coupled up to the source of the power, and the effect of every pulse of the engine was communicated to them, and had it run one hundred miles an hour so would they have done. That is the teaching of the prophet. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," they are coupled up to the source of power without, and being coupled to the power without, the effect of every throb of the engine is communicated to the carriages, and the love of every beat of the heart of God comes down to the Church of the living God. (*Ibid.*) *The power to realise ideals*:—We are constantly being exhorted to-day by good and earnest men to set a high ideal before us. But I believe that the preaching of the high ideal, divorced from the preaching of its attainment by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the reason for more than one-half the cynicism that you find amongst men from thirty-five to forty at the present day. The fact is, men are led to think they are going to conquer the whole land in five minutes, and imagine they are going to realise their ideal before they are five-and-twenty; and when they find that the nearer they ought to be getting to their ideal the farther it recedes into the distance, they are discouraged, and, out of sheer despair of ever reaching their ideal, they give it up, and laugh at those who try to pursue it. I do not say "Do not pursue your ideal," but what I say is this, "If you ever really want to make your ideal, you must be endued with the power from on high." (*Ibid.*) *Godly optimism*:—The knapsack that galls and oppresses the novice at mountain climbing is borne without fatigue by the guide who is accustomed to it. There are amateur and spasmodic philanthropists who dabble occasionally

with the great social problems, and they feel their weight and cry out in despair. But the Christian has had that care upon his heart daily, and he knows how to bear it, and before whom to lay it. But, further. He who has only seen the sorrow, the grief, the sin of the world has not penetrated to the depth of the problem. He sees the clouds and mist around the planet, but not the world itself. Who, of all men who ever lived upon the earth, was the One who had the sorrow of the world nearest to His heart? But you picture the life of the Lord Jesus Christ from the wrong angle, if you picture Him only as "the Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." He was that, but that is not the last analysis of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. None had such joy as Christ. Do you remember after His statement of great intellectual and moral truths that make the brain weary and the heart of the uninitiated faint, it is recorded that the Lord Jesus Christ's spirit leapt for joy, and He said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes"? He mounted up on eagle's wings to meet the down-coming Spirit of the Father. And look at that time when He has the burden of the world upon Him. He is making His will. What has the Lord Jesus Christ to leave? His Cross. That is His great legacy to the Church. But how does He leave it? In the power to endure it. "My peace I give unto you," that is the legacy. And when He calls us home, He who sits upon the circle of the heavens, and sees all the sorrow of this world as you and I can never see it, bids us "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." He who looks only at the burden of the world, and only sees its sorrow and shame, has not got to the last analysis of its meaning; he has not touched the Rock, is floundering in the mud. You must get deeper and deeper yet, and when you touch the Rock—the pillars of the earth—you will come to the fact that under all there is the eternal blessedness. And the man who waits upon God enters into that eternal calm and blessedness. (*Ibid.*) *Strength renewed by waiting on the Lord*:—I. WHEREIN CONSISTS THE STRENGTH SPOKEN OF BY THE PROPHET? 1. The Philistines were utterly unable to find out in what the amazing strength of Samson consisted, until he revealed it to his espoused wife. It was his religious observance of the laws of the Nazarite which occasioned his extraordinary power. His uncommon bodily strength, therefore, was from the Lord; and when He departed from him, he became weak as another man. 2. But the strength spoken of in our text is evidently not corporeal strength; it is a power seated in the mind; but neither is it intellectual vigour. It is often found in persons of weak understanding, and in minds not highly cultivated by refined education. 3. The strength spoken of is a moral, or more properly a spiritual quality. As bodily health is only found in a well-balanced and healthy state of the corporeal functions, so spiritual strength can only be found in souls into which new life has been infused, and is in vigorous exercise. The elements of this strength are—(1) Faith, founded on Divine illumination. This is the mainspring of all spiritual exercises. All men are influenced and governed by some kind of faith; but worldly men have no true faith in things spiritual and invisible. Spiritual strength especially consists in that exercise of faith called trust or confidence. (2) The affections. When love to God is ardent and constant in its exercise, then there is real strength. (3) But the essence of spiritual strength resides in the will. A fixed purpose is that which more clearly characterises the genuine Christian than anything else. When the determination of the will is not only fixed but strong, then the soul is in a vigorous state. Energy properly appertains to the will; indeed, it is nothing else but a strong will; and where this exists there will be active exertion. Where there is strength there will be diligence in well-doing. (4) Humility, meekness, peace, and joy may not seem, at first view, to contribute anything to strength, but in truth they are among the necessary elements of this vigour of mind. There may be a vigour which is the effect of a disordered state of the corporeal system—a feverish or spasmodic action which is much more violent than the strength of a healthy man. So in religion there often is observed an unnatural energy and enthusiastic vehemence. This is not genuine strength, but real disease. True piety has no greater enemy than fanaticism, which some are so undiscriminating as to confound with the fervours of true religion. There are also occasions when the best thing the believer can do is to sit still and cease from his own exertions; when everything must be looked for from God. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Holy joy is an element of strength. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." (5) The only other ingredient of spiritual strength is zeal, zeal according to knowledge. Zeal to the soul is what animal heat is to the body. Without

warmth in our desires and feelings we shall be found sickly. Zeal fills the soul with courage to encounter enemies and surmount obstacles. II. HOW SPIRITUAL STRENGTH MAY BE ACQUIRED; AND HOW RENEWED, WHEN IT HAS BEEN IMPAIRED. We are not exhorted to be strong in ourselves, but "in the Lord, and in the power of His might." But, in order to obtain aid from on high, we must make use of the appointed and appropriate means. These are all comprehended in one expression, "waiting on the Lord." III. WHAT BENEFITS AND AIDS THEY RECEIVE WHO WAIT UPON THE LORD. They are said, in our text, "to mount up on wings as eagles." The soul of fallen man naturally grovels on the earth; his face instead of being raised to heaven, is prone toward the ground. But when the Holy Spirit enters into any man, his thoughts and affections are raised to those things which are above. By the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, faith, love, and hope are brought into lively exercise; and these are as pinions to the soul. When by faith the regenerated soul draws near to God, the earth appears to recede; all its objects are seen to be diminutive; and the realities of the heavenly state are perceived, and operate with power on the susceptible mind. But such seasons of elevated devotion and delightful contemplation are not constant. Our text speaks not only of flying, but of running and walking. Reflections—1. "The men of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." When the body is debilitated and needs to be strengthened, they spare no pains or expense to recover impaired health. If they hear of a medicinal spring far off in the mountains they hesitate not to undertake the journey, and undergo the hardships of the rugged way, that they may test the efficacy of the mineral waters. And this is done commonly, in the greatest uncertainty whether the means will prove effectual. 2. As our natural life requires to be nourished by suitable food from day to day, without which it would decline and death would ensue, so the spiritual life of the Christian needs to be recruited continually, with the nutriment which is suited to its growth and strength. 3. Although every degree of spiritual strength is a precious possession, and we are not permitted "to despise the day of small things," yet it is the duty and privilege of every believer to aim at high attainments in the Divine life, and to encourage and aid others in doing the same. (*A. Alexander, D.D.*) *Condition and conduct*:—Every river needs a channel; and the wider and deeper the channel the fuller and more copious the stream, provided the waters are inexhaustible. The river is God's infinite power; the channel is our conscious weakness. By waiting on the Lord the stream flows into its appointed bed. Let the stream flow on uninterruptedly, and all your need in the way of weakness, helplessness, ignorance, emptiness will be met moment by moment. The result will be as it is figuratively expressed: We shall mount up; we shall run; we shall walk. I. THE PROMISE. "They that wait," &c. "Renew" means to "change your strength." 1. A change from one kind of strength to another. Here is a Christian, bewildered, not quite knowing why he has so perpetually failed. Now when he ceases from self and takes God as his strength, he changes his strength. 2. A change from one measure of strength to another. It is like a river or a stream—always passing away, and yet the power is always present; the power moving the mill-wheel, not by jerks, but by a continuous stream, always passing away, and yet ever flowing in; one measure of strength succeeding that which has been expended. Our whole future is mapped out with tests and trials, but we need not be afraid of these things if we are in the stream of the Divine supply. You see the eagle mounting up by a power that God has given it. But it is possible to rise by another kind of power. By a sudden impetus or effort. You throw a stone into the air. Watch it a bit and down it comes again; the power has spent itself. So it is possible for the Christian to be moving on by a power that very soon expends itself, and by a process of exhaustion he falls back again under the gravitating influence of his evil tendencies. This is not the strength spoken of here. Our Lord refers to a similar thought in John iv. 14, "The water that I shall give him shall become in him." That word "become," in the new version, is full of deep meaning in this connection. It puts before us the thought, not of a new gift, but of a new experience of an old gift. As long as you rest in the place of power and blessing the stream will flow through you unceasingly. II. THE CONDITION of all this. "Waiting upon the Lord." What is it to wait? There must be stillness of soul, dependence, expectation. III. THE RESULT. Heavenly-mindedness. "He shall mount up." There are two wings in our spiritual ascent—faith and obedience. If we try to rise by means of faith alone we shall be like a bird with one wing. If we trust and obey, obey and trust, we rise into a purer atmosphere, and

have a clearer vision—we live in the very presence of God. This threefold description of mounting up, running and walking, presents three aspects of the same character. If I am to run and walk I must be in close communion with God; I must know what it is to mount up. Then there is the "running," that is ready obedience—a mark of the true servant. The "walking" is the most important part after all. It is far easier for some of us to run than to walk. We like a little bit of excitement or emotion. To walk we want something like continuous, sustained evenness of conduct, progressing quietly and steadily day by day in the common round of life; not impulsive, not capricious, not changeable; without show, humble, and always the same. For this we need power. And that power God has provided. (*Evan H. Hopkins, B.A.*) *Waiting upon God* :—One brother in the ministry asked me, "Is there not a danger of too great passivity?" I said—"Oh yes, my brother, as long as we think it is our activity that must do it, then passivity robs us of time and strength. But once we understand that it is God that must work it in us, then I understand that my highest passivity will be my highest activity, for when I give myself entirely away to God, God can work in me, and then I will work as they that wait upon the Lord." 1. If you are to wait aright upon the Lord, you must learn to know Him, you must turn away your thoughts and eyes and heart and trust from everything, and set them upon God alone. My conduct in waiting for a man, or waiting on him, will depend entirely upon what I think of him. One who waits upon the king behaves in a different way from one who waits upon an ordinary person. And all our waiting upon God will depend upon one thing—the knowledge that we have of Him. But how does God reveal Himself when He calls upon us to wait upon Him? (vers. 25–29). He never is weary. He has kept the world going all these ages; and my short life of sixty, seventy, or eighty years—will my God not care for and maintain that? When I look at what He does for the stars, I realise that His work is done every moment. And God, in His omnipotence and faithfulness, is willing to work in my heart every moment of the day. 2. The second great thing is to know ourselves, to be willing and determined to accept what God reveals about us. And what does God reveal in contrast with His great omnipotence? Our utter impotence. If a number of ships of war were sent out to sea, and were ready to start at any moment, and if the question were asked, what are they waiting for?—the answer would likely be one of two things: either that they were waiting for supplies, or waiting for orders. Child of God, that is to be your position. You are to wait for supplies. Wait for the power of the Holy Spirit every day. Cultivate also the habit of waiting for orders. Study and love your Bible, but remember it is God who must give the orders, and you will fail if you take them from a book. Love your Bible and fill your heart with it, but let God apply it in your daily life. 3. Once more, if I am to wait upon the Lord aright I must study well what this word "wait" in itself implies. It implies patience. The Bible speaks about waiting patiently, and also about waiting quietly. You must cultivate that habit. How can you do it? When you go into your closet for your morning devotions, do not, as is very often done, read the Bible and think about it and pray about it, and then get up and go. But do something else in between. Before you read, set yourself still that your soul may realise, I am waiting for God to come in and take possession of me for to-day. That is your great need. And then, before you pray, sit still, and shut your eyes and say, Will God now listen to me for certain? Learn to come into blessed fellowship with God. Then wait continually—not one or two days, not one moment, but all the day (Psa. xxv. 5). (*Andrew Murray.*) *Life's order and the Divine sufficiency* :—We find here the true order of experience in life. 1. First comes the "flying" stage. The period of fresh, wild enthusiasms; the season of zeal without discretion, when all sorts of impossibilities are dreamed, all sorts of vain things attempted. This mood comes at the beginning, and not at the end of our career. It is in the period of youth that we have our ambitious dreams, and take our higher flights. Thank God for the flying stage while it lasts, for we do get visions in those flights that abide with us long after our wings have dropped off, and we have learned that the ether is not our element; visions whose memory helps to cheer us as hereafter we trudge along the monotonous and dusty ways of life's hard routine. Youth is full of impulses, full of excesses, full of exaggerations. Let us not be impatient of them. It is a grand thing that there is one time in our lives when we have wings. Too soon the wings, like those of Icarus, melt, and we drop to mother earth again. Too soon a hard and cynical world converts

our ingenuous confidence into self-mistrust. In religious experience youth is the time of wings. Its faith is romantic, the thrill of its devotion is exquisite. The spiritual is so real. God is so near. Doubt seems so impossible, and elements of character are forming then that we should be poor indeed without in future time. But the period comes when these youthful impulsions give place to the more restrained and disciplined energies of life, like those of the runner who has trained himself to maintain his pace, and to maintain it by not exceeding it. But running is harder than flying. Watch the bird in the air. Nothing looks less like effort. 2. When we have done flying, we go on running. We have found that after all we have to live on *terra firma*. But there is immense energy in us still. Thank God, too, for the running stage. That is the time when we are spiritually aggressive, when we count as an active force in the world. 3. But that stage, too, passes. And then we come to the quiet, steady, persistent "walk." And it is this that tries our mettle most of all. For we have lost the exhilaration of youth and the stimulus of strong emotions. We traverse the solid unromantic ground of principle, while the ghost of many a shattered illusion haunts our path. It is the period of disenchantment; when we discover the bounds of the practical, and when we have a stronger sense of life's limitations than of its possibilities. To do this makes greater demands upon our moral steadfastness than to do either of the before-mentioned stages in our life experience. Patiently to endure, persistently to press on—whatever the burdens we must carry, whatever the inequalities and roughnesses of the way, whatever the obstacles that lie and the enemies that lurk in our path, whatever the tempests that beat overhead—requires a strength of character and a heroism of soul that are the last achievement and the highest triumph of the spiritual life. (*J. Halsey.*) *The Christian's walk* :—We find the same idea also in the New Testament with spiritual applications. There, throughout, we find the Divine life in man described as a "walk." To "walk worthy of his high vocation" is the supreme exploit of the Christian's faith. Other images are used; those of the runner in the stadium, and the wrestler in the arena; but it is always on the walking that stress is laid. It is the daily walk along the beaten path that reveals the depth and sincerity of our religion. Paul had had his eagle "flights," but he did not make much of them. "Caught up into the third heaven" he had seen "visions and revelations"; but he does not appeal to them as any sign of special grace. He had "run" swiftly to and fro on many an errand of evangelisation; but he does not dwell on these as having called forth any remarkable manifestations of the Divine helpfulness. It was as he pursued the ordinary routine of his ministry along the common ways, with the humbling "thorn" ever rankling in his flesh, that he felt the need of and received special succour. It was in this greater exigency that his inner ear caught the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee." (*Ibid.*) *Standing still* :—But, you say, if this progression of ideas is a true climax, flying, running, walking—why stay there? Why not logically carry the idea further, and say that standing still is the sublimest consummation of the Divine life in man? Even so. That is precisely what Paul does say. "Having done all, to stand!" It is when all the romance is past, when all the effervescence of youth has subsided, when all incitements from without and all excitements from within are over, when life has settled into its groove, and, surrounded by the monotonous and the sordid, we find our horizon limited by "the daily round" and "the common task"—it is then that faith rises to its true heroism, enabling us to maintain our spiritual level and hold our ground against the deadening inroads of formality and indifferentism. (*Ibid.*) *Renewing strength* :—Human strength is of many kinds—physical, mental, spiritual; but every form of human strength must of necessity spend itself. All strength apart from God is derived strength, and is consequently measurable, and must come to an end. On the other hand, Divine strength never fails. These two things seem very far away: man with his faintness, God with His eternity and inexhaustible omnipotence. If we can bring these two together, what a wondrous thing will happen! Then the sacred words of the text will be fulfilled. I. WE SEE HOW A TRUE CHURCH MAY BE DESCRIBED. "They that wait upon the Lord." II. WE SEE WHAT THE LORD'S WAITING PEOPLE NEED. To "renew their strength." 1. Because they are human. 2. Because they are imperfect. 3. We must renew our strength, for it is for our honour, comfort, and safety. 4. It is for God's glory and our own usefulness. III. HOW ARE WE TO RENEW OUR STRENGTH? By continually waiting upon God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The continued renewal of strength* :—No man is as strong as he desires to be. Many

things he desires to do but cannot. He would exhaust his strength if he continued working. God has provided hours for rest and refreshment. I. SPIRITUAL LIFE DEMANDS RENEWAL. Strength for to-day does not insure strength for to-morrow. Full provision has been made to supply this need of the soul. The bread of life for the hungry, the water of life for the thirsty. II. ALL RENEWAL OF STRENGTH SHOULD BE REGULAR. Spasmodic efforts are dangerous. There must be a regular feeding on God's Word and promises. III. RENEWAL OF STRENGTH MEANS A RENEWAL OF ACTIVITY. Use all strength as a gift of God. When exhausted renew your power. (*R. M. Donaldson, D.D.*) *Waiting on God* :—This passage has the ring of an Alpine horn. It is very easy to misunderstand this word "wait," and regard it as meaning inactive passivity. There is a vast deal of verve in the original Hebrew; it signifies to be strong enough to hold out. It expresses a solid endurability such as belongs to a stiff piece of oak that never bends and never breaks under heavy pressure. Thence the word came to signify patience as opposed to worry and despondency. "Waiting" denotes a habit of mind—a devout habit that loves to call on God, a submissive habit that is ready to receive just what God sees fit to send, an obedient habit that is glad to do just what God commands, a stalwart habit of carrying such loads as duty lays upon our backs. It is a religion of conscience, and not a mere effervescence of pious emotion. In short, it is a grace, just as much as the grace of faith, or love, or humility. If you and I have this grace, and if we practise it, what may we expect? 1. That God will "renew our strength." For every new occasion, every new trial, every new labour, we shall get new power. If we have failed, or have been foiled, God will put us on our feet again. I have often gone to Saratoga, in the heat of the early summer, quite run down, and my vitality burned out as coal gets exhausted in the bunkers of a steamer. Then I repaired to one of the tonic springs and "waited" on its bubbling waters, trusting them and taking them into my system. Presently a new appetite for food was awakened, and a new life crept into my ten fingers; walking became a delight, and preaching as easy as for a lark to sing. All this renewal of vitality was the result of waiting on one of those wonderful health-fountains. I brought but little there. I took a great deal away. Just such a well of spiritual force is the Lord Jesus Christ. All the men and women of power are men and women of prayer. "Waiting on the Lord" by prayer has the same effect on them that it has on an empty bucket to set it under a rain-spout. They get filled. When I have heard C. H. Spurgeon pray I have not been so astonished at some of his discourses. 2. Waiting on God not only gives strength, it gives inspiration. "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." God means that every soul which waits on Him shall not creep in the muck and the mire, nor crouch in abject slavery to men or devils. When a soul has its inner life hid with Christ and lives a life of true consecration it is enabled to take wing, and its "citizenship is in heaven." He gains wide outlooks; he breathes a clear and crystalline atmosphere. He outflies many of the petty vexations and grovelling desires that drag a worldling down into the mire. What cares the eagle, as he bathes his wings in the translucent gold of the upper sky, for all the turmoil, the dust, or even the murky clouds that drift far beneath him? He flies in company with the sun. So a heaven-bound soul flies in company with God. (*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*) *Waiting on the Lord* :—I. One of the oldest and best tried rules of religion is THE SACRED DUTY OF COMMUNION WITH GOD. The expression "wait upon" is a most felicitous one, because while it includes prayer it means and covers so much more. 1. To wait on the Lord is the drawing nigh unto Him, to pour out our wants before Him, though He knows them so well, to plead the necessities arising out of our own ignorance, waywardness, and poverty of soul, to ask for His light to shine in our darkness, to clear our minds of the mists and fogs of native prejudice and of traditional error, to make plain before us our path of duty, and to keep our feet steadfast therein, to take into His loving hands the discipline and correction of our hearts, and to make us willing to undergo it, to keep us from all vanity and lies, and from every form of subtle self-deception, so that we may ever be true to Him and to ourselves. But waiting on the Lord implies much more than this. Although we have a perfect right to go to God and pour out every wish and longing of our hearts, worthy and unworthy alike, yet this is not by any means the whole or the highest part of communion with Him. Poor and barren and diseased must that heart be which has no song of praise to sing, no gratitude to pour forth for past deliverances and for present mercies, which has no emotion of adoring love for a goodness so infinite and untiring. To make our religion a delight and a glory we

must surely wait on the Lord with songs of gladness and joy, praising Him more for what He is, and for what He has taught us to know and believe Him to be, than for the good gifts which His bounty hath bestowed. 2. Yet, further, there is a waiting on the Lord which is neither prayer nor praise, but silent and serene contemplation, when the mind muses upon His wondrous works and ponders over the stupendous fact that the infinite and eternal God can and will and does come near to the soul of His finite and imperfect creature man, and permits the ineffable solace and privilege of communion with Himself. 3. But all forms of waiting on the Lord involve the personal, conscious, voluntary act of the mind or soul within us, for which no mere ceremony or ritual can be a substitute. All outward observances, whether private or public, have no meaning, and can have no avail without that conscious voluntary movement of the soul towards God. If public worship helps you to this direct personal communion with God, I need not say you are bound to attend it; you are sure to do so of your own free will without any pressure. Experience has proved that, to a great many souls, public worship is the greatest help they ever get, that it gives wings to their holiest prayers and brightness to their gladdest songs of praise, and that it does bring them nearer to God than any other external agency that they know of. But this is not true of all. And I am bound to say that those who find the least pleasure and the least benefit from public worship are those who do not wait on the Lord in private. They do not know by experience the blessings of communion, and therefore these outward aids in public worship are of little use to them. It is like a banquet spread before one who has no appetite or whose habitual food is altogether different, or like a rich and perfect performance of music to one who is altogether destitute of any musical sense. II. I turn now to dwell on THE NATURAL EFFECTS OF WAITING ON THE LORD, as stated by the prophet, and vouched for by myriads of the faithful and devout in all ages. 1. "They shall renew their strength." This is what we all need in this weary world, whose toils and cares and temptations perpetually remind us of our weakness and the need of invigorating grace. We renew our strength in the battle with our besetting sin, in the conquest of fierce passions and unruly tempers, and in the maintenance and steadfastness of high resolve. We renew our strength to meet misfortunes and to carry our load of grief or bereavement, to keep a cheerful heart under the depression of disease, and when chilled by the cold shadow of death. And we renew our strength for all enterprise which makes demand on our courage and truthfulness. 2. This leads us to notice the three degrees of moral and spiritual activity presented to us in the figurative language of the prophet: "They shall mount up on wings as eagles: they shall run and not be weary: they shall walk and not faint." (1) The first typifies lofty aspiration and heroic action. There is a type of soul which soars like the eagle, its daring eye not flinching from the dazzling sun itself but drawn by it higher and higher with steadfast gaze till it is lost to sight of those on earth below. These are the great seers of the human race whose absorbing love and adoration of God has filled them with light and knowledge of Him little dreamed of by the many who have feebler and lower aspiration. The brighter the light before them, the more eagerly and steadfastly they rise upwards to greet it and to bathe in its splendour. Yet the power of thus rising on eagle's wings is not the only quality to be noticed in this symbolism. There is also the heroic courage in speeding one's way as on eagle's wings in defiance of earth-born cries and warnings, and in lofty scorn of earthly interests and pursuits. To one who thus heroically soars towards God and His light, the things of time and earth seem trivial and contemptible. Such strength of rising as this can only come by closest communion with God. (2) While only the few can thus fly, many can only run. Those who have not eagle's wings still have some power of motion, they can run on the earth and in the path of God's commandments. Whatever it be in their power to do, that power will be increased and their strength renewed by waiting upon God. Running is undignified, say some, it is more stately to walk, more dignified even to sit still. They will run nimbly enough after pleasure, wealth and fame, but not after the things which God bids them run after. (3) But as only few can fly and only some can run, there are still some who can only walk. And for them, too, the promise holds good, "They shall renew their strength, they shall walk and not faint." God never expects more from us than He has already given. If we are not of the eagle type and have but feeble aspirations; if we are not of the active, zealous type and cannot run, we may yet be able to walk, to move as fast as our poor, weak, or crippled limbs will carry us, and if we do not wish to faint by the way we shall surely wait on the

Lord. For the less strength we feel we have, the more we shall need and ask from Him. Indeed I think we poor walkers sometimes make the most progress, for we lean more entirely on God and draw more constant supplies of His grace. (*C. Voysey, B.A.*) *Running and walking* :—Any racehorse will start at full speed; but how few have staying power! The tyro in cycling will go at full pelt; but only the experienced rider can walk or stand. To pursue the common track of daily duty—not faltering nor growing weary—to do so when novelty has worn off, when the elasticity of youth has vanished, when the applause of the crowd has become dim and faint—this is the greatest achievement of the Christian life. For this, earthly and human strength will not avail. But God is all-sufficient. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *God's grace sufficient for all life's stages* :—The spiritual teaching of this verse is, that for all the stages and moods of our life-pilgrimage Heaven's grace is available and sufficient. (*J. Halsey.*) **They shall mount up with wings as eagles.**—*God's eagles* :—I. The eagle is built for FLIGHT. 1. His structure marvellously combines strength, lightness, and muscular power. The anatomy of the bird shows feathers, bones, muscles, and sinews to be designed by the Creator for the purpose of flying; and a master specimen of perfect adaptation. *E.g.*, the cylindrical structure of bones and feathers makes each virtually a balloon, so that when the wings are spread for flight, the tendency is upward instead of downward, and no effort is needed to support the body upon the air, which rather buoys it up. 2. Built for high flights, capable of mounting above all other birds, no other being capable of rising to such elevations, or being so at home in the upper atmosphere. In fact, as the air becomes more rarified, the bird seems to soar with greater ease and rapidity, and finds it the more natural to ascend. 3. Built for sustained and tireless flights, maintaining himself without exhaustion for any length of time, and resting on the wing. Those who have watched the eagle's flight have observed that there is no apparent effort; he rather finds in it rest and recreation than a struggle to maintain himself. 4. Built for fearless flight. The eagle soars above the abyss without even a trace of timidity, a stranger to all fear. What to us is danger, is to him delight, challenging and provoking his flight. II. The eagle is built for REPOSE. No bird can be so still and motionless when he rests. When the eagle perches on the crag, and grasps it with his talons, the more he settles down, the firmer and more immovable his clutch. The anatomy of his legs exhibits the adaptation of his whole structure to the purposes of perching. The weight of the body, resting upon the lower portion of the legs, increases the tenacity of the hold upon whatever is chosen as a resting-place. His sleep, therefore, is secure, for his grasp can only relax as he rises upon his feet and so releases all the sinews by which his talons grip the rock. He goes to sleep, therefore, without a doubt that he will find himself there in the morning. III. The eagle is built for the STORM. He perceives it afar off and is not afraid. This king of birds detects the approach of the storm-cloud, not only with eyes and ears, but with mysterious senses to which we are strangers; and, when as yet there is no appearance of the coming tempest above the horizon, he scents its approach, lifts up his majestic head, looks toward the coming storm, and prepares himself for a gigantic grapple with the forces of nature. He welcomes tempests before which wild beasts flee to their dens in terror. He preens his feathers, shakes himself as tornado and tempest approach, actually takes the very front and leads the storm, outflying it at its most rapid pace, rejoicing in its violence, and, when he will, rising far above it into the clear heights of cloudless day, whence he looks down upon it. IV. The eagle LIVES A SOLITARY LIFE. There is no bird so alone. Other birds go in flocks; the eagle, never; if two are seen together, they are mates. Its majesty consists partly in its solitariness. It lives apart because other birds cannot live where and as it lives, and follow where it leads. V. The eagle is TRAINED BY DISCIPLINE. The parent bird trains the young to fly; and, if need be, the mother pushes the young bird off the edge of the cliff, and lets it fall over into the abyss, and tumble screaming and screeching, apparently doomed to be dashed in pieces; but the mother bird watching, drops like a plummet, with incredible rapidity, beneath the young bird, and receives it on her broad maternal wings and bears it up to the heights only to let it drop again; until, by and by, the fledgling is prepared, as the mother bird swoops down to arrest its fall, to take the wing and follow the parent on her majestic flight. VI. The healthy eagle IMPARTS STRENGTH. A sick eagle, whose vitality had been reduced by long confinement, was set loose and placed on the heather, but only drooped and seemed ready to die. Then another eagle, that from the heights saw the feeble bird,

swept down and touched and fanned it with his great wings. This was repeated until the sick bird, gradually feeling the inspiration of the other's vitality, preened itself, expanded its wings, and ultimately followed in the upward flight. We seldom get an upward look, aspiration, or ascent, unless someone from the heights sweeps down and touches us. VII. The eagle, thus built for the heights, is NOT CONTENT TO DWELL ON EARTH. (*W. P. Ray.*) *Life with wings*:—Waiting is not so much a transient action as a permanent attitude. It is not the restless vagrant calling at the door for relief, it is rather the intimacy of the babe at the breast. They who thus wait upon the Lord shall obtain a marvellous addition to their resources. They shall obtain wings. We do well in picturing the angel presences to endow them with wings. At the best it is a clumsy symbolism. What do we mean by wings? We mean that life has gained new powers, extraordinary capacity; the old self has received heavenly addition, endowing it with nimbleness, buoyancy, strength. What are some of the characteristics of life with wings? 1. It is life characterised by buoyancy. We become endowed with power to rise above things! How often we give the counsel one to another, "You should rise above it!" If, when we give the counsel, we could give the wings, the things that bind to the low plains of life might be left behind. How frequently we are held in bondage by grovelling to the mean and trifling. Some small grievance enters into our life and keeps us from the heights. Some disappointment holds us in depressing servitude. Some ingratitude paralyses our service and chills our delight in unselfish toil. Or some discourtesy is done to us, we cannot get away from it. Or, perhaps, it is "the murmur of self-will," or "the storm of passion" which prevents our emancipation. When we get the wings we have the power to rise above these trifles, and even above the things that may be larger than trifles and may appear like gigantic hills. The life with wing-power is not the victim of "the spirit of heaviness." 2. Life with wing-power is characterised by loftiness. "Mount up!" We speak of a "lofty character" as opposed to one who is low or mean. There is no feature that the Bible loves more to proclaim than this "aboveness." "Seek the things that are above"; "Set your mind on things above." It speaks also of dwelling "with Christ in the heavenly places." 3. The wing-life is characterised by comprehensiveness. High soaring gives wide seeing. Loftiness gives comprehension. One man offers his opinion on some weighty matter and he is answered by the charge, "That is a very low ground to take." The higher you get, the greater will be the area that comes within your view. We may judge our height by the measure of our outlook. We have not got very high if we only see ourselves; nay, we are in the mire! "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." It is well when we get so high that our vision comprehends our town, better still when it includes the country, better still when it encircles other countries, best of all when it engirdles the world. It is well when we are interested in home missions; better still when home and foreign work are comprehended in our view. "Lord, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us." How narrow the outlook! One day the vision of the disciples will be immeasurably enlarged. 4. The wing-life is characterised by proportion. To see things aright we must get away from them. We never see a thing truly until we see it in its relationships. We must see a moment in relation to a week, a week in relation to a year, a year in relation to eternity. Wing-power gives us the gift of soaring, and we see how things are related one to another. An affliction looked at from the lowlands may be stupendous; looked at from the heights it may appear little or nothing. "This light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." What a breadth of view! (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The happy effects of waiting upon God*:—They that wait upon the Lord mount up. I. WITH THE VIGOUR OF EAGLES. In all true Christians there must be a considerable attention to heavenly things. They are all exhorted to "set their affections on things which are above, and not on things which are on the earth." Therefore, they cannot be true believers whose minds are not under the influence of spiritual and heavenly objects. But, among true Christians there is a great difference. Some have their minds much more in heaven than others. This difference arises from their difference in waiting upon God. Waiting upon God their faith becomes strong and lively; their love pure and fervent; their hope joyful and blessed. These graces, like the wings of an eagle, lift their souls above worldly things. Their flight is sustained so long as these wings of the renewed soul continue unwearied; and when, like all things

belonging to the human soul, they wax feeble, their strength is renewed by waiting upon God. They who do not wait upon God are weighed down to the earth, and find the concerns of this world, like the fogs and mists of a darkened atmosphere, clouding their prospects and obstructing their progress. II. WITH THE EASE OF THE EAGLE. There is not only a strength of character, but a simplicity, an ease belonging to them who wait upon God with diligence and constancy to which others who are deficient in this duty can never attain. Now religion is eminent and exalted in proportion as it is easy and unconstrained. III. WITH THE ELEVATION OF EAGLES. With what majesty does the eagle soar through the heavens and pursue his lofty course, unmoved by those little persecutions of the feathered race which equally bespeak their fear, and their conscious inferiority! Here you behold a fit emblem of the man who, by waiting upon God, mounts up with wings; and, nobly disregarding the censures of the world, which originate in a consciousness of its own inferior excellence, and in a hatred of those qualities it can never reach, pursues his heavenly flight without one retaliating stroke, without one malignant feeling. And see how, even in his sublimest course, his eagle eye surveys with interest the concerns of this lower world. By waiting upon God he is enabled to unite the benevolence, the magnanimity, and the heavenliness of the saint, with the sobriety, the wisdom, and the activity of the citizen of the world. (*M. Jackson.*) *Mounting as on eagle's wings*:—This is the disposition of good Christians to be heavenly in their meditations and desires. This they are upon these grounds—1. Out of respect to Christ who is their Head, and is in heaven already (Col. iii. 1). 2. The new nature which is in Christians inclines them hereunto likewise. What makes fire to go upward? It has a principle in it which does so dispose it. Everything acts suitably to its principles, and so it is here. Believers are born from above, and therefore it is that they are carried up thither. 3. The end they are ordained to. They are "begotten to a lively hope," and to a "heavenly inheritance." Now where should the minds of great heirs be but where their estates lie? (1 Pet. i. 3, 4.) (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Wings*:—1. The real marrow of life is in its higher experiences. We manage to endure a great deal that is disagreeable and depressing, if now and then come seasons of spiritual uplifting, moments of soul glow and sunrise. "They shall mount up on wings as eagles." This is our privilege. The soul is free. It has wings in the joy of pure emotion, in the upspringing might of faith, in the ardour of heavenly aspiration, in the swift flight of love, in the liberty of exultant hope. 2. With some these wings are often folded. They droop often through sheer weariness. They trail frequently in the dust. Making ample allowance for differences in temperament and scope of thought in individuals, the devout nature is not ignorant of blessed experiences that impel the soul onward—sympathies, insights, ardours—refreshing and enriching to the hidden life. 3. A few hints will awaken precious memories. You remember how the spring odours of the tender-leaved woods seized your finer sense as you came forth from the place of prayer, and wafted your thought to the trees of Paradise. More than once, in the solitude and by the sea, amid the noon's delicious peacefulness, and when the fresh winds blew health and music out of the west, over leagues of prairie, starred with unnumbered flowers, your heart overran with sacred emotion, and expanded to embrace the beautiful repose! Wings were yours. Then, too, after a season of spiritual depression, where you had gone mournfully with a sense of barrenness and burden, the painful spell was finally broken, and you seemed set in "a large place." Your soul bounded outward into blessed light. Great freedom was yours, and you wondered why such doubt could have fettered the faith that now exults in the joyful confidence of a son beloved. You remember how, before now, you have come into the church heavy, gloomy, discouraged, an evil world shadowing your hope, and life looking sepulchral and poor amid earth's losses and changes and delusions, and how hymn and psalm and confession and prayer have little by little stolen away your unrest, and then how the Word of grace uttered from the depths of a prophetic soul flowed with healing, and light, and comfort, to your heart, and how, on the wings of its benediction, you rose up stronger and clearer visioned, and went forth as on the landscape of a better world. But it is in the closet, if you live nobly, that your strength is most graciously renewed. 4. We give grudgingly, we labour in heaviness, we minister painfully, we worship coldly, we live meanly, until the higher life is begotten within us—until the soul gets a glow, and an earnestness, and a breadth of sympathy, and an impulse of high and pure aspirations that make it a joy to do good. Love is always winged. If you would conquer your

besetments, rise to a more gracious benevolence, enjoy a livelier consciousness of eternal things, and have your Christian duties delightful; get the ardent, unselfish, consecrated heart of love, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer and Comforter. (*H. N. Powers.*) *As eagles:*—I. THE ILLUSTRATION. 1. Eagles' wings are connected with strength. God spoke by Moses to the children of Israel on this wise—"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself." Here God's almighty power, displayed in the deliverance from Egypt, and with all the varied privileges of Israel, is compared to the strength of eagles' wings. In Deut. xxxii. 11, it is said, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him." Here the eagle's wings are brought before us in connection with the support of the young, but at the same time with the purpose which the parent bird has in disturbing her nest and her young, namely, to teach them to provide and to fly. All this is more than verified in the experience of those who wait upon the Lord. They are strong, and their strength is continually being renewed—which no circumstances can exhaust, and which in no emergency will be allowed to fail them. Wherein does the strength of the believer rest, then? The apostle John describes this strength when he says, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you; and ye have overcome the wicked one." In other words, the strength of the believer is manifested in opposition to moral and spiritual evil—in opposition to all that is erroneous and contrary to the will and mind of God. Error is very attractive to some minds, but he who waits upon the Lord obtains that spiritual vigour of mind which enables him to throw off the poisonous influence of error, and to abide in the truth. True manliness consists in refusing to do what is wrong, whoever be the tempter, or whatever inducements there be to give way to the temptation. True Christian manliness fears God, and fears no one besides. The promise of the text, then, is that such true energy of mind shall belong to those who wait upon the Lord. It is strength which St. Paul describes as connected with the power of God's might. It is strength which is manifested oftentimes in connection with human weakness, and with the changes that are incident to our human and worldly condition. Observe the expression, "shall renew their strength"; for the eagle, although noted for its strength, is not always strong. There is a season when it loses the feathers of its wings, and sits solitary, drooping, and sad, unable to seize upon its prey, and no longer the terror of the smaller birds; but it is noted that during that season, though the eagle cannot rise to the sun as she was wont to do, she shows herself to the sun, and basking in the sunshine, her feathers grow again, her strength comes back, and she mounts up and meets the sun as of old. And what a striking indication this is of the experiences of those who are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might"! It is not strength which is liable to no variableness. There are seasons of depression for those who are strong in the Lord. 2. But the Bible speaks of the eagle, and of eagle's wings, in connection with swiftness. If you refer to Deut. xxviii. 49, you will find it said, in reference to the judgment which the Lord would bring upon Israel if they persevered in sin, "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand." We may see the fulfilment of this by referring to the Lamentations of Jeremiah (Lam. iv. 19). The eagle's wings are used for the swiftness with which they propel the eagle in his flight. The believer, waiting upon God, is one whose experience is described in the sacred song in this remarkable language—"Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib"—chariots noted for swiftness. 3. The eagle is noted for its peculiarity of flight. It is said that it is furnished with two pairs of eyelids, and that the inner one is transparent, and is drawn over the eye because its flight is always directly towards the sun. Whereas other birds see other objects in the light of the sun, it is the eagle's peculiarity of flight that its eye seems to be fixed upon the sun, and the eyelid of which I speak seems to be for the purpose of protecting the eye from the scorching brilliancy of the sunlight. Now, in this respect there is a similarity to the experience of those who wait upon the Lord. The believer in Jesus Christ is one whose tendency is directly to the Sun of Righteousness. And what a consolation it is, that in the humanity of Jesus the believer finds protection from all that is awful in contemplation of Deity! 4. The flight of the eagle is the flight of life. Think of the contrast between the flight of an arrow and the flight of an eagle. The flight of the arrow is only as high as it is propelled

by the impulse that is given to it from the bow; when that impulse ceases, down comes the arrow again. It is not the flight of life, but of impulse. The flight of the arrow may be likened to those impulses for good which some who profess and call themselves Christians have. II. WHO ARE THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD? And when is it that they are experiencing this blessed promise? The eagle is flying highest when she sees the world the least. The eagle rejoices in light. When she mounts up with her strongest wings it is in the sunlight, contrasting in this respect with the flight of the bird of night. It is always a good sign, when we want the light thrown upon everything that we have to do with—when we want to bring all our motives, and all our actions, and all our plans into the light of God's truth. On the other hand, "He that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." (*W. Cadman, M.A.*) *The wings of surrender and trust*:—We might name our wings the wings of surrender and of trust. If we will only surrender ourselves utterly to the Lord, and will trust Him perfectly, we shall find our souls "mounting up with wings as eagles" to the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, where earthly annoyances or sorrows have no power to disturb us. (*Mrs. Pearsall Smith.*) *Crawling and soaring*:—The caterpillar, as it creeps along the ground, must have a widely different view of the world around it, from that which the same caterpillar will have when its wings are developed, and it soars in the air above the very places where once it crawled. And similarly the crawling soul must necessarily see things in a very different aspect from the soul that has "mounted up with wings." (*Ibid.*) *Overcoming*:—This is what the soul on wings does. It overcomes the world through faith. To overcome means to "come over," not to be crushed under; and the soul on wings flies over this world and the things of it. (*Ibid.*) *Spiritual difficulties*:—A friend once illustrated to me the difference between three of her friends in the following way. She said, if they should all three come to a spiritual mountain which had to be crossed, the first one would tunnel through it with hard and wearisome labour; the second would meander around it in an indefinite fashion, hardly knowing where she was going, and yet because her aim was right, getting around it at last; but the third, she said, would just flap her wings and fly right over. (*Ibid.*) *Wings must be used*:—Not the largest wings ever known can lift a bird one inch upward unless they are used. (*Ibid.*) *Weights holding the soul to earth*:—As well might an eagle try to fly with a hundred-ton weight tied fast to its feet, as the soul try to "mount up with wings" while a weight of earthly cares and anxieties is holding it down to earth. (*Ibid.*) "*With wings as eagles*":—Once when I was in Switzerland I saw an eagle, a splendid bird, but it was chained to a rock. It had some twenty or thirty feet of chain attached to its legs, and to an iron bolt in the rock. There was the king of birds, meant to soar into heaven, chained down to earth. That is the life of multitudes of believers. Are you allowing business, are you allowing the cares of the world, are you allowing the flesh to chain you down, so that you cannot rise up? 1. You ask me, How can I get these eagle wings? I answer, How did the eagle get its wings? By its birth. It was born a royal eagle; it had a royal descent. And every child of God is born with eagle wings. God means you to live a heavenly life. 2. How does God teach His eaglet children to use their wings? He comes and stirs up their nest. Sometimes with a trying providence, with a death, with sickness, with loss, with some tribulation, with temptation. Why? Just as those eaglets, ready to sink, find the mother coming under them and carrying them, so the everlasting arms are stretched out underneath the soul that feels itself ready to perish, and God calls upon the soul to trust Him. As the eaglet trusts the mother to carry it, God asks me to trust Him, that He will bear me. And God longs to teach His children to mount on eagle wings. But how can they do it? "They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles." God often comes to the Christian worker and stirs up the nest, because He sees the eagle wings are not being used. 3. What is the characteristic of the eagle wings? To be able to mount up to heaven, the wings of the eagle must have greater strength than the wings of any other bird. And God wants His children to be so strong that they can live above the world. The great mark of the disciple of Christ that Christ spoke of in His prayer to the Father was, "They are not of the world, as I am not of the world." They belong to heaven, their life and heart are there. This idea of strength is the great idea of our text, and you have it in the words that precede (vers. 28–31). You find that word "faint" four times in the passage,

First, it is God "fainteth not"; and then it is, He giveth power to the "faint"; and then it is, the young men shall "faint." All human strength shall faint—the very strongest shall faint and be of no avail. Then, "They shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not 'faint.'" (*Andrew Murray.*) *The glory of the common life* :—This movement from the wing of the eagle to the foot of man is no descending path, no record of decaying spiritual vigour, but rather the ascending line of life. 1. Religion is not some highly wrought emotional experience—rare, ecstatic, lifting us into the seventh heaven; but an accession of permanent spiritual power to enable us to do the work of our everyday life and grow in the grace of a normal Christian character. In the common experience of man all true religion begins on the soaring wing of some strong emotion, some wave of feeling that comes over the heart for mercies received. It was as Moses when God met him in the desert of Horeb and showed him the burning bush, a rare sight, a moment of vision of heavenly things from which all future experiences were to be dated. The common lot of man falls upon the believer; the moment of thrill and ecstasy passes away. Moses has to go down to Egypt among the politicians and do the hard work and drudgery of life. Is, then, the ecstasy a waste of force? Moses, as he turned to the worrying work of rounding up the Israelites for the long journey over seas and across the desert, may frequently have thought that God's service had not procured for him either the ease or the honour that the ecstatic experiences of the burning bush had promised. But when we look back on the life and work of the great statesman we can see that the burning bush was but an ancillary incident in a great moral career; and that the patient, daily labour, the unflinching loyalty to duty, which for forty years had to be pursued in all weathers and in all moods, are the facts that loom large like mountain peaks in this great life. It was to warm his heart and inspire his spirit for those days of toil and nights devoid of ease that the vision was given. It was precisely the same truth that we find illustrated in the religious experience of the apostle Paul. His spiritual life began with a celestial vision; and in its upward development he came, not to more and clearer visions, but to the perception of a sanctity and nobility which lay in the common work of life. The Christian man as father and priest in his own household hallows his home by the benediction of his morning prayers. You do not regard your morning prayer as false and futile because during the day you cannot live up to all your own high ideals. The aspiration to be better is itself the accession of power to do better. This truth, so full of the poetry of passion and the deepest philosophy of life, is brought to us with wonderful force and tenderness in Hogg's "Skylark." The wild abandon of feeling that carried the songster so far into the sky was not frenzy nor foolishness because he had to come back and gather worms for the nestlings. On the contrary, there had been no nestlings but for the emotion that produced that song. And the song of rapture found its crowning glory in the lowly service of the obscure nest. 2. The intellectual man is in danger of disparaging the emotions and of setting aside the mysticism and ecstasy of the soul as mere fancies and dreams. But the emotional man is in still greater danger of regarding them as the only kind of religious experiences worth seeking after, the only evidence of true religion in the heart, and certainly the glory of the Christian life. In a word, the emotional man regards the glory and crown of life to be the rapture and ecstasy of the love and faith, and not the works and character which these feelings should produce. He mistakes the means for the end. In the effort to correct this mistake we must go the length of saying that love to and trust in Christ are not religion at all; just as seeds are not trees. They become religion only as they are transmuted into Christian character in the daily work and warfare of the common life. It is of vital importance that people should understand the laws of life in regard to the relation of emotions to acts. Pleasure is not an end, but the servant of higher and nobler ways of living. Nature provides that eating and drinking shall be a pleasure to man; but what is the man called who cares merely for the pleasure of eating; who lives to gratify his appetites and never does an honest day's work for the food he consumes? No deeper stain, no more deadly practice can come into our life than the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. The moment you love the excitement more than the work, so that you come soon to steal the excitement and shirk the work, nature revenges herself on you by making all such work as you are forced to do a drudgery instead of a pleasure. I have heard hard-working wives and mothers say, "I have lost my religion! I have so many little children to care for, so many duties in the

home that I cannot get to church." Is not this mother's care and self-sacrifice for her children her religion? What did she love and trust Christ for? That she might gad about at religious meetings, or that she might bring up her little ones in the fear of God? She and her child, with the sense of the presence of the Father-God, make that nursery the holiest of shrines. If a youth should learn mathematics and mensuration in school for the purpose of making him a surveyor, and then be sent out into the prairies or the Rocky Mountains for six months to apply his theoretical knowledge to the practical work of his profession, you would pronounce him crazy if, when he came back with a successful survey of the region, he should say, "Yes, that is good work, but I have lost my mathematics; I was not in a school all those six months." The mathematics were a means to an end. If faith and love to God are spiritual things, then their glory lies just in this—that they are not dependent on times and places, on churches, on moods or sentiments. It is not the state of "feeling good" that makes a man a humble, true Christian, but the act of doing good. Faith and prayer and the emotional exaltation of the church service are only the raw material out of which religion is made. Religion is life, and the deepest and grandest of all the realities of life. Life is known and expressed only as we test and try the religious emotions in all those various phases of business and social activity. The eagle's wing can carry me far, but it is in danger of leaving me remote, and so out of touch with common men and common interests. I want to be able to walk without weariness, to sympathise with plain people, to enter into the lowly door of pity, to keep company with the plodding man on the highway, and the toilers in the field. (*D. Beaton, D.D.*) *The ecstasies and commonplaces of love*:—Nature makes no mistakes in the manner in which it moves its creatures in those elemental feelings which have the perpetuation of life as their object. She is far-sighted, she has purposes in view. The lover is to become a husband; the husband is a protector and provider: the duties incident to that lot are prosaic and often dull. In a word, the common lot is soon to fall upon those two souls now transported into the seventh heaven by the ecstasies of love. They will have to discuss ways and means of domestic economy. Salaries and savings, the price of meat and babies' clothes, not to speak of new gowns for this paragon of beauty herself, will all be serious questions that cannot be effectually settled without a good deal of the tenderness that still warms their hearts from the old ecstasy. (*Ibid.*) *The Christian's air-ship*:—I. NOTE CERTAIN FACTS OF AËRIAL FLIGHT to illustrate some experience of a soul elevated to fellowship with God. 1. As with the aeronaut so with the Christian, the higher he rises from earth the smaller the world appears. Afflictions seem "light" and "but for a moment." Honour, wealth, and all material things seem mere earth toys. 2. As with the air navigator, so with the Christian rising from the earth, impurities and discord are left below. The soul that waits upon God and rises to the high privileges tendered by the grace of God, rises above the nauseating vices and conquering swarms of poisonous temptations, and the annoying, stinging adversities incident to sinful human life. 3. As with the sailor of the air in his realm, so with the Christian in his, each gets a better, broader view and a truer perspective as he rises. To the aeronaut the horizon is widened. True experimental religion is exceedingly broad, sane, and tolerant. It holds truest ideas as well as loftiest ideals. Not he who comes close and stays close to some little wall of prejudice, some river of personal preference, some mountain of hereditary impulse, or some self-constructed village of creeds, but he who on wings of faith rises to higher altitudes for observation and sees all and each in its relation to all others—such hold opinions most in accord with truth. 4. As with the navigator of the air in his realm, so with the Christian in the spiritual realm, each is inspired with healthful vigour as he rises, the one on the wings of the wind and the other on the wings of an intelligent, rational faith and the exercise of his soul in prayer. Dr. Naiger, at a meeting of the Academy of Medicine in France, tells us that ascension into the air acts as a powerful tonic; that the red corpuscles of blood are multiplied in a remarkable degree and with astonishing rapidity; further, that the recuperated condition remains for some time after the navigator returns to the ground. He gives it as his professional opinion that five brief air-ship trips are of more value to a consumptive than would be a summer in the mountains. As Christians, we cannot get permanently away from the world of sin any more than the air navigator can get permanently away from *terra firma*. We go like the disciples of old with Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration, to our public and private devotions, to gather strength for

the duties that will appear in the valley. II. NOTE SOME OF THE PRINCIPLES UPON WHICH SUCCESSFUL AËRIAL NAVIGATION DEPENDS, as typical of the principles of true spiritual life. 1. One principle which has been quite lately discovered, and which is held by at least one school of aërial scientists, is that the elevating power and the propelling power must be from the same source, and all are agreed that they must be in harmony, and so arranged that they will in no way conflict. The balloon idea as an elevating power is constantly lifting straight upward, while a propelling power of some kind of enginery drawing horizontally is constantly in conflict with the elevating power. Prof. Thomas May, in *The Aeronautical Journal*, declares that before there can be successful navigation of the air, the propelling power and the elevating power must be in exact harmony, if not produced by the same appliance Some very successful experiments have been made with "gliding-machines," the balloon idea having been abandoned in these appliances. And with this principle the Wright brothers have been enabled to move their machines near the earth or far away as they choose, sometimes gliding only a few inches from the surface. For the Christian to make progress in his spiritual flight, whether near to or far from the earth, this principle must be rigidly enforced and carefully observed. God's Spirit is the elevating power. Our own wills and purposes constitute the propelling power of the soul. These must be in harmony with the will of God, be submerged into His will, so that the elevating power and the propelling power are one in every essential, though some way God needs the modifying elements of our own consecrated purposes. For while "we can do nothing without Him," it is equally true that in practical, spiritual grace He has so arranged His plans that He does nothing without us. 2. Note one more principle of aerodynamics, which is called the Langley law because it was discovered and applied by Prof. S. P. Langley, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and the inventor of an air-ship device known as Langley's aeridrome. The law is that as the speed of a flying-machine increases, the power necessary to propel it decreases in definite proportions. Theoretically, this is true indefinitely; but, practically, only to a certain limit. Just why, when the working hypothesis is tried, the experiment fits the theory only to a certain limit, has not yet been fully explained; but the theory has been demonstrated so that it is worthy of a place among scientific principles. The law certainly prevails within the limit of natural and acquired ability, and modified by opportunity, in the human soul in its operations in the spiritual realm. The more decidedly and persistently, determinedly and vigorously, the Christian prosecutes his spiritual movements, the easier it becomes for him to do so, and he finds by practical experiment that as he advances he is able to accomplish more and more with less and less of propelling power. More and more he speeds along with less of emotional feeling and persistent determination. (*F. W. Luce, D.D.*)

The eagle's strength:—The swiftness of its flight shows its strength. The eagle is often known to fly at the rate of between forty and fifty miles an hour. Then, the great height to which it flies shows its strength. Then, in the food which it carries to its nest for its young ones to eat, we see the strength of the eagle. It carries geese, and turkeys, and kids, and lambs, and even little children for its young ones to feed on. In one of the cantons of Switzerland, two little girls were playing together in a meadow; one of them was about three years old, and the other five. While they were busy in their play, an eagle came and swooped down upon them. He seized hold of the elder child, and carried her away to his nest, which was about the distance of a mile and a half from where he found the child. And there the remains of the poor child were found by a hunter some time afterwards. (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

Living above the world:—Observatories used to be erected in the heart of cities, but it was found that these were the worst places for them. The atmosphere is obscured, the instruments do not act properly, and now they are built thousands of feet above the sea. We must rise into God's own climate if we would see things in God's own light, and correct our consciences by the eternal. Just as man lives on a high level he is safe from moral contamination and hurt. I have read that when the eagle flies in the depth of blue the bullet of the sportsman merely brushes his feathers. Its force is all spent before it reaches him. The eagle shakes it disdainfully from his wings, and soars away into the heavenly places. Travellers tell us that in the Australian forests it is almost impossible to bring down a cockatoo, because the bird seeks refuge in the highest branches of the gigantic trees. It is no use fighting temptation on a low level. Fly high, and its bullets will be spent before they reach you,

(*W. L. Watkinson.*) **They shall run, and not be weary.**—*The unwearied runner*:—I. THE RUNNING. There are different paces among the Lord's servants: Ahimaaz is swifter than Cushi, and John outruns Peter, but he who by faith has truly entered upon the road to heaven, though his march be slow and limping, shall nevertheless ultimately reach his journey's end. Scores of timid believers creep towards heaven as the snail crept into the ark. However, there is no reason why you should imitate these slowly moving pilgrims; if Mephibosheth be lame in both his feet, it is not desirable that you should imitate his limp. 1. Running is the pace of energy. Be it yours and mine to outstrip the energy of this world, and so to run in our Master's ways as to prove that the servants of Christ can render Him more loyal and devoted service than princes win from their favourites and flatterers. 2. Running is a pace which indicates fulness of alacrity. Mark often uses about our Lord the words "straightway" and "immediately." Mark's is the Gospel descriptive of Christ as a servant, and it is one of the attributes of a good servant that he is prompt at once to do his lord's bidding. 3. To run is to be diligent. 4. Running indicates thorough-going hearty zeal. II. I shall COMMEND THE RUNNING. 1. Running is most commendable, because it is a warming pace. 2. Running is a pace that clears the ground. 3. It is a cheering pace. 4. It is the winning pace. 5. It is a fitting pace for a believer. III. THE RUNNER'S GIRDLE. "They that wait upon the Lord shall run, and not be weary." What is it to "wait upon the Lord"? Singleness of eye in serving God, simplicity of dependence upon the Divine power, and constant expectation that the power will be given. IV. THE RUNNER'S STAFF. The runner's consolation lies in this promise, that "he shall not be weary." How is it that running Christians do not become weary? 1. Because they have daily strength given them for all their daily needs. 2. As the Christian advances he finds fresh matter to interest him. 3. Above all, there is one fact that keeps the Christian from weariness, namely, that he looks to the end, to the recompense of the reward. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **They shall walk, and not faint.**—*They shall walk, and not faint*:—When [the prophet] says last, and most impressively, of his people's fortunes, that they "shall walk, and not faint," he has, perhaps, just those long centuries in view, when, instead of a nation of enthusiasts taking humanity by storm, we see small bands of pioneers pushing their way from city to city by the slow methods of ancient travel,—Damascus, Antioch, Tarsus, Iconium, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Rome—everywhere that Paul and the missionaries of the Cross found a pulpit and a congregation ready for the Gospel; toiling from day to day at their own trades, serving the alien for wages, here and there founding a synagogue, now and then completing a version of their Scriptures, oftentimes achieving martyrdom, but ever living a pure and a testifying life in face of the heathen, with the passion of these prophecies at their hearts. It was certainly for such centuries and such men that the word was written, "they shall walk, and not faint." (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XLI.

VER. 1. **Keep silence before Me, O islands.**—*The convocation of the nations* (whole chapter):—The conception of this passage is superb. Jehovah is represented as summoning the earth, as far as the remote isles of the west, to determine once and for ever who is the true God: whether He, or the idols and oracles of which there were myriads worshipped and believed in by every nation under heaven. The test proposed is a very simple one. The gods of the nations were to predict events in the near future, or to show that they had had a clear understanding of the events of former days. On the other hand, the servant of Jehovah was prepared to show how fast-sealed prophecies, committed to the custody of his race, had been precisely verified in the event, and to utter minute predictions about Cyrus, "the one from the East," which should be fulfilled before that generation had passed away. Not, as in Elijah's case, would the appeal be made to the descending flame; but to the fitting of prophecy and historical fact. Immediately there is a great commotion, the isles see and fear, the ends of the earth tremble, they draw near and come to the judgment-seat. On their way thither each bids

the other take courage. There is an industrious furbishing up of the dilapidated idols, and manufacturing of new ones. The carpenter encourages the goldsmith; and he that smooths with the hammer him that smites the anvil. They examine the soldering to see if it will stand, and drive great nails to render the idols steadfast. The universal desire is to make a strong set of gods who will be able to meet the Divine challenge—much as if a Roman Catholic priest were to regild and repaint the images of the saints on the time-worn altar of a fishing hamlet, in the hope of securing from them greater help in quelling the winter storms. Amidst the excitement of this vast convocation the idols are dumb. We can almost see them borne into the arena by their attendant priests, resplendent in gold and tinsel, flashing with jewels, bedizened in gorgeous apparel. They are set in a row, their acolytes swing high the censer, the monotonous drawl of their votaries arises in supplication. Silence is proclaimed that they may have an opportunity of pronouncing on the subject submitted to them; but they are speechless. Jehovah pronounces the verdict against which there can be no appeal, "Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought; an abomination is he that chooseth you" (ver. 24). As Jehovah looks, there is no one. When He asks of them, there is no counsellor that can answer a word. "Behold they are all vanity; their works are nought; their molten images are wind and confusion." (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Heathen oracles and Scripture prophecy:*—History furnishes some interesting confirmations of this contrast between the predictions of heathen oracles and the clear prophecies of Old Testament Scripture, which were so literally and minutely realised. For instance, Herodotus tells us that when Crœsus heard of the growing power of Cyrus, he was so alarmed for his kingdom, that he sent rich presents to the oracles at Delphi, Dodona, and elsewhere, asking what would be the outcome of his victorious march. That at Delphi gave this ambiguous reply, "That he would destroy a great empire," but whether the empire would be that of Cyrus or of Crœsus was left unexplained: thus, whichever way the event turned, the oracle could claim to have predicted it. This is a fair illustration of the manner in which the oracles answered the appeals made to them by men or nations when in the agony of fear. How striking a contrast the precise prediction of these pages which give us the name of the conqueror; the quarter from which he would fall upon Babylon; the marvellous series of successes that gave kings as dust to his sword, and as the driven stubble to his bow; his reverence towards God, his simplicity and integrity of purpose (vers. 2, 3, 25, xlv. 1). (*Ibid.*) *A drama:*—In form the chapter is dramatic. Two great debates are imagined: the first (vers. 1–7) between Jehovah and the nations; the second (vers. 21–29) between Jehovah and the idols, the subject of both being the appearance of Cyrus. In the intervening passage (vers. 8–20) Jehovah encourages His servant Israel in view of this great crisis of history. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *A trial at law:*—Chapter xli. is loosely cast in the same form of a trial at law which we found in chapter i. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *God's response to Israel's complaint:*—In reply to Israel's complaint (chap. xl. 27) that his cause against the heathen oppressors is neglected or dismissed by the Great Judge, God now summons the nations to His court of justice; and as Israel had just been assured that, if they would wait upon Jehovah, they would renew their strength and discern His wisdom, an interval is granted to the heathen and their gods, in which they too may renew their strength and have time to produce evidence of the powers of design and action possessed by their gods, and in virtue of which they claim the right to keep Israel in subjection. The solemn pause thus allowed—"Keep silence . . . then let them speak"—is filled (how bitter the irony!) by the nations employing their carpenters and goldsmiths to make a particularly good and strong set of gods, because there is a general alarm that the emergency is great. For it is already seen that the judgment goes against them by default: that these gods can show no plans, can do nothing good or bad; and that they and their worshippers have neither right nor power to break up the designs of Almighty wisdom. They have been trying to do this by those oppressions of Israel which were only permitted for a time, because they fell into and formed a part of God's own plan. But Israel had from the first an appointed and chief place in that plan: He who is at once King of Israel and God of all the earth, has been maintaining His chosen people in their place, generation after generation, when He made Abraham His friend, and gave the blessing to his seed, and then He made the well yield springs of water under the rod of Moses: and now, though they are reduced to extremity of weakness and dismay, the Holy One of Israel bids them fear not, for He has taken upon

Himself to be their Redeemer. (*Sir E. Strachey, Bart.*) *A lawsuit*:—If Jehovah is a party, who then is the presiding judge? This question is to be answered as in chap. v. 3. The decisive authority is reason, which must acknowledge the state of the case and the conclusions following therefrom. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *A fair trial*:—1. The cause of God and His kingdom is not afraid of a fair trial. If the case be but fairly stated it will be surely carried in favour of religion. 2. The enemies of God's Church and His holy religion may safely be challenged to say and do their worst for the support of their unrighteous cause. (*M. Henry.*) *Islands*:—A characteristic word of the second half of Isaiah occurring twelve times. In the general usage of the Old Testament it denotes the islands and coast-lands of the Mediterranean (comp. the use of the singular by Isaiah in chap. xx. 6). Etymologically, it probably means simply "habitable lands"; and this prophet uses it with great laxity, hardly distinguishing it from "lands" (chap. xlii. 15). (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Solemn pleadings for revival*:—We also who worship the Lord God have a controversy with Him. We have not seen His Church and His cause prospering in the world as we could desire; as yet heathenism is not put to the rout by Christianity, neither does the truth everywhere trample down error. We desire to reason with God about this, and He Himself instructs us how to prepare for this sacred debate. He bids us be silent; He bids us consider, and then draw near to Him with holy boldness and plead with Him, produce our cause and bring forth our strong reasons. I. FIRST, THEN, LET US BE SILENT. 1. Before the controversy opens let us be silent with solemn awe, for we have to speak with the Lord God Almighty! Let us not open our mouths to impugn His wisdom, nor allow our hearts to question His love. We are going to make bold to speak with Him, but still He is the eternal God, and we are dust and ashes. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, and if He chooses to conceal it, let it be concealed. Truly, God is good to Israel, and His mercy endureth for ever. 2. Our silence of awe should deepen into that of shame; for, though it is true that the cause of God has not prospered, whose fault is this? 3. Go further than this, and keep the silence of consideration. This is a noisy age, and the Church of Christ herself is too noisy. We have very little silent worship, I fear. Let us be silent, now, for a minute, and consider what it is that we desire of the Lord. The conversion of thousands, the overthrow of error, the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom. Think in your minds what the blessings are which your soul pants after. Suppose they were to be now bestowed, are you ready? If thousands of converts were to be born unto this one Church, are you prepared to teach them and comfort them? You pray for grace—are you using the grace you have? You want to see more power—how about the power you have? Are you employing it? If a mighty wave of revival sweeps over London, are your hearts ready? Are your hands ready? Are your purses ready? If you reflect, you will see that God is able to give His Church the largest blessing, and to give it at any time. Keep silence and consider, and you will see that He can give the blessing by you or by me. Ask yourselves in the quiet of your spirits, what can we do to get the blessing? Are we doing that? 4. Then we shall pass on to the silence of attention. Keep silence that God may speak to you. We cannot expect Him to hear us if we will not hear Him. 5. If you have learned attention, be silent with submission. II. In that silence LET US RENEW OUR STRENGTH. Noise wears us; silence feeds us. To run upon the Master's errands is always well, but to sit at the Master's feet is quite as necessary; or, like the angels which excel in strength, our power to do His commandments arises out of our hearkening to the voice of His Word. But how happens it that such silence renews our strength? 1. It does so by giving space for the strengthening word to come into the soul, and the energy of the Holy Spirit to be really felt. 2. We must be silent to renew our strength, by using silence for consideration as to who it is that we are dealing with. We are going to speak with God about the weakness of His Church, and the slowness of its progress. We are coming to plead now with One whose arm is not shortened, and whose ear is not heavy. Renew your strength as you think of Him. Hath not the Lord said concerning His beloved Son that He shall divide the spoil with the strong, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands? Shall it not be so? Think, too, that you are about to appeal to the Holy Spirit. What cannot the Spirit of God do? 3. In silence, too, let us renew our strength by remembering His promises. There are a thousand promises. Let us think of that, and however difficult the enterprise may be, and however dark our present prospects, we shall not dare to doubt when Jehovah has spoken and pledged His Word. 4. Our strength

will be renewed next, if in silence we yield up to God all our own wisdom and strength. 5. Keep silence, then, ye saints, till ye have felt your folly and your weakness, and then renew your strength most gloriously by casting yourselves upon the strength of God. III. Our text proceeds to add, "Then let them draw near." You that know the Lord DRAW NEAR. You are silent, you have renewed your strength, now enjoy access with boldness. The condition in which to intercede for others is not that of distance from God, but that of great nearness to Him. Even thus did Abraham draw nigh when he pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah. 1. Let us remember how near we really are. We are one with Christ, and members of His body. How could we be nearer? 2. You are coming to a Father. 3. The desire in our heart for God's glory and the extension of His Church, is a desire written there by the Holy Spirit. 4. What we ask, if we are about to plead with God concerning His kingdom, is according to His own mind. 5. Moreover, there is this further consideration; the Lord loves to be pleaded with. He might have given all the covenant blessings without prayer; wherefore does He compel us to use entreaties, unless it be that He loves to hear the voices of His children? IV. I now come to the last point, which is, "LET US SPEAK." Be silent, renew your strength, draw near, and then speak. What have we to say upon the matter which concerns us? 1. Let us first speak in the spirit of adoring gratitude. How sweet to think that there should be a Saviour at all. To think that there should be a heavenly kingdom set up, as it is set up; that it should have made such advances as it has made, and should still grow mightily! 2. Next, let us speak in humble expostulation. 3. Then turn to pleading. 4. Let us speak in the way of dedication. 5. Let us speak still in the way of confidence. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Silence and speech before God*:—God addresses men here by two designations, the one having reference to their remoteness and isolation, and the other to their unity. The series of injunctions begins with silence and ends with speech. Right silence before God, passing on through stirring up of energy and earnest confiding approach, issues in speech. We shall consider the beginning and the end of this series—silence before God and speech to God. I. SILENCE BEFORE GOD. Shall we not be silent in the endeavour to realise that God is, and what He is? Would not this do more for us than any urging of ourselves or any kind of activity and noise whatever? And can anything have its proper effect on our soul without this? If we but realise with ourselves that we have to do with an Infinite One, that there is One Being of spotless perfection, almighty power, unchangeableness, boundless love, complete and earnest opposition to evil, what an effect this will produce on us! Unless we can bear to be silent and brood, the thought of God will not rise before us in fulness and splendour. But God speaks, and we must listen in silence. With what glad silence should we listen to the Divine voice. A single word of God must be worth more to us than all other words. When we read the Word of God we should say to ourselves, Hush! God is speaking. We should listen to it as a message conveying what we are to believe and embrace and ponder and do. We may spoil everything by letting the murmur of our own thoughts arise. Our silence in the presence of God will often take the form of thinking of ourselves. Thinking of self becomes sincere and profitable when it goes on consciously in God's presence. The felt presence of God revives memory, prevents besetting self-deception, and turns the survey of the future from chaotic dreams into earnest outlook. Can any man make such a survey, however imperfectly, without shame? Shame makes him silent. He who knows the bitterness of being put to silence in the presence of God, will scarcely be without experience of the sweetness of silent satisfaction and rest. He will be led to see such a graciousness in God, such a benign healing aspect of His mercy, such a fulness in Christ, such a might of forgiveness, such a sublime oblivion, that he will feel for a while as if he had nothing more to ask. This satisfaction passes into expectation. II. SPEECH TO GOD FOLLOWING UPON THE SILENCE. Silence before God in which such thoughts as these go on leads to a stirring of the soul, a forth-putting of endeavour, and a drawing near to God. Silence before God heaps a load on the heart which can only be thrown off by speaking to God. One thing after another brings fresh penitence, new discovery of sin, new sense of the greatness of God; new fears spring up, new resolutions gather, and all these weigh very heavily. And much more than freedom from pressure will be experienced. The convictions that gather in silence will be strengthened by speech. If they did not find expression they would begin to decay. In short, speaking to God of the things that have lain on the soul in its silence is a necessity at once for relief, for understanding, for intensity, for permanence, and for growth. It

would be a wrong inference to draw from this passage that one ought not to speak to God without consciously going through these stages of the text. There may be true speaking to God which seems to break forth at once and immediately from the soul. It is not always a bad sign when we feel that we cannot speak, but must be silent before God. This state is not, indeed, to be prolonged. Nor must it be a dull, dead, distant silence, but one that has its own peculiar activities. Hasting to cut short the period of silence may enervate and chill. The silence may be more acceptable to God for the time than any words could be. We should expect times of silence before God—times in which speaking to God is not indeed absent, but in which silence is the dominating element. If it is a silence before God, it is a leaving of space for God to speak, and surely this is implied in communion. (*J. Leckie, D.D.*) *The silence of reverence* is the soil in which earnestness and energy grow. By this reverent silence resolution takes shape and gathers force. Men gird up their energies afresh when in solemn silence they have gone over the actualities and the possibilities of life. Then with purpose and intensity they come near to God. (*Ibid.*) *The relief of speech after silence*:—You may have seen a reservoir of water which, by continuous rain, had become so full that it threatened to overflow all its banks or burst them—the rain through days and nights had been pouring on its broad bosom, and the brooks and rills from miles around had been hurrying their foaming tributes into it, till the ordinary small outlet is wholly unable to relieve the immense pressure, and the very edge of ruin is reached, when, lo! the great sluice is raised, and away rushes the pent-up flood in immense volume. There is relief and safety at once. So is it with the burdened soul on which silence before God has been laying load after load, pressing and crushing it with memories, convictions, fears, resolutions. Relief and freedom are gained by pouring out the soul in words before God. (*Ibid.*) *Conviction aided by both silence and speech*:—In silence there is the rooting of conviction, but in speaking to God its expansion and growth. When you have hyacinths in water glasses, you put them first in darkness for some weeks till the roots strike down into the water. You find that the roots have spread and filled the glass, but there is scarcely a sign of growth upward, the stalk remains undeveloped. Light is needed for that. So speech to God is needed to raise and expand the feelings that have been rooted in silence. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 2. **The righteous man from the East.**—*The righteous man from the East*:—The question, whose appearance is predicted, has been always a subject of dispute. Eusebius, Theodoret, and Procopius understand it as describing the triumphs of the true religion, or the Gospel, here called "righteousness." Cyril and Jerome apply it to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as the Righteous One, or the Lord our Righteousness. Cocceius stands alone in his application of the verse to the apostle Paul. The Jews make Abraham the subject of the passage, excepting Aben Ezra, who, with Vitringa and all the latest writers, understands it as a prophecy of Cyrus. The inappropriateness of the terms employed to our Saviour or the Gospel, to Abraham or Paul, is almost self-evident, and equally clear is its appropriateness to the case of Cyrus. The argument in favour of the latter application, drawn from the analogy of chaps. xlv. 1, xlvi. 11, is less conclusive, because he is there expressly named. The truth appears to be that this is a more general intimation of a great eventful movement from the East, which is afterwards repeated with specific reference to Cyrus and his conquests. It might even be supposed without absurdity that there is here an allusion to the general progress of the human race, of conquest, civilisation, and religion from the East to the West. Umbreit supposes a specific reference to the course of the sun, from which the name of Cyrus was derived. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Cyrus raised up by God*:—"Stirred up"; the sense is "impelled into activity." (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *Cyrus from the East, yet from the North*:—"From the East"; Cyrus' home, Susiania, being to the east of Babylonia. "From the North" (ver. 25), alludes to the Medes, who united with the Persians under Cyrus, and whose home was to the north or north-east of Babylonia. (*Ibid.*) *Cyrus called in righteousness* (see R.V.):—Cyrus' career being a furtherance of God's righteous purpose for the government of the world. (*Ibid.*) *Cyrus called to God's foot*:—To call to one's foot is a Hebrew idiom for calling to one's service, or summoning to take a place among one's followers. (*J. A. Alexander.*)

Ver. 4. **I the Lord, the first, and with the last.**—I. LOOK AT GOD IN HIS PRIMARY RELATION TO HIS CREATURE. Understand clearly that everything which is was first an idea in the mind of God. Thence, by a creative act, it came forth and took form and being. So God was first, long before all His works—as the mould is before the castings. Here is the truth and glory of predestination, that great argument of all comfort. It places God far away, beyond our little horizon, in advance of everything. Whatever is, is to fulfil its preordained purpose; each thing coming up and rising in its turn; everything a reflection of the eternal love, care, and wisdom which dwelt from everlasting in the mind of God. II. "WITH THE LAST." There are those who say, "This world is on the decline and growing worse." Can it be, if He who was First is with the last—the same God yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the equal portion of all times? Is it not sufficient argument? The golden age cannot be over. From the fleeting and the changing, from the disappointing and the dying, I yearn to ask, "Where is the true?" Where is that which my soul wants, and for which my restless spirit has so long been craving, what shall satisfy my immortality? And the answer comes, as a whisper in the desert, louder and clearer from the solitude of my heart's waste places, "I the Lord, the First, and with the last; I am He." (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

Vers. 6, 7. **They helped every one his neighbour.**—*Idolatry the subject of sarcasm:*—The sarcasm consists in making the idolaters dependent upon idols which are themselves dependent upon common workmen and the most trivial mechanical operations for their form and their stability. Hence the particular enumeration of the different artificers employed in the manufacture of these deities. The last clause implies that the strength of the idol is not in itself, but in the nails that keep it in its place, or hold its parts together. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Lessons from the idol-makers:*—Idolatry being threatened with an overthrow, their "craft" was endangered, and hence the earnestness and co-operation of these makers of idols. The text is suggestive. I. It affords an illustration of THE WAY THE WICKED COMBINE IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST THE RIGHT. Jeremiah gives us a picture of this combination in the family (Jer. vii. 17, 18). Isaiah, carrying it up higher, here shows how the different crafts cheer and help each other. Take the history of the world; follow the struggle between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, and you will find that this has always been the case. When Jesus Christ made His appearance upon the earth for the purpose of inaugurating the overthrow of paganism and planting His kingdom on its ruins, witness what varied and unhallowed combinations arrayed themselves against Him. See how the liquor-dealers are now banded together in that strong association, which has for its object the protection and perpetuity of their iniquitous traffic. And if certain questions are touched there are manifested some strange combinations. II. We see the importance of UNANIMITY OF FEELING AND CONCERT OF ACTION IN CHURCH WORK. 1. This should be true in the individual Churches. The various ages, classes, and organisations of a Church ought to work for the same ends. 2. On the great leading questions there must be co-operation between the various denominations. III. We have a suggestion as to THE MUTUAL DEPENDENCE OF MEN. Notice how many crafts the idols passed through before they were finished. Take any article in your possession, and a great many different persons and trades have contributed to its production. No profession or trade is independent of other professions and trades; no class is independent of other classes. IV. We are reminded that OUR AIM IN LIFE SHOULD BE TO HELP THOSE WITH WHOM WE COME IN CONTACT. "They helped every one his neighbour." Jesus Christ came into this world not to seek His own ease or profit or pleasure, but to help the needy sons of men. Have we caught anything of His spirit? There are many ways in which we can help. 1. Like these idolaters, we can do it by our words of cheer. We are too chary with our praise. 2. Help by our deeds. (*J. W. Rogan.*) *Mutual encouragement:*—How much of mutuality there is in the teaching of the Bible! This is mutual encouragement, and applies to higher forms of service. The next verse reads, "But thou, Israel, art My servant." To be a carpenter who works on wood is merely to do something outward, but "thou art My servant" introduces us into the moral sphere of action. Now encouragement is not flattery. You are not to forget the great ethical basis on which all our life must rest. It is not right to flatter. It is right to encourage, because there are always circumstances in human life that tend to depress, and

there are specific temperamental constitutions that need a great deal of gladdening from without, for some are not easily inspired. I believe in encouragement all through. Many young people never play the piano well because their parents have not encouraged them. Sometimes we fail to encourage our servants. I. ENCOURAGEMENT MUST BE LIVED AS WELL AS SPOKEN. We are to give courage through the possession of it. It will not do for those who are to inspire others to whimper over their troubles! If the general is beaten the army is often defeated. II. ENCOURAGEMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE NEAREST POINT. "Everyone said to his neighbour." The man next to me is to catch the influence. If I do not encourage him it is a poor compliment to encourage somebody in Spain or Jerusalem. It is of no use for me to write the foreign letter to my friend far away, if I do not encourage the charwoman who comes for a day's work. All these splendid heroics of distance are mere romance. Your neighbour nigh you often needs encouragement, and God has placed you there to give it. III. ENCOURAGEMENT MUST NOT BE MERELY SEASONAL. Because you do not know when a man wants you! It is to be the atmosphere of duty; you are to live in it. We need encouragement when things are bright with us to stimulate us to make a right and thankful use of our mercies. We need encouragement in adversity, for patience needs sustaining in long hours of pain, in mysteries we cannot fathom, in paths where we see no turning. You can encourage someone best of all when you can say, Thus and thus it has been with me. IV. ENCOURAGEMENT MUST NOT BE WITHDRAWN BY FREQUENT FAILURES. Do not say, I will give it up, it is a bad job. As the R.V. says, "Despairing of no man." What do you say? Am I to encourage the man who has broken so many vows? Yes. His next step may be on to the rock. Am I to be the one to bear upon my heart the responsibility of cheering those who never seem to cheer me? Yes. Your relation to me is not to affect my relation to you. Encourage the doubter, the erring, the deserter, as you would be encouraged yourself. V. ENCOURAGEMENT MUST BE TRUE, BASED ON REASONS. No one can really encourage me unless he speaks on the ground of truth. For truth will not encourage me by hiding my symptoms and using soft, seductive words! Encourage one another, because the work in which we are engaged is the only immortal work of the ages, and to unite in Christian work is to lay hold of the "everlasting." (*W. M. Statham.*)

Mutual help a law of nature:—1. The commonwealth is not served till the different branches of industry merge their jealousies in goodwill. 2. The very composition of the earth we walk over offers a strong hint of this intention. You read it in the beautiful balancings of clouds and tides, the equations of astronomy, the adjustments of growth and climate, all the musical accord by which the Divine Spirit has attuned His creation to an everlasting anthem. Sky and water, vapour and vegetation, earth and sun are ever friendly and hospitable; they are perpetually running on some missionary errand on each other's behalf. 3. Indeed, it is most interesting to see how liberally the Creator has given hints and illustrations of this social principle by His own arrangements, even in what we call the humbler departments of His creation. For society does not stand apart from nature, but interlinks its laws with hers. Very wonderful it is, and very beautiful, to see how God twines together, into a system of mutual benefits, the operations that different creatures carry on for their own advantage, thus revealing His intention that they should be fellow-helpers, even these dumb and soulless things. He scarcely lets any good end with the being that produced it, but carries it over into some wider usefulness. He pushes out the doings of each animal and person into results that help other animals and other persons. The silkworm, with no thought of a charity, spins for himself an elaborate and complicated coffin, to hold the chrysalis, till its resurrection with wings. But the strands of that delicate fabric, the ingenuity of man winds off into the material of his costliest and most durable vestures. Coral insects build their reefs with the slow toil of ages, not certainly as philanthropists, but simply by the instinct that bids living things provide a habitation. Yet they are all the time laying the foundations of islands that men will some time inhabit, when overpopulated continents shall send out their swarming colonies, and thus God "layeth the beams of His chambers in the waters." The spider weaves a web, out in the air, for certain economical purposes of his own. But God bathes it overnight in drops of dew, and in the morning sun it hangs like a silver shield, with miniature rainbows for its quarterings, "a thing of beauty" at which children clap their hands with rapture, and which every beauty-loving passenger is the better for. The spider had no thought

of being an artist; but the Creator made him one to shed delight unconsciously. Or else astronomy stretches one of those slender fibres across the glass in her telescope to mark the passage of a star, and the little insect under a clover leaf gives a measuring line to science to tell the august motions of the constellations of the sky. 4. So in another and higher grade of creation. When men forget to help each other, God overrules their plans, and makes them do it, to a certain extent, in despite of themselves. He is for ever defeating the plots of selfishness. He suffers no immunities to be strictly personal. It is the settled policy of Providence, so to speak, to break up monopolies. He regards always the good, not only of the greatest number, but of the whole. He allows no mortal to live for himself alone, however much disposed to. A capitalist, without the remotest intention of being a public benefactor perhaps, founds a factory, to enlarge his private fortune. But the enterprise calls into employment an army of labourers, and the wages forestall their starvation. A few men, in a corporation, as the case may be, build a railway, for the sake of the dividends; but it becomes an immeasurable facility of travel and transportation, and while it enriches a few is a convenience to millions. (*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. **So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith.**—*The hardships of working men*:—If men in bad work can encourage each other, should not men engaged in honest artisanship and mechanism speak words of good cheer? 1. Men see in their own work hardships and trials, while they recognise no hardships or trials in anybody else's occupation. Every man's burden is the heaviest, and every woman's task is the hardest. We find people wanting to get other occupations and professions. Now, the beauty of our holy religion is that God looks down upon all the occupations and professions; and while I cannot understand your annoyances, and you cannot understand mine, God understands them all. I will speak this warning of the general hardships of the working classes. You may not belong to this class, but you are bound as Christian men and women to know their sorrows and sympathise with them, and as political economists to come to their rescue. You do a great wrong to the labouring classes if you hold them responsible for the work of the scoundrelly anarchists. You may do your duty toward your *employés*, but many do not, and the biggest business firm to-day is Grip, Gouge, Grind and Company. By what principle of justice is it that women in many of our cities get only two-thirds as much as men, and in many cases only half? Here is the gigantic injustice, that for work equally well, if not better, done woman receives far less compensation than man. Has toil frosted the colour of your cheeks? Has it taken all spontaneity from your laughter? Has it subtracted the spring from your step, and the lustre from your eye, until it has left you only half the man you were when you first put your hand on the hammer and your foot on the wheel? To-morrow in your place of toil, listen, and you will hear a voice above the hiss of the furnace, and the groan of the foundry, and the clatter of the shuttle—a voice not of machinery nor of the task-master, but the voice of an all-sympathetic God, as He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Let all men and women of toil remember that this work will soon be over. Have they not heard that there is a great holiday coming? Oh, that home, and no long walk to get to it! I wish they would put their head on this pillow stuffed with the down from the wing of all God's promises. "There remains a rest for the people of God." 2. Another great trial is privation of taste and sentiment. I do not know of anything much more painful than to have a fine taste for painting and sculpture and music and glorious sunsets and the expanse of the blue sky, and yet not to be able to get the dollar for the oratorio, or to get a picture, or to buy one's way into the country to look at the setting sun and at the bright heavens. 3. Then there are a great many who suffer not only in the privation of their tastes, but in the apprehension and the oppressive surroundings of life. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Encouragements for working men*:—1. One of the greatest safeguards against evil is plenty to do. I see a pool of water in the country, and I say, "Thou slimy fetid thing, what does all this mean? Didn't I see you playing with those shuttles and turning that grist-mill?" "Oh yes," says the water, "I used to earn my living." I say again, "Then what makes you look so sick? Why are you covered with this green scum? Why is your breath so vile?" "Oh," says the water, "I have nothing to do. I am disgusted with shuttles and wheels. I am going to spend my whole lifetime here, and while yonder stream sings on its way down the mountain-side, here I am left to fester

and die accursed of God because I have nothing to do!" Sin is an old pirate that bears down on vessels whose sails are flapping idly in the wind. The arrow of sin has hard work to puncture the leather of an old working-apron. 2. Another encouragement is the fact that their families are going to have the very best opportunity for development and usefulness. That may sound strange to you, but the children of fortune are very apt to turn out poorly. The son of the porter that kept the gate learns his trade, gets a robust physical constitution, achieves high moral culture, and stands in the front rank of Church and State. 3. Again, I offer as encouragement that you have so many opportunities of gaining information. The Countess of Anjou gave two hundred sheep for one volume. Jerome ruined himself financially by buying one copy of Origen. Oh, the contrast! 4. Your toils in this world are only intended to be a discipline by which you shall be prepared for heaven. (*Ibid.*) *A call to action*:—I propose to address myself—I. To THOSE WHO PROFESS THE FAITH OF CHRIST. Is there no work for you to do? Join some of the regiments; belong to the artillery, or the cavalry, or the infantry of the Church. Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion. II. To THOSE WHO PROFESS NOT TO BE CHRISTIANS. 1. There are some of you who say you are kept back by your worldly engagements. Will you let your store, your office, your shop, stand between you and heaven? 2. There is somebody who says: "I am afraid someone will laugh at me if I become a Christian." Will you allow your soul to be caught in such a thin trap as human scorn? Can these people who laugh at your seriousness insure you for the future? 3. There may be young people who say, "We are too young yet. Wait a little while, after we have enjoyed the world more; and then we will become Christians." I ask any young man if that is fair—to sit down at a banquet all your life long, and have everything you want, and then at the close, when you are utterly exhausted, say, "Lord Jesus, there are dregs in that cup; you may drink them. Lord Jesus, there are crumbs under that table; you may take them up"? 4. I heard some say, "I am too old." If thou canst not do any more than tremble towards the Cross, if thou art too weak to-night to hold the staff, if all thy soul seems to be bowed down with sorrow, just stumble the way, and put thy withered arms around that Cross, and life, and joy, and pardon, and salvation will come to you. 5. I hear someone say, "Give me more time to think of this!" What is time? (*Ibid.*) *A model Church*:—I. It is a scene of ACTIVITY. We all enjoy activity in the natural world. When the winter frosts have melted, and the streams gush down the mountain-side, and the trees begin to put out their livery of green, we enjoy it. Life is a scene of activity in the physical universe. So it is in the business world. So it is with intellectual activity. The long years of the Middle Ages have passed, and the darkness enveloping Europe lifts up. The printing-press is doing a work beyond that of the old feudal castle. Still more is it the case when there comes spiritual life in a church or in a parish; everybody feels happy. II. It is a scene of CHEERFUL, COURAGEOUS TOIL. The carpenter encourages the goldsmith. Many people discourage. The carpenter is querulous, and he says, "Look here, Mr. Goldsmith, I think you had better do your work so." "What do you know about goldsmithing?" says the other; "you are a carpenter; attend to your own business," and thus angry words pass between them. It is so in our churches. "Singing," says one; "what do you know about singing?" "You don't preach quite right," says one. "Would you like to try?" A sensible man says, "I cannot preach; I think my minister knows how to preach, and I will pray for him if he makes a mistake now and then." He knows how to encourage him. III. It is a scene of PROMPT INDUSTRY AND THOROUGH WORK. When a man gets a reputation for dilatoriness his fate is sealed. The model Church does thorough work, and does it promptly. IV. THEY ARE ALL WORKING FOR ONE COMMON END. The Church has one end. This man attends to the singing; this man to the children; this man looks after the working men's class; this man attends to outdoor relief; another visits the mothers; others attend to this, that, and the other, but they are all working for one end. The Church is a unity—a unity in spirit, in aim, in end. (*E. P. Thwing.*) *All at work*:—I. THEY WERE ALL AT WORK. Many of us like activity. In the intellectual world all is life and go. In the political world it is the same. "Rest and be thankful" belongs to other days. It should be just like that in the Church of Jesus Christ. Here, stagnation means death. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH THEY GAVE EACH OTHER. Men will work, and work well, when their efforts are appreciated. Even the dumb animals which have become the companion and worker for man seem to understand encouragement, and will, in many ways, show their appreciation of it. III. THE

QUALITY OF THEIR WORK. "It was fastened with nails, and could not be moved." Work done under the circumstances of the text was sure to be good. Do your work well. Do not catch the spirit of the age. This is the day of the jerry-builder. Quantity is often considered rather than quality. Outward show is the order of the day. It is important for us all to remember that what we can do for God depends upon what we are before God. We can only teach what we know. (*C. Leach, D.D.*) *A society of encouragers*:—Societies already exist in multitude—societies religious, political, social, literary, &c; but there is room for another. It need not displace any existing ones that are worthy of continuance; it can fulfil its purpose by infusing into them all a new spirit—a spirit of brightness, of good cheer, and strengthening comradeship. I propose to call it "The Society of Encouragers." I. ITS BASIS IS LAID IN NEIGHBOURLINESS AND BROTHERLINESS. Does anyone ask, "Who is my neighbour?" Let him read again the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that story neighbourliness stands for love, sympathy, kindness, help, and all those qualities that constitute practical religion. It bridges, at a leap, the chasm of national distinctions. My neighbour's house may be near or far in situation, his rental may stand at £80 a-year, and mine at £20. His walls may be adorned with the costliest pictures, and I may be indebted to the enterprising activity of tradesmen at Christmas-time for any adornment on mine; or the financial positions of each may be transposed, but we are neighbours. We live to help each other. Is there trouble anywhere? That is enough, my place is there; and when the hour of distress comes for me, I shall not be without a friend. But there is a deeper word still. In the new society we are brothers. "Every one said to his brother, Be of good cheer." This strikes a yet tenderer chord. "Have we not all one Father?" This will settle the relations between capital and labour by uniting master and man in a common bond of reciprocal interest. Carry it to its furthest issue, and it will solve all questions of national and international strife by bringing in the reign of "Peace on earth and goodwill to men." II. AS TO ITS RAISON D'ÊTRE. 1. The new society exists for kindly speech to one another. "Every one said to his brother, Be of good courage." A word in season, how good it is! There is helpfulness and inspiration in kindly, encouraging speech. The ministry that never fails is the ministry of encouragement. 2. It exists for kindly speech of one another. In the new society we pledge ourselves to think and act towards the living as we do for those who have passed into the Great Silence. Many have died before their time for want of a Society of Encouragers. Sympathy is vain that is reserved for the eulogy of the dead or flower-wreaths for the coffin-lid. Expend it now. 3. The new society exists also for mutual effort. "They helped every one his neighbour." The kindly word is valuable and precious, but it is better still when crystallised into action. What the world wants is the practical application of the religion of Jesus Christ, whose human life is summed up in the brief sentence, "Who went about doing good." 4. The new society is a society of workers. "The carpenter encouraged the goldsmith." You can put your own trade or profession in. All may be included whose calling is honest, just, and pure. What is wanted is a sense of comradeship, and this the new society provides. The isolation is removed. We no longer work alone, but side by side, in the world's great workshop. III. THE UNITING BOND OF ALL IS LOVE. Love is the common bond that unites man to man, neighbour to neighbour, brother to brother, and all together to Him who is Love's primal fount and source. (*A. Hancock.*) *Humble co-operation*:—A traveller, standing outside Cologne Cathedral, expressed his admiration of its beauty. "Yes," said a labourer, who was near; "it's a fine building, and took us many a year to finish." "Took you!" exclaimed the tourist; "why, what have you to do with it?" "I mixed the mortar, sir," was the modest yet proud reply. (*Home Magazine.*)

Ver. 8. **But thou, Israel, art My servant.**—*The servant of Jehovah*:—It is reasonable to seek the origin of the idea in the first passage in which the term occurs (Isa. xli. 8). Here there can be no doubt as to what the term denotes. It denotes the Israelitish nation, treated, however, not as the mere aggregate of the members composing it, but as a unity, developing historically, and maintaining its continuity and essential character through successive generations. (*S. R. Driver.*) **The seed of Abraham, My friend.**—*God blessing for the sake of another*:—God turns the eyes of Israel to the past. He reminds them that they are the children of His friend Abraham. You may find a man in distress, and may be tempted to turn away from him; but as he talks to you about himself

and his antecedents, you find that he is the son of an old friend of yours. That alters the case. There is another motive operating on you now—the desire to be faithful to your friend. Israel was the seed of God's friend Abraham. God would be faithful to them for His friend's sake. "For Jesus Christ's sake" is the highest expression and application of this principle. (*J. A. Davies, B.D.*) *The seed of Abraham* (with Matt. iii. 9):—There is between these two passages an ascertainable relation. In the passage which we have read from the Book of Isaiah is exhibited the greatest element in the Israelitish national consciousness. Apparently these people never forgot their vocation as the children of Abraham. Sometimes they attributed more importance to it, sometimes less. When the nation was at its best they spiritualised the ideal; when it was at its worst they materialised it; but they never wholly ignored it. Here is a prophet speaking in a stern time with the purpose of heartening the people who were listening to him. See how he does it. In the chapter which precedes the one whence our text is taken the opening sentences are: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God," &c. The last verse of the chapter is more beautiful still: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." We see the mood in which Isaiah speaks and the tenderness which is evident in his message. It is as though he would say to Israel: You have passed through a stern testing time, but you have not ceased to be the people of God. Indeed, the testing time was permitted because you are never to be anything else than the chosen ones, God's Israel. You have Abraham for your father, and the covenant which God made with Abraham He will keep with you. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." In the light of this Old Testament consciousness let us now look at the passage which we have chosen from the New. Isaiah and John are both heralds; there is at least this similarity between them, that they both come as the bearers of good tidings concerning a better day. But they are different in this: while Isaiah speaks with the gorgeous magnificence of Oriental symbolism, and his message is one full of comfort and tenderness, the words of St. John are utterly unadorned; rugged and grim is the speech of this child of the desert. He comes less with a message of comfort than with one of rebuke; and yet, like Isaiah, he is the herald of a glorious day. But the people are not ready for his message nor for the blessing which he announces. And so his words to them are words of warning, especially, shall I say, to the Pharisees. The people and their leaders had been too much inclined to content themselves with making much of the tradition of the covenant of God with Abraham, and they thought comparatively little of what was required from them in the keeping of it. "O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance." The Pharisees were conspicuous for two particular vices; and may I say, in parenthesis, that Pharisees were by no means in their entirety bad men. There were many sincere men in their ranks, and yet Jesus, like John, had more difficulty with the Pharisees than with any other class in the community. Their chief sin was that of spiritual pride; but another was, they believed in the externals of religion rather than in change of heart. They insisted much upon their lineage: here we are the chosen people, the descendants of Abraham—would not God keep His word to us? What part or lot has the race of mankind in this which is a special privilege of Israel? John's reply to them is this: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father." Why should God trouble to show His favour to men like you, for you are very different from Abraham? God is able to raise up from these stones children unto Abraham. Shall we spend a little more time in discovering what John the Baptist means by saying, "God is able of the stones to raise up children unto Abraham"? I have heard an exegesis of this kind, and it is not a modern one only: "Oh, it is obvious that St. John meant that the hearts around him might be changed by his glorious message, that God would give to these men a heart of flesh in place of a heart of stone, and then they would be children of Abraham indeed." Well, the inference is not unjustifiable, but I do not think it is correct. I believe that St. John meant exactly and literally what he said: "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." To believe that he meant it literally adds force to the warning and the appeal. What he meant, then, was something like this: It is in the power of God to breathe the breath of life into these rocks of the desert, and they

should become living souls; and if so it is conceivable they would be better men than you and worthier successors of Abraham, the friend of God. For who was, what was, this Abraham? If you turn to Hebrews xi. you will read a Christian description of the man and his character: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went," &c. Momentous results followed that far-off choice. It was the dawning of a great hour in which Israel was born, and with Israel the Messiah, and with the Messiah the gospel under which you and I live our lives to-day. Here, then, is the Abraham of whose seed these Pharisees claimed to be. They had not his moral courage, nor his noble spirit; these were not of the kind who would have gone out in pursuit of a spiritual ideal. These were men who had hardened into insensibility, who by their lives denied the spiritual idea Abraham had bequeathed to them, and therefore the Baptist's remonstrance was apt indeed. "Think not to say, we have Abraham to our father." You are not of the spiritual lineage of Abraham; you would never dare for God; you are content with the grovelling things, your gaze is never lifted to the eternal. God could raise up another Abraham, yea, of these stones he could raise up children worthier than you. As an illustration of what the fiery, indomitable prophet of the desert meant, let me remind you of something, perhaps, that may have crossed your lips but yesterday. Looking upon the degenerate son of a noble sire, what was it you remarked to your companion? "His only recommendation is that he is his father's son." Any worthless profligate who soils a noble name and brings degradation upon the record of a noble race receives and deserves the reprobation of honest men. The question whether England is Israel is not worth discussing, believe me. If you could prove it to-morrow, some John the Baptist might rise and tell you you are out of the spiritual succession altogether. This is merely the negative side of the question. The seed of Abraham in spirit and in truth are those who hear the Word of God speaking within their own hearts, and rise and go forth and obey. Hear what Jesus has to say on this theme in John viii. 39. If Jesus is correctly reported by one who at any rate knew Him well, as addressing the indignant Jews, He says: "I speak that which I have seen with My Father; and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham." We can classify easily the men that are of the quality of Abraham. Did these pharisaic time-servers, these bigoted Jews, who were questioning Jesus with the object of destroying Him, really think that they stood in the succession of him who was the friend of God? Verily they did; but the consciousness of humanity since has put them right. An Ambrose, in the early years of Christianity, a rough soldier, is chosen by the people, who know him and his character, to be their bishop; and now as prelate of Milan it is the duty of this erstwhile soldier to turn from the church door the bloodstained emperor who had been his commander. He dare not do otherwise, for he is serving a greater than the emperor. Here speaks the seed of Abraham. And who knows? God knows, maybe, that in this church this morning there are some of the lineage of Abraham of whom the world will never hear. The rest of us, perhaps, in the gaze of heaven, may have to be put in another category—the category of those who have not dared for justice and right and truth. There is one more thought suggested in our second text. There is something contained in the very phrase "these stones," which I think was not merely accidental. The prophet knew well what he meant: the stones are unpromising material. Conversion is a turning from sin and a turning towards God. Get firm hold of that fact. Feelings are an endowment which may or may not accompany it; but the man whose heart is right with holiness and truth, whose faith is turned that way, is of the seed of Abraham and the friend of God. I want you to recognise, what is the very truth, that Abraham had far less to guide him than you. He heard the same voice as you, but it had not told the world as much then as it has told it since. When you take up this Old Testament again and read of the wonders achieved by the heroes of old, remember that the voice that spake to them spake within their own hearts, and not without, just as it speaks now to you. This Abraham heard a voice, and he said he would obey it; he could trust it; he established his covenant with God, and it never failed him. How shall I know I am of the seed of Abraham? Is my face turned the way his was? How shall I know I belong to the Lord Christ?

Here is my charter: "Whosoever shall do the will of God (even seek to do it), the same is My brother and sister and mother." Jesus will never turn away from His own spiritual kindred. Yet there may be one more experience here to which I ought to speak. There is, perhaps, a man who says, "Ah yes; but I have made shipwreck of my career. Such lives as these may look back upon their life and say, 'I have done the best I could with my manhood.' But I have failed; my road is strewn with the dust and ashes of vain regrets. 'The stones are the rubbish of the desert. They only serve to accentuate its desolation.' Just so; I am the stones." Well, I want you to hear a voice that I am fond of listening to—with deepest reverence be it spoken—One that spoke with authority; and I think you will agree with me it has power in it still:—John viii. 56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Picture the astonishment of those Jews. "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?" Poor literalists! Abraham in his lonely desert vigil never saw Jesus; he had no foregleam of the day when Jesus should speak such words as these; but what he did have was the vision by which he saw the Sun of Righteousness arising in his own heart. That was Jesus' day. The Abraham who spent his early days in a guilty household, in the midst of men who never thought of the unworthiness of serving God by lascivious rites and brutal deeds, one day said to himself, "This life has to be left behind." So soon as he had seen that, he had seen Jesus' day, and he rose up and went out to meet it. And that is just what we have to do. For the same voice that spake to Abraham is speaking to the world to-day, is speaking through Jesus: "Before Abraham was I am." Children of Abraham, friends of Jesus, is not that voice speaking to you even now? (*R. J. Campbell, M.A.*) *Scripture characters:* — 1. There is in Scripture a hidden truth which we gradually become acquainted with, and which we may not thoroughly know for years. God has attached certain names and titles to men in the Bible which seem to have some great hidden meaning, as showing what character God approves. There are certain men to whose characters He has attached a distinct approval which is most striking. Abraham is called "the friend of God"; David, "the man after God's own heart"; St. John, "the beloved disciple." There is some deep meaning in each of these titles not to be passed by casually. 2. The characters of Holy Scripture are so various that we are impressed with the view that the Old Testament is a volume of character, written to show the application of religious privileges to the varieties of men. Look at Abraham. What is our first feeling in thinking of him? that is, in what did his character seem peculiar? In faith and unworldliness. In what David's? A tender love of God. In what St. John's? Love. Now how do they assimilate essentially with each other? Who else was especially faithful? Not so strikingly, Jacob or Isaac or Solomon. Abraham's faithfulness bore the great fruit of faithfulness, unworldliness. Samuel, Elijah, and Ezekiel were characters who seemed especially to have lived by faith, to have lived free of the world. How did Abraham differ from them? In having a tender disposition, a deeper well-spring of human feeling. He was a man of much strong and domestic affection, really attached to earthly ties, and mentioned in close connection with them throughout his history. The three characters, then, which are thus distinguished by especial names of God's favour, all agree in this respect, a deep and tender love in their dispositions; yet prevented from so ruling them as to draw off their faith from God, which faith was shown by a life of freedom from the world. 3. Let this, then, be the lesson and comfort we draw, that however little we may be living a life of public usefulness, yet a retired one may be the life God has placed us in. (*E. Monro.*) *The friend of God* (with James ii. 23):—Abraham was called the friend of God because he was so. The name does not occur in his life as given in the Book of Genesis, and it has been questioned whether it occurs anywhere else in Holy Scripture; for many have preferred to translate the word in Isaiah, and in 2 Chron. xx. 7, as "lover," or "beloved," rather than "friend." However this may be, it is quite certain that among the Jewish people Abraham was frequently spoken of as "the friend of God." At this present moment, among the Arabs and other Mohammedans, the name of Abraham is not often mentioned, but they speak of him as Khalil Allah, or the "friend of God," or more briefly as El Khalil, "the friend." Those tribes which boast of their descent from him through Ishmael, or through the sons of Keturah, greatly reverence the patriarch, and are wont to speak of him under the name which the Holy Spirit here ascribes to him. It

is a noble title, not to be equalled by all the names of greatness which have been bestowed by princes, even if they should all meet in one. Patents of nobility are mere vanity when laid side by side with this transcendent honour. I think I hear you say, "Yes, it was indeed a high degree to which Abraham reached: so high that we cannot attain unto it." Think not so. We also may be called friends of God (John xv. 14). I. A TITLE TO BE WONDERED AT. 1. Admire and adore the condescending God, who thus makes of a man, like ourselves, His friend. In this case the august Friend displays His pure love, since He has nothing to gain. Surely God does not need friends. How sweet it is to mingle the current of our life with that of some choice bosom friend! Can God have a friend? Friendship cannot all be on one side. In this particular instance it is intended that we should know that while God was Abraham's Friend, this was not all; but Abraham was God's friend. He received and returned the friendship of God. Friendship creates a measure of equality between the persons concerned. I say not that absolute equality is at all necessary to friendship, for a great king may have a firm friend in one of the least of his subjects; but the tendency is towards an equalising of the two friends: the one comes down gladly, and the other rises up in sympathy. Friendship begets fellowship, and this bridges over the dividing gulf. We must keep our place, or we shall not be friends. 2. Note the singular excellence of Abraham. How could he have been God's friend had not grace wrought wonderfully in him? Although a plain man, dwelling in tents, the father of the faithful is always a right royal personage. A calm dignity surrounds him, and the sons of Heth and the kings of Egypt feel its power. His character is well balanced. 3. Note some of the points in which this Divine friendship showed itself. (1) The Lord often visited Abraham. (2) Secrets were disclosed. (3) Compacts were entered into. On certain grand occasions we read: "The Lord made a covenant with Abram." (4) This friendship resulted in the bestowal of innumerable benefits. The life of Abraham was rich with mercies. (5) Since Abraham was God's friend, God accepted his pleadings, and was moved by his influence. (6) There was also between these friends a mutual love and delight. Abraham rejoiced in Jehovah! He was his shield, and his exceeding great reward, and the Lord Himself delighted to commune with Abraham. The serenity of the patriarch's life was caused by his constant joy in God. (7) This friendship was maintained with great constancy. The Lord never forsook Abraham: even when the patriarch erred, the Lord remembered and rescued him. He did not cast him off in old age. Constancy is also seen on the human side of this renowned friendship. Abraham did not turn aside to worship any false god. (8) The Lord kept His friendship to Abraham by favouring his posterity. That is what our text tells us. The Lord styled rebellious Israel, "the seed of Abraham, My friend." II. THE TITLE VINDICATED. Abraham was the friend of God in a truthful sense. There was great propriety and fulness of meaning in the name as applied to him. 1. Abraham's trust in God was implicit. He "staggered not at the promise through unbelief," for he knew that what the Lord had promised He was able also to perform. 2. There was joined to this implicit trust a practical confidence as to the accomplishment of everything that God had promised. 3. Abraham's obedience to God was unquestioning. 4. Abraham's desire for God's glory was uppermost at all times. 5. Abraham's communion with God was constant. III. Regard this name as THE TITLE TO BE SOUGHT AFTER. Oh, that we may get to ourselves this good degree, this diploma, "friend of God"! 1. You must be fully reconciled to Him. 2. We must exercise a mutual choice. The God who has chosen you must be chosen by you. 3. There must be a conformity of heart, and will, and design, and character to God. 4. There must be a continual intercourse. The friend of God must not spend a day without God, and he must undertake no work apart from his God. 5. If we are to be friends of God, we must be co-partners with Him. 6. Friendship, if it exists, will breed mutual delight. IV. THE TITLE TO BE UTILISED for practical purposes. 1. Here is a great encouragement to the people of God. See what possibilities lie before you! 2. Here is a solemn thought for those who would be friends of God. A man's friend must show himself friendly, and behave with tender care for his friend. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 10. **Fear thou not; for I am with thee.**—"*Fear thou not!*"—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH GOD ADDRESSES HIS PEOPLE. They are poor and needy. It is necessary that God should have room in which to work. Emptiness to receive Him; weakness to be empowered by Him. It is into the empty branch that

the vine-sap pours; into the hollowed basin that the water flows; the weakness of the child gives scope for the man's strength. II. THE ASSURANCES THAT HE MAKES TO THEM. No height, however bare, nor depth, however profound, can separate us from His love. III. THE DIVINE PROVISION FOR THEIR NEED. Life is not easy for any of us, if we regard the external conditions only: but directly we learn the Divine secret, rivers flow over bare heights in magnificent cascades; fountains arise in the rock-strewn sterile valleys; the wilderness becomes a pool (vers. 17, 18). To the ordinary eye it is probable that there would appear no difference. Still the tiny garret, and the wasting illness; still the pining child; still the straitened circumstances—still the deferred hope. But the eye of faith beholds a paradise of beauty, murmuring brooks filling the air with melody, leafy trees spreading their shade. What makes the difference? What does faith see? How is she able to work such transformations? 1. Faith is conscious that God is there, and that His presence is the complement of every need. To her eye common desert bushes burn with His Shechinah 2. Faith recognises the reality of an eternal choice, that God has entered into a covenant which cannot be dissolved, and that His love and fidelity are bound to finish the work He has commenced. 3. Faith knows that there is a loving purpose running through every moment of trial, and that the Great Refiner has a meaning in every degree of heat to which the furnace is raised; and she anticipates the moment when she will see what God has foreseen all the time, and towards which He has been working. 4. Faith realises that others are learning from her experiences lessons which nothing else would teach them; and that glory is accruing to God in the highest, because men and angels see and know and consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it (ver. 20). (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *No fear for God's people*:—I. THE SPEAKER. The words derive all their importance from this. So many are our enemies, so mighty, so subtle, so malignant, so ceaseless in their attacks, that all finite beings would be powerless to help. We want Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence on our side. A patience, a compassion, a pity, a love that belongs only to God. We want One to help who embraces all being, all time, all eternity. We want even more than this. We want One who has engaged all these perfections on our behalf. We want even more than this: One who stands in the tenderest relation to us in all these. And such is the Speaker of these words. II. THE PERSONS TO WHOM SPOKEN. Literally to His ancient people. But spiritually to all the people of God, the true descendants of Jacob, everywhere, in all ages. They need them in every stage of their journey, every moment of their lives, every step they take. They are strangers on the earth. The world is a strange place to them, and they are strangers in it. The path which they are treading was never trod by them before. The religion of the world is not theirs; its habits, amusements, principles, practice, are all foreign to them. It is a strange land, and hostile too, for there is much in it that opposes them. They are sailors on a stormy ocean, where sun and stars in many days appear not, and no small tempest lies on them. They are soldiers in a field of hard fighting; their enemies vastly out-number them, overmatch them, and besides this, in themselves they are but weak, yea, powerless, and, unless perpetually encouraged, timid. III. THE WORDS THEMSELVES. "Fear not." He says it more than seventy times in the Scripture. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Fear not!*—Three times within the compass of a few verses, the exhortation, "Fear not," is given. I. THE EXHORTATION. "Fear not." A great honour comes to anyone who is thus addressed by God. It shows that God cares for that person, and desires to live on terms of intimacy with him; for God binds His friends to Him by ties of love as well as reverence. True religion differs from false in this respect. How wonderful to hear God say to any man, "Fear not"; because all have reason to fear Him. Ever since Adam hid himself in the garden, fear has been characteristic of our attitude towards God. We sin against Him. He hates and punishes sin. Does it not look like mockery for us sinners to be told, "Fear not"? Terror often disappears as a fuller knowledge is gained of the object which caused it. Friday trembled all over on first meeting Robinson Crusoe; but soon his terror vanished. Much of our fear of God arises from ignorance; and will vanish when the light of the knowledge of God in Christ dawns on our souls. II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THIS INJUNCTION IS BASED. Remember that God never gives His children a stone when they ask Him for bread. If He says, "Fear not," He means it. Why "Fear not"? "I am with thee," He assures Israel. How tenderly God speaks to Israel in vers. 8, 9. His voice is like that of a mother

crooning to her child—Israel, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend, I have taken thee, and called thee, and chosen thee, and not cast thee away. God is nearer to us than He was to even the Old Testament saints. Immanuel means "God with us." III. THIS TEACHES US TO CLING TO CHRIST ALL THROUGH LIFE. Lord Chamberlain Leslie was once riding through a dangerous ford with the Queen of Scotland sitting behind, in the old fashion, and fastened to him by a belt. As she slipped backwards during the steep ascent out of the river, the Lord Chamberlain shouted encouragingly, "Grip fast." "Ay," said Her Majesty, "gin the buckle haud" They landed safely, and to make security double sure in the future, two additional buckles were sewed on to the belt. God's command to us regarding Christ is, "Grip fast." The bond that binds a believing sinner to Him will never break. Why, then, should we fear? (*D. A. Mackinnon, M.A.*) *Encouragement not to fear:*—I. THE TEMPER OF SPIRIT that the Lord aims to reduce His people unto. "Fear not; be not dismayed." Quietness, settledness, and undauntedness of spirit. II. THE COURSE HE TAKES to reduce them to it. A proposal of motives and arguments of sufficient effect and prevalency to pull down vain fear out of the heart. (*T. Crisp, D.D.*) *Fear, and its remedy:*—I. WHAT IT IS FOR A PERSON NOT TO FEAR, nor be dismayed. Fear is a very distracting, disturbing, confounding passion; it is a kind of besetting passion that makes men lose themselves, especially if it be in the extremity of fear; it ariseth from an apprehension of some unavoidable, insupportable evil growing upon a person, and occasioned either by some symptoms of that evil, or by some messenger or other relating it, or by some foresight of it in the eye. Now, as evil appears greater or lesser, and more or less tolerable, so the passion of fear is more or less in persons. II. WHAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD SHOULD NOT FEAR. There is a threefold fear; a natural, a religious, and a turbulent fear. A natural fear is nothing else but such an affection as is in men by nature, that they cannot be freed from; such a fear was in Christ Himself, without sin. A religious fear is nothing but an awful reverence, whereby people keep a fit distance between the glorious majesty of God and the meanness of a creature. A turbulent fear is a fear of disquietness. Now all disquieting fear is that which the Lord endeavours to take off from His people. 1. The people of God need not be afraid of their sins. I do not say they must not be afraid to sin (Rom. viii. 1). 2. Neither ought we to fear the sins of others. They cannot do God's people any hurt. 3. They that have God for their God must not be afraid of men. III. WHAT THE FRUIT OF FEAR IS; or what prejudice or disadvantage fear and dismayedness bring along with them. 1. Fearfulness of spirit casts many slanders upon God. Upon His power, His faithfulness, His care and providence, the freeness of His grace, the efficacy of the sufferings of Christ. 2. As it respects God's service. (1) It is the cut-throat of believing. (2) It is prejudicial to all religious duties: it is a damper to prayer. It makes all duties merely selfish. Fear puts a man beside his wits, that while he is in such a passion, he is to seek for common ways of safety; so that, whereas men think that fear will help them to avoid danger, commonly, in amazement, you shall have people stand still, not able to stir to save themselves. Besides, this fear is such a torment, that commonly those evils so much feared, prove not so hurtful nor evil to a person as the present fears; and, besides this, it many times doth not only daunt the spirit of a man in himself, but proves very dangerous to others. IV. GOD'S MOTIVES, by which He attempts to prevail over the spirits of His people, not to be afraid or dismayed, come what can or may. God is our God. 1. What is it for God to be our God? While you have all things else but this, you have the rays of the sun; while you have this, you have the sun itself in its brightness and lustre. "I am thy God," is as much as to say, Thou hast a propriety in Me. God's all-sufficiency reaches beyond all wants. 2. What a person hath in this. There are three particulars whereby specially you may observe what great treasure people have in having God. (1) In regard of the quality of the treasure. (2) In regard of the virtue of it. The quintessence of all virtues is in Him. (3) In regard of the sovereignty, universality, and variety of help in it. 3. How it is so well with those that are the Lord's. God, in giving Himself unto persons, gives Himself to be communicated unto them at sundry seasons, and in divers kinds and measures, and yet so that He will be the judge of the fitness of the time. 4. How He becomes their God, and upon what terms. The gift of Him is as cheap as it is rich. He never looks the creature should bring anything that he might procure it. 5. How He will be found of them. The way of finding out God efficiently to be our God, is the Spirit of the Lord. God makes Himself known passively to be the God of His people,

by the word of His grace, and faith laying hold upon it revealed, and more subordinately in prayer, fasting, receiving of the Lord's supper, and such ordinances, so far as they are mixed with faith. (*Ibid.*) *Fear conquered*:—Many good people are full of fears. Bunyan says of Mr. Fearing, "He was a man that had the root of the matter in him, but he was one of the most troublesome pilgrims that I ever met with in all my days." Many things may help us to conquer our fears. I. IT IS WRONG TO FEAR. We are quite safe in God's hands, and fear is really unbelief. It dishonours God. II. IT PREVENTS US FROM DOING OUR DUTY. If a gardener is afraid to sow his seed he will have no flowers, or if the farmer is afraid to plough he will have no crop. If a boy is afraid it is of no use to try for the prize, he will not get it. Fear is ruinous to our work. III. IT DISCOURAGES OTHERS (Numb. xiii. 31-33, xiv. 1). Fear kept the Israelites out of the promised land. IV. IT IS UNNECESSARY. We are afraid because the dangers seem so great, or the work so hard, and ourselves so weak. But we forget who is for us—more than all that can be against us. 1. God is with us. 2. God is our God. What a possession God is! (1) Vast. (2) Rich. (3) Secure. (4) Everlasting. 3. God will strengthen us as He did David and Samson. 4. He will hold us up by His right hand. Who then can lay us low? Away then with fear for ever. (*R. Brewin.*) *Never despair*:—I. GOD'S PEOPLE PASS THROUGH ADVERSITY. II. TRIBULATION STRENGTHENS GOD'S PEOPLE. III. GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THE DAY OF THEIR TROUBLE. IV. A PERSONAL ENCOURAGEMENT. "I am with thee." 1. Your fellow-men may ridicule you because you have become religious. 2. In your trade you may have to pass through much tribulation. 3. You may have felt much fear about making a profession of your faith. 4. Temporal calamity often visits the people of God. 5. There may be affliction and pain coming to you. V. AN INVITATION TO SINNERS. You say this invitation is not in the text. Never mind, I must go over hedge and ditch to call the sinner to Jesus. (*W. Birch.*) *Missionary encouragement*:—The missionary could not take with him a higher word of manifold comfort than is here contained. I. THE COMMAND. 1. "Fear not, thou." Fear throws a paralysis over the senses and faculties of man, so that flight and safety are more thought of than holding one's ground, or making headway against the enemy. 2. "Be not dismayed." If one have fear, he loses both courage and hope; and in this state no valuable work can be done. The soldiers of the first French Revolution were destitute of fear, and by nothing dismayed; hence, all the armies of Europe prevailed not against them, until, in the terms of Carlyle, they had provoked all men, and the Gaelic fire had kindled another kind of fire—the Teutonic kind. II. ITS GROUND. 1. "I am with thee." God promised Moses that His presence should go with him; and without that, said Moses, send me not up. 2. "For I am thy God." It is Jehovah that speaks, who created the universe and governs it still. 3. "I will strengthen thee." God will renew not merely such strength as is natural to us, but a surplusage of strength for special service. In the strength of heavenly food and drink Elijah "went forty days and forty nights." 4. "Yea, I will help thee." Joseph in Egypt, or Daniel in Babylon, would have been destroyed by their enemies, and would never have become prime ministers but for the Divine interposition. 5. "Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." The right hand is an emblem of power—here, of omnipotent power—so that the work of righteousness which you do shall never cease. Truth is omnipotent, and shall rule the eternal years. III. ITS ENCOURAGEMENT. 1. If God be for us in mission work, who can be against us? 2. If He favour and command it, how can it ever cease? *Deus vult*, said Peter the Hermit, and for two centuries the Crusades flamed on high. 3. If truth and righteousness be eternal, how bold and hopeful ought the missionary to be! The Gospel is stronger than the strongest battalions. (*Homiletic Review.*) *The Christian's fears and the Christian's encouragement*:—I. THE CHRISTIAN'S FEARS. It may be asked why does the Christian fear? I answer, because of his knowledge. Do you say, "If this be so, then ignorance is bliss"? I answer, No. I do not say that our knowledge causes our danger, I only say it produces our fear. I may be in danger and not know it; but my ignorance does not diminish my danger; it rather increases it. See Captain Williams in the Atlantic. He is asleep in his cabin: maybe dreaming of wife, and home, and joys to come. He knows nothing of the rocks ahead on which, in a few moments, the vessel may dash, and where many a precious life will soon be gone for ever. If he were awake, there would be agony in his face instead of a smile; but there would be a chance of escape. His knowledge would produce fear, but might lead to safety. So with the sinner; he enters upon this year amidst smiles and songs, and little dreams that ere the next year comes he will be in

eternity. If he were to awake there would be deep anxiety, but that anxiety might end in life and heaven. The Christian, however, is awake. 1. He knows that he is on trial for eternity. 2. That he is surrounded by enemies. 3. He knows himself: every day he lives he makes discoveries of his character that fill him with shame and sorrow. His constant acknowledgment is, "By the grace of God I am what I am." 4. He knows that many a fellow-soldier has fallen. II. THE CHRISTIAN'S ENCOURAGEMENT. 1. There is the assurance of God's presence. 2. There are several exceeding great and precious promises. Conclusion—"To whom wilt thou flee for help? and where wilt thou leave thy glory?" Talk about destitution, there are none so destitute as those who have no God. (*C. Garrett.*) *Courage:*—There is no virtue more highly and widely esteemed than courage, and no vice more generally detested than cowardice. Courage makes heroes, and amongst the ancients, at least, heroes were second in rank to the gods. Amongst savage tribes it may almost be said that courage is the only virtue, for without it all other good qualities lose their value, and where it exists it covers a multitude of sins. This is also the virtue which children most admire. Jack the Giant Killer is a story of perennial interest to the children. Nor is hero-worship a thing unknown among older people. I. THE NEED FOR COURAGE. Courage is the quality which enables one to resist. It is the power to say "No." II. THE NATURE OF COURAGE. Courage displays itself in many ways. It may be seen on the battlefield, and in the quiet endurance of difficulties in the home. It may be seen in maintaining unpopular opinions amid difficult or dangerous circumstances, or in meeting death with unblanched cheek. What is courage? 1. Courage is not blindness to danger. It is no virtue to be unconcerned in the presence of dangers, about which one is totally ignorant. The greatest courage often goes along with the keenest sense of danger. The young officer who was fighting by the side of an old veteran was surprised to find his face blanched with fear. The young man being reckless of danger himself, asked with considerable surprise, "You are not afraid, are you?" "I am afraid," was the reply; "and if you were half as afraid as I am you would run." Two of our Lord's disciples once displayed the courage of ignorance. When Christ asked them if they were able to drink of the cup which He should drink, and be baptized with His baptism, they readily replied that they were able. They were unconscious of the greatness of the task to which they were willing to pledge themselves. 2. Courage is a true estimate of dangers. "Knowledge is the antidote to fear." "Courage is equality to the problem before us." Socrates was condemned to drink the hemlock cup because he taught the youth of Athens noble truths about God, which were esteemed by the authorities as heresy. He might have won his life by a recantation, or an apology to his judges. He preferred death. When the executioner brought in the poison cup, the friends who were gathered round him wept, and Socrates alone was calm. He explained to them that he knew it was a dangerous thing to tell a lie; but that it might even be a blessing to die. At least he would not do what he knew to be evil, in preference to suffering what might possibly be evil, or what might even prove a blessing. The lie was the greater danger. III. MOTIVES FOR COURAGE. The possession of such courage is to be coveted. How is it to be gained? What motive can be found sufficient to inspire one to such acts of bravery? 1. Pity for the oppressed. 2. Consciousness of companionship. 3. Knowledge that the cause is God's. (*R. C. Ford, M.A.*) *Fear and dismay—an antidote:*—There is no doubt of the fact that we have all some fears, and that there are moments when we are dismayed, for life stands connected not only with to-day and man, but with God and eternity. The words of our text come to those who are faithful. I. THE REASONS WHY SOME OF GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE OCCASION AT TIMES TO FEAR AND EVEN TO BE DISMAYED. 1. Our own nature is our enemy. In its depravity, in its ungodliness, the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other. 2. Then there are these things that surround us, and those people who constitute the world around. 3. Then there is the great enemy. God often teaches us our inability. Is it not a solemn thing to stand in the midst of these enemies with that other world coming, and Christ to be the Judge? Is it not a solemn life when we think of all its responsibilities, if we are not found looking to the true source and finding the true power? II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE TEXT. 1. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." Do not imagine for a moment that it is your wants that *bring* to you this succour. The tendency with us all is always to make it our doing. Let us lay aside the thought that we have any power, and remember that from first to last it is all of grace. The first encouragement,

then, is found in the Divine presence: "I am with thee." 2. But there is yet a deeper depth. Sometimes the spirit of dismay comes over us. What will be the end? Cast away? What does the prophet tell us in regard to our covenant-keeping God? "Be not dismayed, for I am thy God." Here is the most endearing relationship in the universe! There is not an angel in heaven but feels as he thinks of God that he is all safe. Now it is the same relationship between us and God; nay, it is a more sanctified one, for it is a relationship which exhibits the infinitude of His love, the unspeakableness of His mercy. 3. "I am thy God, I will strengthen thee." One of the finest things that one finds after affliction is when the strength is returning and weakness is departing. There is a gladness and a gratitude in connection with such an experience as this which only those who have been afflicted can know. The downcast ones who are in the depths and ready to perish, ready to faint by the way, in that condition hear a voice; and what does it say to them? "I will strengthen thee." 4. That is not all. "I will help thee." Now this implies one step further. It implies that you and I have a burden, and as we are going through the world we are carrying it; but the burden is too heavy for us. We are tired; we are overloaded, and there is one Traveller by our side who can help us. 5. Then His support is effectual. "Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." There is no left-hand work with God; no sinister work; it is all right-hand work with Him. And then all that is with it and all that it introduces is righteousness. I know of no encouragement like this text if we properly appreciate it. (*A. M. Brown, LL.D.*) *God's all-sufficiency a reason for fearlessness*:—God can be God and fearless, but we can scarcely be creatures and fearless. Still less is it likely that sinful creatures should be fearless. It is more than the Father looks for under the present mode of our existence. But when the fearful thing is coming down, or when the children see it looming in the distance and are frightened, and they catch the Father's countenance, and see that He is not frightened, it wonderfully reassures the poor children to see a fearlessness on the Father's face. Heaven is full of "Fear nots." And if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, it will break out of your midnight, and up from your deepest valley too, that voice of the Father, the All-in-all. I. The meaning of the word is that GOD IS OUR ALL-SUFFICIENCY, and not dis-related, but related to us. II. CONSIDER THE USE THE CHILDREN SHOULD MAKE OF THIS SUFFICIENCY OF THEIR FATHER. See what liberties we take with God's earth. We get stones wherever we like. They are not our stones. And we get gold wherever we like, and we get iron wherever we like, and we get coal wherever we can. I hope the day will come when, even without thought or intention, we shall, from the new nature of our being, take up God as easily as the blade of grass takes up atmosphere and light. Let us enter our home—enter and be comforted, as all helpless things are, to find their source of supply so near. And let us not leave our nest and then fret that our rest is gone, but abide encircled by the everlasting strength. (*J. Pulsford.*) *The sweet harp of consolation*:—We sometimes speak very lightly of doubts and fears; but such is not God's estimate of them. Our Heavenly Father evidently considers them to be great evils, extremely mischievous to us, and exceedingly dishonourable to Himself, for He very frequently forbids our fears, and as often affords us the most potent remedies for them. "Fear not" is a frequent utterance of the Divine mouth. "I am with thee" is the fervent, soul-cheering argument to support it. Martin Luther used to say, that to comfort a desponding spirit is as difficult as to raise the dead; but, then, we have a God who both raises the dead from their graves and His people from their despair. Saul was subject to fits of deep despondency, but when David, the skilful harper, laid his hand among the obedient strings, the evil spirit departed, overcome by the subduing power of melody. My text is such a harp. I. WE SHALL NOTE THE TIMES WHEN ITS SWEET STRAINS ARE MOST NEEDED. Occasions when comfort is needed are many; for some there be, who, like the willow, will only flourish in a soil which is always wet with consolation. If their mothers did not bear them with sorrow, like Jabez, they commenced very early on their own account to accumulate a heritage of woe. As John Bunyan would say, they need not be afraid of the Slough of Despond, for they carry a slough within their own hearts, and are never out of it, or it is never out of them. They are plants which flourish best in shady places, among the damps of sorrow. They delight most to dwell in the Valley of Humiliation; and when they are journeying through that peaceful vale, like Mr. Fearing, they could lie down and kiss the flowers, because the place is so suitable to their meek and lowly spirit. There is something sadly weak about this state of experience, though there is also much to admire: these are they whom the Master carries in His

bosom, and doth gently lead. More or less, believers need consolation at all times, because their life is a very peculiar one. 1. Yet are there special occasions when the Comforter's work is needed, and one of these certainly is when we are racked with much physical pain. Many bodily pains can be borne without affecting the mind, but there are others whose sharp fangs insinuate themselves into the marrow of our nature, boring their way most horribly through the brain and the spirit: for these much grace is wanted. 2. When the trouble comes in another shape, namely, in our relative sorrows, borne personally by those dear to us. 3. When all the currents of providence run counter to us. 4. Some of us know what it is to hear this voice of God in the midst of unusual responsibilities, heavy labours, and great enterprises. 5. Did you ever stand, as a servant of God, alone in the midst of opposition? Have you heard the clamour of many, some saying this thing, and some the other—some saying, "He is a good man," but others saying, "Nay, but he deceiveth the people"? Did you never feel the delight of saying, "The best of all is, God is with us; and, in the name of God, instead of folding up the standard, we will set up our banners"? If you have ever passed through that ordeal, then have you needed the words, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God." "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" 6. We shall want this word of comfort most of all when we go down the shelving banks of the black river. 7. After death, we read in this Word of great events, what shall happen to us; but we feebly comprehend the revelation. Solemnities shall follow which may well strike a man with awe as he thinks upon them. What about that future? Why, faith can look forward to it without a single tremor; she fears not, for she hears the voice of the everlasting God saying to her, "I am with thee." Thus have I mentioned a few of the occasions in which this harp sounds most sweetly. All through life I may picture the saints as marching to its music, even as the children of Israel set forward to the notes of the silver trumpets. II. We come to you, harp in hand, and pray you DISTINCTLY TO HEAR ITS NOTES. The sweetness of all the notes melt into each other, but now we shall touch each string severally and by itself, and if you have an educated ear you will hear that which will solace your souls. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." What does it mean? 1. "I am with thee in deepest sympathy." When you suffer, you suffer not a new pang; Christ knew that pain long ago. 2. The Lord is with us in community of interests. That is to say, if the believer should fail, God himself would be dishonoured. Luther rejoiced greatly whenever he felt that he had brought God into his quarrel. "Well," said he, "if it were I, Martin Luther, and the Pope of Rome who had to fight it out, I might well despair; but if it be the Pope against Martin Luther and Martin Luther's God, then woe be unto Antichrist." God is in the quarrel of the man who attacks error; God is in the quarrel of the man who is trying to do good, to reclaim his fellow-creatures from sin, and to establish the kingdom of Christ. Ay, and when you can quote a Divine promise, God is engaged in your affairs, because if He do not keep that promise, He is not true. It is with us as it is with the timid traveller in the Alps, who is attended by a faithful guide. He shivers as he passes under overhanging cliffs, or glides down shelving precipices, or climbs the slippery steeps of glaciers, but if his guide has linked himself with him he is reassured. The guide has said, "You are trembling, sir, but the way is safe; I have passed it many a time with many a traveller as weak as you are. But to reassure you and make you feel how safe you are, see here!" and he straps a rope round the traveller and round himself. "Now," says he, "both of us or neither. We shall both get safely home or neither." 3. The next string of the harp gives this sound, "I am with thee in providential aid." In the old days of the post horses, there were always relays of swift horses ready to carry onward the king's mails. It is wonderful how God has His relays of providential agents; how when He has done with one, there is always another just ready to take his place. 4. God is with us in secret sustaining power. He well knows how, if He do not interpose openly, to deliver us in trouble, to infuse strength into our sinking hearts. I have read of those who bathe in those baths of Germany which are much impregnated with iron, that they have felt after bathing as if they were made of iron, and were able in the heat of the sun to cast off the heat as though they were dressed in steel. Happy indeed are they who bathe in the bath of such a promise as this, "I am with thee!" 5. There is a way by which the Lord can be with His people, which is best of all, namely, by sensible manifestations of His presence, imparting joy and peace which surpass all understanding. III. MEDITATE MUCH UPON THE SWEETNESS OF THOSE NOTES. 1. The comfort of my text excels all other comfort under heaven. 2. There is all

the comfort here that heaven itself could afford. The Manx people have for their motto three legs, so that whichever way you throw them they are sure to stand; but as for the saints, it is impossible for them to be thrown down by misfortune, or even by the infernal powers. We shall stand, for God upholds us. Now divide the words, and view them separately. "I AM." Know you what this meaneth? God is self-existent, eternal, independent, sitting on no precarious throne, nor borrowing leave to be. It is no other than "JEHOVAH," "JAH," "I AM," who has become the Friend of His people. Note the tense of it—not "I was," not "I shall be," but "I am." We have yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the same great "I am." "I am"—what? "I am with thee," poor, feeble thing as thou art. IV. Though I have spoken of my text as a harp yielding rarest music, yet IT NEEDS THAT THE EAR BE TUNED BEFORE ITS MUSIC CAN BE APPRECIATED. It is not every man that understands the delights of harmony, even in ordinary music. So there are tens of thousands of men who know nothing at all of what it is to have God with them. Yea, this would be their dread; they would be glad to escape from God if they could. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Fear and its antidote*:—To whom are these words spoken? We must not steal from God's Scripture any more than from man's treasury. They were spoken—1. To God's chosen ones (ver. 8). 2. To those whom God has called (ver. 9). 3. They are God's servants, doing His will (ver. 8). 4. They are those whom He has not rejected from His service, in spite of the imperfections of which they are penitently conscious (ver. 9). To these every honey-dropping word of this text belongs. I. A VERY COMMON DISEASE OF GOOD MEN—FEAR. 1. This disease came into man's heart with sin (Gen. iii. 8). 2. Fear continues in good men because sin continues in them. 3. Fear coming in by sin, and being sustained by sin, readily finds food upon which it may live. 4. If fear finds food within, it also readily finds food without. Poverty, sickness, &c. 5. In certain instances the habit of fearing has reached a monstrous growth. 6. Even the strongest of God's servants are sometimes the subjects of fear (1 Kings xix. 4). II. GOD'S COMMAND AGAINST FEAR. "Fear thou not; be not dismayed." That precept is absolute and unqualified; we are not to fear at all. Why? 1. Because it is sinful. It almost always results from unbelief, the sin of sins. 2. It feeds sin. 3. It injures yourself. 4. It weakens the believer's influence and so causes mischief to others. III. THE PROMISES WHICH GOD GIVES TO PREVENT FEAR AND DISMAY. 1. Many a man fears because he is afraid of loneliness. You are not alone, because God is with you. 2. Men fear they may lose all they have in the world, and they know very well that if they lose their property they usually lose their friends. Your goods may go, but your God will not. 3. Fear sometimes arises from a sense of personal weakness. "I will strengthen thee." God can, if He wills it, put Samson's strength into an infant's arm. 4. Some fear that friendly succour will fail. If the work on which we have set our hearts is God's work, He will send to our aid all the succour we need. 5. Many a child of God is afflicted with a fear that he shall one day, in some unguarded moment, bring dishonour upon the Cross of Christ. This is a very natural, and in some respects a very proper fear. "I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." (*Ibid.*) *Helpful presence*:—It was said of Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform, that his presence in a sick-room half cured his patients. Pain lost half its terror, and seemed to expect its dismission, once he stood by the sick. (*J. A. Davies, B.D.*) *A trinity of Divine forces*:—"Strengthen," "help," "uphold," a trinity of Divine forces, a triple wall of Divine protection. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *A grand staircase*:—When the late Dr. William Anderson lay dying, his friend, Mr. Logan, read this passage to him, and the noble old man at once seized it, and looking at his friend, said with great emphasis, "What a grand staircase that is up which to go to God!" (*C. Garrett.*) *Security in God's company*:—If Cæsar could say to the fearful ferryman, in a terrible storm, "Be of good cheer; thou carriest Cæsar, and therefore canst not miscarry," how much more may he presume to be safe that hath God in his company! A child in the dark fears nothing while he hath his father by the hand. (*J. Trapp.*) *The protection of God's presence*:—Zwingle, in spite of all the machinations of his enemies, went about unharmed. It was as though an unseen bodyguard encompassed him, and his enemies despaired of attaining their end. "God is with me," he said; "and with Him on my side I fear my enemies as little as the crag fears the ocean's foam." (*Sunday School Chronicle.*) *God a background*:—Dr. Dale of Birmingham, towards the close of his life, made the following entry in his diary: "Of course, when Sir Andrew Clark was sent for, and —— and —— came, I understood that my position was regarded as critical. I was too weak, however, to be much moved by it—

too weak to find much direct consolation in the eternal springs of strength and joy. God was a kind of background to everything—hardly discerned, but there; this was all." (*Life of R. W. Dale.*) *General Gordon's faith*:—"I go as alone," wrote General Gordon, as he started from Cairo to Khartoum, "with an infinite almighty God to direct and guide me, and I am so called to trust in Him, as to fear nothing, and, indeed, to feel sure of success." (*Sunday School Chronicle.*) **I will help thee.**—*God's "I wills"*:—I will, I will, I will. Oh, the rhetoric of God! Oh, the certainty of the promise! (*J. Trapp.*) *The best Helper*:—Two persons are spoken of here: "I" and "thee." "I," the person speaking, is our God and Saviour; and "thee," the person spoken to, means everybody who needs His help and seeks it. There are four reasons why Jesus is the best Helper. I. BECAUSE HE IS ALWAYS NEAR TO HELP. God is always near when people are in trouble. He always could help them if He saw it best. But sometimes He sees good reasons for not helping those who are in need. II. BECAUSE HE IS ALWAYS ABLE TO HELP. III. BECAUSE HE IS ALWAYS WILLING TO HELP. He may not always be willing to help us just at the time, or in the way we desire,—that may not be best; but in His own time and way He is always willing to help. IV. BECAUSE HE IS ALWAYS KIND IN HELPING. There are some people who are willing and able to help others, and who do help them too, but it is done in a very rough manner. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Our Helper*:—I. WHO MAKES THE PROMISE? A promise is nothing to me unless I have good security that it will be kept. When a man makes a promise to me that he will do so and so, I value the promise according to his ability and disposition to make it good. If, now, you read from verse 10, you will see who it is that promises help. It is a well-guaranteed promise. He who made you knows all about you. His knowledge of you is even more exact than is the watchmaker's knowledge of the delicate machinery which he takes apart and puts together again. II. HOW MUCH WE ALL NEED HELP. We begin to need it in many ways as soon as we are born, and we never cease to need it as long as we live. (*J. W. Teal.*) *God's help*:—A minister was one day bringing his books upstairs into another room, for he was going to have his study on the first floor, instead of downstairs, and his little boy wanted to help father carry some of the books. "Now," said the father, "I knew he could not do it, but as he wanted to be doing something, to please him and to do him good by encouraging his industry, I told him he might take a book and carry it up." So away he went, and picked out one of the biggest volumes—Caryl on Job or Poli Synopsis, I should think—and when he had climbed a step or two up the stairs, down he sat and began to cry. He could not manage to carry his big book any farther; he was disappointed and unhappy. How did the matter end? Why, the father had to go to the rescue, and carry both the great book and the little man. So, when the Lord gives us a work to do, we are glad to do it, but our strength is not equal to the work, and then we sit down and cry, and it comes to this, that our blessed Father carries the work and carries the little man too, and then it is all done and done gloriously. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 13. **For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand.**—*The Christian's help*:—I. IT IS A PERSONAL HELP. "I will help thee." When the religious element was strongly felt amongst the Jews, they looked to the King eternal for guidance and protection; nothing but His counsel would satisfy them. Man seems to have the special intuition of a personal God, as if nothing but personal contact with Him could revive the latent powers. Truth in the abstract cannot touch the heart so as to cause an inner revolution. Truth must come from God as from a living Being. II. THIS PERSONAL HELP WILL BE GIVEN ONLY IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. The children of Israel had departed from the right way, and as long as they sought their own gratification they could not expect help from the God of their fathers. The way of righteousness is not the most pleasant at all times for flesh and blood, but it is always the safest. III. IT IS THE MOST TENDER AND CONSTANT HELP WITHIN THE REACH OF MAN. The Jewish people were bruised by their terrible fall, they had but little strength left, they were almost hopeless of ever seeing their own country. The Lord knew their helplessness, so these words are full of the greatest kindness. The way of holiness, the way to heaven, is so strange to a person who has defiled himself with sin that but little progress could be made without a guide. So the Lord tenderly takes each traveller by the hand. (*Homilist.*) *The promised help*:—I. THE LORD GIVETH STRENGTH. What a precious truth is this, if believed in, to such a feeble creature as man. It is as a covenant God in Christ that the Lord comforts the believing soul with the promise, "I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand," &c. The Lord "thy"

God. II. MAN NEEDS THE STRENGTH which the Lord promises, and which He alone can give. Man needs strength for obedience to God's holy laws. Vain is the help or salvation of man, even far more in things spiritual and eternal than in our temporal concerns; so that those who trust in and pray to saints and angels, and expect salvation from them, will be overcome: they will not tread down their enemies, nor obtain the conqueror's crown. (*W. Firth, B.D.*) *Courage, its source and its necessity*:—I. ITS SOURCE. "I will hold thy right hand." The grasp of the hand is significant of close and present friendship, of the living nearness of the deliverer. And that sense of God's presence, so near that our faith can touch His hand and hear the deep still music of His voice—realised as it may be in Christ, is the source of a courage which no danger can dispel, no suffering exhaust, and no death destroy. The clearest way of illustrating this will be to take the higher forms of courage among men, and observe what states of soul are most conducive to it. 1. Beginning with the courage of active resistance, we find its great element in the fixed survey of the means of conquest. 2. Passing on to the courage needful for passive endurance, we find that its great feature is self-surrender to the highest law of life. The Christian endures, because the law of his being has become resignation to the will of God. II. ITS NECESSITY. 1. It requires courage to manifest the Christian character before men. 2. To maintain steadfast obedience to the will of God. 3. To hold fast to our highest aspirations. (*E. L. Hull, B.A.*) *The repetitions of love*:—God repeats His love for, and His purpose concerning, Israel. Lacordaire said that love is always saying the same thing, yet never repeats itself. And though God repeats in both parts His love and purpose, yet it would be new all through to the Jew, sick with his sorrow and captivity; and the sum of the consolation is—"I am with thee. Fear not; rather rejoice." No trial could or would befall the Jew but God would help him to bear it. (*J. A. Davies, B.D.*) *Held by God's hand*:—A little lad in the hospital was asked if he could bear a severe operation. "Yes," was his reply, "if father will hold my hand." When we feel God's hand holding us in times of trial, the touch gives us nerve and calm. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 14. **Fear not, thou worm Jacob.**—*Fear not!*—I. The first qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God's work well, is A SENSE OF OUR OWN WEAKNESS. When God's warrior marches forth to battle with plumed helmet, and with mail about his loins, strong in his own majesty—when he says, "I know that I shall conquer, my own right arm and my mighty sword shall get unto me the victory," defeat is not far distant. God will not go forth with that man who goeth forth in his own strength. The text addresses us as worms. Now, the mere rationalist, the man who boasts of the dignity of human nature, will never subscribe his name to such a title as this. Not so, however, he who is wise and understandeth; he knows that he is a worm, and he knows it in this way—1. By contemplation. Those who think, must think their pride down—if God is with them in their thinking. Lift up now your eyes, behold the heavens, the work of God's fingers; and if ye be men of sense and your souls are attuned to the high music of the spheres, ye will say, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?" 2. Again, if you want to know your own nothingness, consider what you are in suffering. 3. Try some great labour for Christ. II. THERE SHOULD BE TRUST IN THE PROMISED STRENGTH. There is no saying what man can do when God is with him. Put God into a man's arm, and he may have only the jawbone of an ass to fight with, but he will lay the Philistines in heaps: put God into a man's hand, and he may have a giant to deal with, and nothing but a sling and a stone, but he will lodge the stone in the giant's brow before long; put God into a man's eye, and he will flash defiance on kings and princes; put God into a man's lip, and he will speak right honestly, though his death should be the wages of his speech. III. WE MUST LABOUR TO GET RID, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, OF FEAR. The prophet says, "Fear not"; thou art a worm, but do not fear; God will help thee; why shouldest thou fear? 1. Get rid of fear, because fear is painful. 2. Fear is weakening. 3. Fear dishonours God. 4. Doubt not the Lord, oh, Christian, for in so doing thou dost lower thyself. The more thou believest, the greater thou art; but the more thou doubtest, the less thou becomest. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) "*Thou worm Jacob!*"—I. JACOB WAS A WORM IN OTHER PEOPLE'S EYES. Is there not many a "worm" still under the same experience? I may be speaking to a clerk who gets laughed at by his fellow-clerks, with their master's permission, because he is a Christian. I may be speaking to some one

who is despised and scoffed at, and called a Sabbatarian, because he keeps the Sabbath day. Take comfort! He who is now thy Redeemer was treated as a worm. "I am a worm, and no man," sang the Messianic psalmist. II. JACOB WAS ALSO A WORM IN HIS OWN EYES, which is far more to the purpose. Look at the Jews drawing together into some little sanctuary on a Sabbath morning or evening, amid the scoffs of the Babylonians. Look at the aged patriarch when the doors are shut, opening the roll of the prophet Isaiah, and reading, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob." "Ay, worms indeed!" the hearers would reply from the bottom of their hearts; "worms indeed!" We may writhe under men's contempt; but there is no writhing like the writhing under a sense of personal sin. There is no nerve like the nerve that passes through the conscience. Job was perhaps the noblest man of his day; and yet we find him saying, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister." None of you are so low as that! Our Lord called Himself a worm because He was treated as a worm; but Job uses the word in a very different sense; for Job knew he was a sinner, and it is almost an insult to a worm for a sinner to call himself by the name. The Septuagint has left out this word in the text. How that came about passes my comprehension. Were these proud translators of Alexandria too good for the Bible? Were they too high and holy to put in what Isaiah wrote? Coleridge says, "God's Word is God's Word to me, because it finds me." Has it found us? Have we seen the sin and the misery of our own heart? Can we look back on that action we did yesterday, and say, "It was the action of a worm, and not of a man"? III. JACOB WAS A WORM IN GOD'S EYES. "God," says Calvin, "here seems to speak disrespectfully of His people"; but if you are to speak to worms, you must speak in their language. Fine names would never suit Jacob in this case, and the Jacob-minded soul finds comfort in such words, knowing that they were used in love. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, I will help thee." "Thee" is an individualising, singularising word. The Lord places His finger upon the humble man's heart, and says, "I will help thee. I, the Highest, will seek out the lowest, and let others, who think themselves better, help themselves." "The Holy One of Israel"—blessed name! name He will never lay aside!—is the Portion, the Helper, the Friend of "worm Jacob." Oh "worm Jacob," it doth not yet appear what thou shalt be; but when He shall appear whose thou art, "thou shalt be like Him, for thou shalt see Him as He is." (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) *Fears dispelled*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S PEOPLE. 1. The language employed refers to the Jews as the descendants of Jacob, afterwards called Israel. 2. The epithet which designates their character. "Worm." This word describes a person—mean, weak, vile, and despised (Job xxv. 5, 6). This epithet implies—(1) Meanness. This meanness is frequently felt by Christians when they think of the grandeur and glory of God, as seen in His works and recorded in His Word (Psa. viii. 3, 4). When they think of their sins and imperfections (1 Cor. xv. 9). When they think of their duties, trials, their ignorance, and their tendency to the grave. (2) Pollution. A worm is regarded as unclean. Its element is putrescence. Man is now degraded from his original dignity. Every Christian feels his tendency to pollution. (3) Danger. A worm is frequently exposed to danger. Every foot is ready to crush it. The body of man is liable to casualties. And the precious soul of man is surrounded by danger. (4) Weakness. A worm is not able to make resistance. What resistance can a sinner make to God? II. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE SUBJECT TO FEAR. "Fear not, worm Jacob." The Israelites in Babylon were sadly depressed in mind, fearing that God would be gracious no more. The people of God are subject to fear. 1. Their character, as represented by meanness, pollution, danger, and weakness, causes them to fear. 2. The multitude of their enemies causes fear 3. They fear Divine chastisements. These are needful, but "grievous" (Heb. xii. 11). 4. They sometimes fear the tests and trials of the future. 5. They fear death. III. THE EXHORTATION AND PROMISE. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, I will help thee." "Fear not!" Look from earthly resources to the mighty God of Jacob. Fear not thy foes. "He that is for thee is more than all that are against thee." I will help thee, for—1. I have chosen thee. 2. I have redeemed thee. 3. I have adopted thee. 4. I have the ability as well as the will. By all means. 5. I will help thee with the ministration of My angels, by the events of providence. 6. I will guide thee in all perplexities. 7. I will not only help, but will glorify thee. Thou art a worm here. I will change thy vile body when the dead shall be raised, even as the chrysalis becomes a beautiful being after its temporary sleep. (*Homilist.*)

Biblical illustrations from the animal kingdom :—It is not unusual to find the Bible writers borrowing names from the animal kingdom and applying them to men. Isaiah does so again and again. Bold in his calling, he stands beside Jehovah in the circle of the heavens, and sees men like grasshoppers. But among the grass and the grasshoppers he sees a people over whom Jehovah rules, and he calls them "sheep," and the little people he calls "lambs." And then he sees his sheep and his lambs changing into eagles and eaglets—"They shall mount up with wings as eagles." Prophets, psalmists, apostles, all employ the same method, and draw their illustrations from the same source. There is fine education in the Bible! No wonder that John Bunyan wrote the finest style in the English language, getting his vocabulary between its boards! (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) "*Thou worm Jacob!*" :—The worm here indicated is elsewhere referred to as being injurious to vineyards (Deut. xxviii. 39). It was the destroyer of Jonah's gourd (Jonah iv. 7). It is said to be the coccus, a genus which includes the cochineal insect. Naturalists describe the coccus as living upon trees and plants, and as being very small. When collected in districts where these insects are cultivated for the dye which they yield, there are found to be about 70,000 of them in a pound. Two kinds of insect are designated "worm" in Isa. xiv. 11. "The worm (mite of corruption) is spread under thee, and worms (cocci) cover thee." This is also the case in Job xxv. 6. In the passage before us, then, the descendants of Jacob are compared with a creature that is despicable, because it is insignificant and noxious (Psa. xxii. 6). Orelli, explaining that "worm Jacob" denotes here smallness, weakness, and helplessness, seems to have presented to his mind some such insignificant creature as the coccus; but the commentators generally have thought rather of the familiar earthworm, which they regard as a symbol of debasement and affliction, after the manner of Glo'ster in *King Lear*, when he says of the supposed idiot beggar—

> "I' the last night's storm I such a fellow saw,
> Which made me think a man a worm."

"God's people," says Henry, "are as 'worms' in humble thoughts of themselves, and in their enemies' haughty thoughts of them: worms, but not vipers, or of the serpent's seed." Other writers use the expressions "despicable and trampled upon" (Lowth); "weak and despised, and trodden under foot" (Wordsworth); "creature of the dust, prostrate and helpless" (Kay); "abject, weak, and wretched of thyself" (Diodati). We must turn to Mic. vii. 17 for a passage in which reference is expressly made to the earthworm. The comments supplied by Cornelius à Lapide show that expositors have not always been content to regard the epithet "worm Jacob" merely as a suggestion of lowliness and meanness. In the opinion of the more ancient among them it signifies, historically and typically, the Jews afflicted by the Assyrians, but antitypically the apostles and early Christians, *tum ob paucitatem, tum ob contemptum et humilitatem*. Allusion was made to Luke xii. 32 and 1 Cor. iv. 9; while Ezek. xxviii. 11, 12 was referred to as a parallel passage. Jerome is quoted as saying, *Sicut vermis terram penetrat, ita sermo Apostolicus penetravit Gentium civitates, et ingressus est corda prius durissima*. On Luke xii. 32 Bengel comments, *Grex est non numerissimus, si ad mundum comparetur*; and by applying the thought thus expressed to the phrase under discussion we get a slight, but useful, addition to the suggestions made elsewhere. (*F. Jarratt.*) **Thy Redeemer.**—*Thy Redeemer* :—And why does it say, "and thy Redeemer"? What was the use of appending the Redeemer's name to this precious exhortation? I. It was added FOR AMPLIFICATION. There are some preachers from whom you will never learn anything; not because they do not say much which is instructive, but because they just mention the instructive thought once, and immediately pass on to another thought, never expanding the second thought, but immediately passing on, almost without connection, to a third. Other preachers, on the other hand, follow a better method. Having given one idea, they endeavour to amplify it, so that their hearers, if they are not able to receive the idea in the abstract, at least are able to lay hold upon some of its points, when they come to the amplification of it. Now God, the great Author of the Book, the great Preacher of the truth by His prophets, when He would preach it, and when He would write it, so amplifies a fact, so extends a truth, and enlarges upon a doctrine. "I will help thee," saith Jehovah. That means Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "Ah! but," said God, "My people will forget that, unless I amplify the thought, so I will even break it up; I will

remind them of My Trinity. They understand My Unity; I will bid them recollect that there are Three in One, though these Three be One"; and He adds, "Thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Jehovah—Redeemer—Holy One of Israel—three persons, all included, indeed, in the word Jehovah, but very likely to be forgotten unless they had been distinctly enumerated. Suffer your thoughts to enlarge upon the fact, that the promise contained in this verse, "Fear not, I will help thee," is a promise from Three Divine Persons. II. It is a SWEETENING OF THE PROMISE. All the promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus; but when a promise mentions the name of the Redeemer, it imparts a peculiar blessedness to it. It is something like, if I may represent it by such a figure, the beautiful effect of certain decorations of stained glass. There are some persons whose eyes are so weak that the light seems to be injurious to them, especially the red rays of the sun, and a glass has been invented, which rejects the rays that are injurious, and allows only those to pass which are softened and modified to the weakness of the eye. It seems as if the Lord Jesus were some such a glass as this. The grace of God the Trinity, shining through the man Christ Jesus, becomes a mellow, soft light, so that mortal eye can bear it. III. I think this is put in by way of CONFIRMATION. Read the promise, recollecting that it says, "Thy Redeemer"; and then, as you read it through, you will see how the word "Redeemer" seems to confirm it all. Now begin. "*I* will help thee": lay a stress on that word. If you read it so, there is one blow at your unbelief. "*I* will help thee," saith the Redeemer. There is the Master's handwriting; it is His own autograph, it is written by Himself; behold the bloody signature! It is stamped with His Cross. And now let us read the promise again, and lay the stress on the "*will*." Oh, the "wills" and the "shalls": they are the sweetest words in the Bible. When God says "I will," there is something in it. And now we lay stress on another word: "I will *help* thee." That is very little for Me to do, to help thee. Consider what I have done already. What! not help thee? Why, I bought thee with My blood. And now, just take the last word, "I will help *thee*." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) "*Thy Redeemer*":—The word "Redeemer" would suggest to a Hebrew reader the idea of a near kinsman (Lev. xxv. 24, 25), and of deliverance from bondage by the payment of a ransom. Its highest application occurs here and in Job xix. 25. The reference to the Son of God, although it might not be perceptible of old, is now rendered necessary by the knowledge that this act, even under the old dispensation, is always referred to the same person of the Trinity. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *The Holy One thy Redeemer*:—Of the two names applied by Isaiah to the Saviour, which are nearly peculiar to him, Qudosh, or Holy One, is common to both sections of his book, while Goel, the Redeemer, though not confined to the second part, receives there its peculiar significance. Here it is that "the Holy One thy Redeemer," becomes altogether merged in the Goel. (*F. Sessions.*)

Ver. 15. **A new sharp threshing instrument.**—*Evil and good*:—I. THE FORMS OF GOOD AND EVIL. Evil is a mountain—a big thing occupying immense space, bounding the horizon and darkening the sun. Good often appears as small as a worm. II. THE CONFLICT OF GOOD AND EVIL. The worm shall "thresh the mountain." Worms in nature are mighty things; they build up islands fair as Eden. Good has made an attack upon evil, and it will thresh its "mountains and beat them small." (*Homilist.*) *Worm Jacob threshing the mountains*:—I. WHAT THE CHURCH AND PEOPLE OF GOD ARE. They are named by Him who misnames none, "worm Jacob." Their name from their nature is a worm; they are weak, despised creatures, ready to be crushed by the foot of every passer-by: yet "worm Jacob," believing, praying, wrestling worm as he was. II. WHAT THEY SHALL CERTAINLY AND INFALLIBLY DO. "Thresh the mountains," &c. Interpreters generally understand by the "mountains" the great and lofty potentates of the earth, setting themselves against the Church. And, no doubt, these were in the prophet's view; but the view was not confined to them. God's bringing down the Babylonian monarchy at their prayers, and the victories afterward of the Maccabees over their enemies, cannot reasonably be supposed to complete the intent of this prophecy. We must needs look to the kingdom of Christ for it, of which there is plainly an account (vers. 17–19). Compare Dan. ii. 34, 35. And we must carry on our view all along to the end of time (Rev. ii. 26, 27); the rather that it is the manner of the prophet to wrap up in one expression, temporal, spiritual, and eternal deliverance; the deliverance

from Babylon, which was temporal, being the first and nearest in view, but not terminating it. Here then we may consider—1. What "worm Jacob" has to encounter. "Mountains," and "hills," whose weight is sufficient to crush millions of him; difficulties quite disproportionable to his strength, as a mountain to that of a worm. 2. The success of this so very unequal match. The mountains shall not crush the worm; but the worm shall thresh the mountains, as one does a sheaf of corn with repeated strokes. 3. The degree and pitch of the worm's success against those mountains. It shall beat them small, till they be like dust or chaff: so that they shall be blown away with the wind, and no vestige of them remain. 4. The insurance of this success of the worm. Who could insure it, but the mighty God? Jesus Christ, Jehovah, the most high God, and worm Jacob's Kinsman-Redeemer, hath, by His word of promise, engaged His almighty power on the side of the worm against the mountains. Let not then the worm fear or doubt the success. (*T. Boston.*) *A mystery of grace*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE SUBJECT wherein this mystery of grace is carried on by Jesus Christ. It is in worm Jacob, denoting the Church in general, and every believer or true member thereof in particular. One would think, that one designed to be a thresher of the mountains should be a party of a signally great and swelling character, a hero, a giant, or if there were anything could carry the character higher: but, on the contrary, it is very low, surprisingly low, worm Jacob. II. THE MYSTERY OF GRACE CARRIED ON IN THEM BY JESUS CHRIST. 1. An apparently hopeless encounter they are led to by Him. Worm Jacob threshing the mountains. (1) The Lord lays in His people's way mountains of difficulties quite above their strength; difficulties which they look to, as a worm to a mountain before it (2 Cor. i. 8). (2) They must not go about the mountains in their way, shifting the difficulties which the Lord calls them to; but they must make their way over them, threshing them down. (3) Therefore worm Jacob falls a-threshing the mountains, combating the difficulties which the Lord lays in his way. There is a spirit in worm Jacob more daring and venturous than ever was in any unbelieving hero. (4) They continue the combating of difficulties resolutely and patiently. Threshing is a continued action, consisting of repeated strokes. (5) Worm Jacob has many mountains to thresh. 2. A surprising success; even as surprising as a worm's threshing and beating the mountains small to dust, and threshing them away. (1) Partial successes in their way, very surprising; surprising to others and to themselves. (2) A total success at the end of their way, which will swallow them up in surprise and eternal wonder. III. I SHALL ACCOUNT FOR THIS MYSTERY. 1. God has said it, and therefore it cannot fail. 2. The glory of His grace, which is the great design of the whole mystery of God, necessarily requires it. 3. By an unalterable decree, there must be a conformity betwixt the little worm and the great worm Jacob, the little one's Kinsman-Redeemer. The great worm, the man Christ, "a worm and no man," has encountered mountains, and threshed them away. Where are the four monarchies, the most towering mountains that ever set up their heads on the earth? The chief worm Jacob has threshed them away to chaff, which is away with the wind (Dan. ii. 35). The mountains stood before Him through the world, with all the fastness that human learning and the power of the sword could give; but by His few fishermen He threshed them away. 4. The little worm Jacob is in reality but a member of the great one, Jesus Christ. 5. All the mountains that stand before worm Jacob are burnt mountains; so they are far easier to thresh than one would think. (*Ibid.*) *God's sharp threshing instrument*:—Three things this threshing instrument is shod with. 1. A word of command, calling to the work. 2. A word of promise, securing the success. 3. The use of means of Heaven's appointment for reaching the end. (*Ibid.*) "*A sharp threshing instrument having teeth*":—A people who shall leave their mark on the world. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *A threshing roller*:—"Behold, I have made thee a threshing-roller, a sharp one, new, with double edge." (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Earth-worms useful*:—People hate the obscure animal, popularly said to play undertaker to all flesh, although as a matter of fact worms seldom burrow deeper than a few inches, except to go to sleep. Suddenly, however, the gentle sunbeam of genius has shone into the dark region where these despised beings dwell and work. Dr. Darwin has studied these among other neglected denizens of our common planet, and gives us the fruits of his investigations in a little volume bearing the title of *Vegetable Mould and Earth-worms*. At the touch of his transcendently patient intellect a new glory breaks over the degraded, writhing, offensive worm. Instead of being useless

or even harmful, it turns out that we could never do without these humble creatures. They, and they alone, in their countless millions, and by their ceaseless hidden toil, have made the globe what it is, fit for agriculture and the residence of man. The bulk of the humus or vegetable mould of his fields everywhere is mainly of their manufacture, and goes perpetually through and through their organs to be fitted and perfected for fertility. The most assiduous and wealthy farmer does not lavish half as much nourishment upon his crops as the earth-worms, which in many parts of the British Isles make and bring to the surface of each acre of land ten tons or more of rich fine mould yearly. All things considered, Dr. Darwin inclines to rank the earth-worm higher in the scale of constructive agencies than the coral insect itself, though the last named rears islands, and ocean-kingdoms. It is the worm which, by perpetually consuming decayed leaves and small particles of soil, disintegrates and renews all the face of our earth. Their castings, hardly noticed, alter invisibly the contour of a whole country. Brought up from below, they make stones and rocks gradually sink, covering these by the collapse of their tiny burrows, so that the surface grows smooth for our use by their viewless help. Antiquarians owe to the earth-worm the preservation of almost every ancient pavement and foundation by the soft coat of mould with which they overlay these relics. They remove decaying leaves, facilitate the germination of seeds and the growth of plants, and create for us most of our wide, level, turf-covered expanses. Thus at one stroke our great natural philosopher has raised them to an honourable rank in the vast family of creation. (*Public Opinion.*)

Vers. 17, 18. **When the poor and needy seek water.**—*An image of God's care:*—The thought of the caravans returning homewards through the thirsty desert suggests to the prophet an effective image symbolising the Divine care which will attend them: the ground at their side bursts into waterpools, and noble trees cast their shade about them! (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *God's promise to the poor and needy:*—I. By the "POOR AND NEEDY" are not meant those who are poor and needy in the things of this world; but in a spiritual point of view. 1. The life of the Christian may be compared to a barren wilderness, leading from this world to that which is to come; in their journey through this wilderness the Lord's people often feel themselves to be "poor and needy" without the cheering presence of their God, destitute of the usual manifestations of His love and the consolations of His Spirit. Water is an emblem frequently employed in Scripture to represent Divine influences, which refresh, gladden, and cleanse the soul, as water does the body. The children of God are sometimes reduced to straits; they "seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst." They realise the feeling of David whilst they are constrained to adopt his language in the Forty-second Psalm, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God," &c. 2. But there is another sense in which the Lord's people may be represented as "poor and needy, seeking water and finding none"; it is when they are anxiously desirous of larger measures of grace and knowledge, increasing holiness and spirituality of mind, more complete superiority to the world with the affections and lusts of the flesh, and a growing conformity to the precepts of the Gospel. It is a striking feature in the character of every real Christian, that he is never satisfied with present attainments in religion. The real Christian will daily labour to abound yet more and more in the fair and beautiful "fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God." Here is the difference between nominal Christianity and real Christianity. II. THE CONSOLATORY PROMISE. The Lord assures His people that they shall not be disappointed in the objects of their desire: in their extremity of distress, and when they are almost without hope, the Lord will hear their cry. Prayer, which is the earnest expression of the desires of the heart, shall never be offered up in vain. Nothing is impossible with God; possessed of infinite power and infinite love, He can and will do for His people more than they ask or think. But further, He is represented as "the God of Israel." The history of the saints in all ages will bear testimony to the truth of that Scripture, "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, He increaseth strength." (*C. Rawlings, B.A.*) *Water for the needy:*—The first sense of this passage belongs to God's ancient people, and was partially accomplished after their return from Babylon, partially when the kingdom of heaven was spiritually set up at Jerusalem, but was to be still more gloriously fulfilled

hereafter. But a child of God claims all the promises. I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD HERE GIVEN. 1. "Poor, and needy." All creatures are poor compared with God—even the pure spirits, the highest angel, yea, archangels themselves. Especially must this be true of a fallen creature, yea, a restored creature. 2. "They seek water." This spiritually sets forth the sacred influences of the Holy Spirit. They want refreshing views of God's love, realising apprehensions of an interest in Christ, more of the real power of religion, more faith, more repentance, more love, more uprightness, more purity of heart, more humility, more true prayer, more gratitude and praise, more brokenness, more joy, more devotedness. They seek this water. Sometimes with great ardour, sometimes, alas! with little. In the means of grace they seek it, and it seems as if "there is none." They strive, they fight, but they only find their own weakness, their enemies, darkness, and deadness in their souls. 3. "Their tongue faileth for thirst." Few states are so disconsolate. It is vast discouragement. That this is a state into which the soul has brought itself through its own sin, I am led to conclude—(1) By considering the state in which this promise finds the Jews, to whom it primarily belongs. (2) By remembering the promise which sets forth God's usual dealings (Matt. vii. 7–9). (3) By retracing the history of one's own experience. If this be so, beware of the steps which lead to this desolate region. II. THE VAST ENCOURAGEMENT. My people are honestly, uprightly seeking Me. Out of Infinite love, Infinite wisdom, Infinite grace and mercy, I have delayed the answer. Their faith is small, their strength little, their souls discouraged. But I have not forgotten. "I, the Lord, will hear them." The subject is one of unutterable sweetness and consolation to a true child of God. In few things, perhaps, are we more tried than in prayer. But the words of the text encourage not only persevering prayer, they do more. They encourage expecting prayer. Be not afraid of seasons of need. They are usually seasons of prayer, and these are our greatest seasons of happiness. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *God's tenderness to the poor and needy*:—I. GOD HAS LEFT PECULIARLY TENDER AND GRACIOUS PROMISES TO THE POOR AND NEEDY. It is not the healthy and strong child of the family around whom the father's love is most closely entwined. "Like as a father pitieth his children," &c. II. GOD HAS PLEDGED HIS ALMIGHTY POWER TO WORK MIRACLES, IF NECESSARY, TO SUPPLY THEIR NEED. "I will open rivers in high places," &c. This would be reversing the order of nature. Rivers do not flow in high places; fountains do not spring in the depths of valleys. God simply says that, ere the poor and needy shall lack water, He will reverse the order of nature and turn the world upside down. III. THE PROMISES ARE MADE ONLY TO THOSE WHO SEEK AND CRY UNTO GOD FOR HIS HELP. God's unchanging tenderness does not make prayer unnecessary. There must be expectation, desire, and confidence. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Spiritual thirst*:—The application is world-wide. Who is there to whom this description, more or less, does not apply—"The poor and needy seek water—there is none—their tongue faileth for thirst"? Is it not the too faithful delineation of weary humanity? It is a commonplace saying, but its truthfulness redeems its triteness," that there is nothing in this world which can satisfy immortal longings. "Thirst again," is the too frequent verdict after its sweetest fountains have been drained. Its best joys leave behind them aching voids, unfulfilled aspirations. After the thirst of its votaries has apparently been quenched at their favourite rills, of riches, honours, ambition, glory,—their name is the same as before, "Poor and needy"; their search is the same as ever, "They seek water"; the epitaph they write over every fresh grave of their hopes is the same, "There is none—their tongue faileth them for thirst." And where, then, is that thirst to be quenched; where else are the wells of water to be had, "springing up into everlasting life," but in the grace and promises of God as revealed in His blessed Word? And, like the waters seen by Ezekiel bursting from the threshold of the sanctuary, "Everything lives whither the river cometh." (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Supply for the poor and needy*:—This double promise to the poor and needy stands in connection with other great promises which guarantee the gift of wonderful strength and blessing to God's people. These promises seem to be such as the mightiest servant of God might well desire to have fulfilled in himself. Look, for instance, at the one in verses 15, 16. I think that the promise of our text specially comes in, not for you mountain-threshers,—not for you who are made so strong in the Lord, but for some who cannot as yet get a grip of that grand word of His. "When the poor and needy" are not trying to thresh mountains, but are looking for

that which is needful for the supply of their own personal wants,—seeking water; when they are in too low a condition to be able to rise to the dignity of service, but are just like poor Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness, seeking water; when they have fallen into such a sad and sorrowful state of heart that, instead of testifying to the goodness of God they cannot testify to anything, for "their tongue faileth for thirst";—it is then, in their extremity, that the blessed promises shall come to them: "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Wordless prayers heard in heaven*:—I. Here is POVERTY OF CONDITION. "Poor and needy." This description applies to poverty of spiritual condition. 1. Most of us would take the position of great poverty as to anything like merit. 2. We have poverty as to anything like strength. 3. As to grace, many of the children of God are, to their shame, obliged to confess that they are poor and needy where they ought to be rich, and where they might be rich: poor in patience, in courage, in faith, in hope, in love, in private prayer, in public influence, poor in every way. There are many of God's children who seem scarcely to have a penny of spending-money, and they never appear to go to the King's treasury, and dip their hand in, and take out great handfuls of the precious gold of grace. II. URGENCY OF NEED. "When the poor and needy seek"—what? Money? No; that is only to be poor and needy. Bread? Ay; that shows a harder poverty than merely being "poor and needy." But it is not bread that these poor and needy ones are seeking, but "water." Why, that is generally to be had for nothing,—a drink of water. It must be very hard times indeed when poor souls are in such a state that they are longing for water, and seeking for it afar, as though there were none near at hand. Are any of you in such a condition, sighing after the living water? Though you have drunk of it before, you are still sighing for more of it, and feel as if you could not tell where to find it. 1. This is an urgent necessity, for it touches a vital point. A man can exist without money, he can live without garments, he could live longer without bread than without water. 2. Do I address one in whom this vital necessity has become an agonising thirst? 3. Further, there is an immediate necessity. When a man's tongue faileth for thirst, and he seeks water, he wants it at once. III. The third step down—and it is a very long one—is this, DISAPPOINTMENT OF HOPE. "There is none." 1. "There is none" even where they have found it before. Have not some of you at times found it so in attending the means of grace? 2. It makes their case even more disappointing when they have, side by side with them, others who are seeking water, and finding it. Have you never been to the Lord's table,—say, with your own wife,—and when she has been going home, she has said, "Oh, what a precious communion service! Was not the Lord manifestly among His people in the breaking of bread?"—and you have hardly liked to tell her that you have not seen the Lord even in His own ordinance? 3. If you go to places where there is none of the living water, then you have only yourself to blame when you cannot find it. IV. THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER. "And their tongue faileth for thirst." 1. They cannot speak; they cannot tell their fellow-Christians about their trouble. They are ashamed to tell others what they feel. If a hymn is given out, they feel as if they must not sing it. If there is a promise quoted, they feel as if they could not appropriate it, and sometimes the prayer of a joyous brother seems to shoot over their head,—they cannot attain to his experience. 2. If they were called upon to state their own feelings and convictions before the living God, it may be that they have become so mournful that they could not describe themselves. I think we have gone about as low as we can. Here is a man who, to begin with, is poor and needy. Here is a man who is wanting water, who has sought it, but who cannot find it. Here is a man whose tongue is so parched with thirst that he cannot now say a single word, he must sit down in sorrowful silence. V. Yet, strange to say, now is the time that he learns that SALVATION IS OF GOD. "I the Lord will hear them." What? Why, they cannot speak: "their tongue faileth for thirst." 1. That brings me to this point, that God's great object in bringing His people down so low as this, is to make them pray directly to Himself; that now they may not seek any water, but just cry to Him who is the Fountain of living waters; that now they may not tell their friends about their need, nor even tell it to themselves, but just, in the very silence of their soul, speak with God, for there is a kind of speech which is perfectly consistent with silence,—the speech of sorrow,—the exhibition of the wounds of misery,—the opening up of the brokenness of the heart,—the setting before God, not in eloquent descrip-

tions, but in indescribable revelation, the intolerable want which lies within the soul. The text does not even say that they pray; because, sometimes, even prayer becomes a mechanical act, and we are apt to rely upon it for comfort, instead of upon our God. 2. The prayer which is hidden away in the text—for although there is no mention of prayer in it, yet it is hidden away there—is the prayer of inward thirst. 3. This is the prayer of one who despairs of all means. 4. This is the prayer of faintness. 5. Now comes the declaration of God. "I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Is it not something that God hears you? I have frequently had to explain this word by speaking of the poor woman who was so pleased to see her minister. She was very poor, and so was her minister; what good, then, did he do her? Did he speak to her a very comforting word? No. The good man did not happen that day to be in much of a mood to do so, yet he did that sister a deal of good, she said. Why? Because he let her talk, and she just told out all her trouble, and he looked sympathetic, for that is how he felt, and that was just what she wanted. She wanted somebody who would listen to her. It is wonderfully condescending on God's part to listen to us. Many of our complaints are only rubbish, yet He hears them patiently. Sometimes, when people begin groaning and grumbling, I wish I was down the next street; but God is so patient and long-suffering, that He hears all that His people say. 6. You know that you have only to get a hearing from God, and you know what the consequence will be when your Heavenly Father knoweth what things you have need of. (*Ibid.*) *God's faithfulness tested:*—The late Dr. Parsons, of York, had a tea-caddy which he inherited from his father, who was also a spiritual preacher. Its history was curious. A husband and father, reduced to abject poverty, set out on a Sabbath morning to drown himself, and so escape the agony of looking at starving wife and children. A crowd was entering the Tottenham Court Road Chapel, London, and the man somehow was drawn along with the crowd. Mr. Parsons preached from Isa. xli. 17, "When the poor and needy seek water," &c. He appealed to his hearers needing temporal and spiritual blessings, "Have you put the God of Jacob to the test?" "No," thought the desperate man, "I have not." He went back, told his wife, joined in prayer, and all day seemingly in vain. But next morning temporary aid came, with directions as to work, which he found, did faithfully, and rose to comfort and notable prosperity. He offered a large gift to the good preacher, but it was declined. He sent the tea-caddy as a memento of his gratitude, which he felt could not be refused. (*J. Hall, LL.D.*)

Ver. 18. **I will open rivers in high places.**—*God's "I wills"*:—In this verse the Lord twice says, "I will"; and in that respect this verse is in harmony with the rest of the chapter. When we come to the "I wills" of God, then we get among the precious things, the deep things, the things which minister comfort and strength to the people of God. We sometimes say "I will"; but it is in a feeble fashion compared with the way in which God says it. People say "'Must' is for the king." So "I will" is for the King of kings. It is His prerogative to will. 1. It is an "I will," uttered with deliberation. James said, "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." We say, "I will" in a hurry, and then we take time to repent of it. We are under excitement, persuasion, or compulsion, and we say, "I will," and we are very sorry afterwards, and perhaps we are so unfaithful as not to keep our word; but God never speaks under compulsion; He is almighty. God never speaks in a hurry; He has infinite leisure. Now, when a man speaks a thing prudently and wisely, you believe that he will carry it out, if he can. You may have much more confidence with regard to what the Lord says, for He has not spoken without due deliberation. 2. When God says, "I will," His resolution is supported by omnipotence. You say, "I will," but you cannot do what you have promised. That can never happen with God. 3. When God says, "I will," it is sealed with immutability. We are always changing. Hence, we say to-day, "I will," and we mean it; but to-morrow we wish that we had never said "I will," and the next day we say, "I will not." But God never changes. 4. When God says, "I will," it will be carried out in faithfulness. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Two "I wills" in Isaiah xli.*:—I propose to apply the text as a general promise to many things. I. To THE TRIALS OF SAINTS. 1. Their temporal trials. What though there is nothing at present, perhaps by to-morrow morning the Lord may have opened rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. 2. The spiritual experience of believers. There are

in our text four words relating to water. Everything had been dry before, and there was no water for the thirsty to drink. Now, here you have rivers, fountains, a pool, and springs of water. There is a difference in the four words. The first is "rivers." There shall come directly from God a rush of mighty grace, like the streams of flowing rivers. There shall be "waters to swim in." You shall have abundance where before you had nothing. The next word is "fountains," which may be rendered "wells." Wells are places to which people regularly go for water. They represent the means of grace. Perhaps you have been to the means of grace, and obtained no comfort. But, on a sudden, God appears, and opens wells in the midst of the valley. Now the service is all full of refreshment. There is a third word, "I will make the wilderness a pool of water." Here you have the idea of overflowing abundance. God can give you so much joy that you will not know how to hold it all; you will have to let it be like a pool that overflows its banks. God can give you so much earnestness that you can hardly employ it all in the work that you have to do. He can give you so much nearness to Himself, that your heart shall scarcely be able to contain your delight. The fourth word is "springs." It seems to indicate a perpetual freshness. Where there was a long-continued drought, there shall come perpetual freshness; always something new—new thoughts of Christ, new delights in holy service, new prospects of the world to come, new communion with God. II. To THE EXPERIENCE OF CONVERTS. 1. Who were these people to whom the Lord spoke? They were people who were poor and needy. God will not do much for spiritually rich people; I mean you who say that you are rich in yourselves. 2. When will He do it? When they begin to seek Him. "When the poor and needy seek water." Can you expect God to bless you if you do not seek Him? 3. But the time is noted further still. It is not only when they begin to seek, but when they begin silently to plead. "When their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them." They could not speak. Yet says the Lord, "I will hear them." A glib tongue is bad at praying. When a man prays in his heart, he is often like Moses, slow of speech. 4. But the time mentioned is more sorrowful still; these people were in abject distress. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none." "My day of grace is past," says one. I wonder whoever told you that lie? "Ah, well," says one, "I have gone to look for mercy, and there is none." So you think. Now is the time for Divine interposition. When you seek water, and find none, God will open rivers for you. 5. The promise also relates to those who are in various positions. Some are in very high places. You run up to the very tops of the mountains, and you fancy God cannot reach you there, but He says, "I will open rivers in high places." A river on the top of a mountain is a wonderful thing; but God can make it so. Others are ordinary sinners down in the valleys. "Well," says the Lord, "I will open fountains in the midst of the valleys." Yes, and to vary the promise still more the Lord says, "I will make the wilderness a pool of water." Have you ever seen a large extent of flat country covered with sand and stones? God pictures you as being like that barren, dried-up land, and He says that He will turn you into a pool of water. In a word, no condition can be so bad but God can change it. III. To THE LABOURS OF WORKERS FOR GOD. God can soon change the condition of the plot of ground on which you are at work. 1. I may be speaking to one who says, "Mine is a very bad place to work in, for I cannot get the people to come and hear the Gospel; there seems to be no spirit of hearing." Do not give up preaching; do not give up working, you who long for souls to be saved, for God can suddenly give a love for His house, and an eagerness to hear the Gospel. 2. Another says, "I get the people to hear, but there is no feeling." When the old St. Paul's Cathedral had to be taken down for the present one to be built, Sir Christopher Wren had to remove some massive walls that had stood for hundreds of years; so he had a battering-ram, with a great mass of people, working away to break down the walls. I think that for four-and-twenty hours they kept right on, and there seemed to be no sign of giving way, the walls were so well built, very different from our modern walls. The structure was like a rock, it could not be stirred; but the battering-ram kept on and on and on, blow after blow, stroke after stroke, and at last the whole mass began to quiver, like a jelly, and by and by over went the massive walls. You have only to keep on long enough, and the same thing will happen in your work. The first blows upon the wall were not wasted; they were preparing for the others, and getting the whole structure into a condition of disintegration; and when that was done, down it came, and great was the fall thereof. 3. "Well," says one, "what we want in

our place is for the ministry itself to be supplied." If the minister himself is dry, what is to be done? Find fault with him, and leave him? No! if he is a man of God, pray for him, and never rest till the Lord makes the dry land springs of water. 4. But what is wanted, too, is the same blessing upon the helpers. What is the preacher to do, what is the Church to do, if the workers are half asleep? One sleepy Christian in a Church may do much mischief. In some businesses the whole thing is so arranged, that if one person goes to sleep, all the machinery goes wrong; and I believe that it is very much so in the Church of God. 5. Then we may look for a change throughout the whole congregation. Men and women will cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" There will be plenty of people to be talked to about their souls. We shall have no difficulty in increasing the Church, month by month, with such as shall be saved. 6. Then all the neighbourhood will be transformed. (*Ibid.*) *God's abounding generosity*:—He does not measure His gifts of water by the pint and by the gallon; but here you have pools, and springs, and rivers. When He has given waters, He will give trees to grow by the waters. When God gives blessing, He makes other blessings to spring out of it. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 19. **I will plant in the wilderness.**—*Trees*:—The "cedar" grew on Mount Lebanon, and was of great height, and had extended branches, which afforded kindly shade. The "shittah" tree is probably, as the R.V. renders it, the acacia. This was "a large tree, growing abundantly in Egypt and Arabia, and is the tree from which gum-arabic is obtained. It is covered with black thorns, and the wood is hard, and when old resembles ebony." The "myrtle" rises eight or ten feet high, its characteristic being "a dense, full head." It is thus convenient for shade. The "oil tree" is probably the olive tree. The "fir tree" usually denotes the cypress, an evergreen. This is also a tree whose wide-spread foliage would afford shade. The "pine" tree is perhaps the poplar (according to the Septuagint), or elm (according to the Vulgate), or a kind of hard oak (according to Gesenius). The "box" tree is probably some tall tree of the cedar kind, also affording shade. The chief common characteristic of these trees is that they afford welcome shade. In Western lands the intensity of the sun's heat and rays is not felt; but in the East he is at his fiercest, and a shadow is a most grateful possession. A missionary from the South Seas said: "Oh, the shining of the sun! The one thing we wanted to hide from was the sun. Its glare was intolerable!" (*J. A. Davies, B.D.*) *The rejoicing wilderness*:—What meaneth this figurative picture of a vast oasis—a well-watered grove of stately, fragrant shady trees? Observe, there are seven kinds of these mentioned; seven—the Hebrew symbol of abundance, diversity, perfection. The words may well be taken, therefore, to denote the plenitude of Divine grace vouchsafed in the hour of deepest perplexity and sorrow. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Divine grace adapted to human need*:—The beautiful part of the picture is, that God bestows grace varied in its manifestations; adapted in its wondrous diversity to meet the wants and necessities and trials of all His suffering people. He has sustaining grace for one, restraining grace for another; strengthening grace for one, sanctifying grace for another; comforting grace for one, dying grace for another. But all these "trees of God" are "full of sap," from the lowly "näbk" or mountain-thorn, to the "cedar of Lebanon which He hath planted." Each tree may be taken as the type or emblem of a cluster of Bible promises. To the weak, there is the cedar in its strength; to the bereaved, there is the olive, with its ashen leaves, and yet with its "oil of joy" for the mourner; to the fainting and downcast, there is the tall pine and tapering cypress pointing upwards; to the wounded spirit, there is the balsam tree of Gilead and the fragrant myrtle; to the dying, there is the palm tree with its graceful fronds, according to the Eastern tradition, whispering in the ear the name of Jesus! And the further peculiarity of this promise is, that it is in the hour of sorest want and trial and perplexity that that grace is most abundant. It is in the depths of the arid desert, with hillocks of sand on all sides bounding the horizon,—in seasons of loneliest bereavement and uttermost sorrow,—that these palm and acacia and olive and myrtle groves, as if by the hand of an enchanter, rise up to view. It was "at the fourth watch of the night" (when the darkness was deepest, and the hearts of the disciples were most despairing and desponding) that Jesus "cometh unto them walking upon the sea." Man's extremity is often God's opportunity. (*Ibid.*) *The symbolism of trees*:—In the more figurative sense it intimates that the Lord God would raise up, for

the benefit of His Church, men of distinguished eminence and usefulness, such as judges and generals, to afford them protection; rulers and governors, who should prove both ornamental and useful to them; and choice ministers of the Word, from whose doctrine they were to derive defence from evil, spiritual nourishment, and consolation. (*R. Macculloch.*)

Ver. 21. **Produce your cause.**—*Heaven's appeal to the reason of the sinner:*—The text implies—I. THAT THE SINNER HAS SOME REASONS FOR THE EVIL COURSE HE PURSUES. II. THAT THESE REASONS HE IS BOUND TO STATE BEFORE HIS MAKER. "Bring forth your reasons." Why bring them forth? 1. The question of a sinful course of conduct is a public question. The sinner has no right to say that his conduct concerns no one but himself. 2. Because it is the only way of exposing their moral absurdity. They will scarcely bear to be stated. Bring them out and they will frighten you. III. THAT HIS MAKER WILL GIVE THE STATEMENT OF THEM HIS ATTENTION. 1. His readiness to attend to them shows that your conduct towards Him will not bear investigation. 2. His readiness to attend to them shows the existence of mediation. He does not attend to the reasons of the lost. 3. His readiness to attend to them shows His infinite condescension. (*Homilist.*) *God's challenge to the sinner:*—These words are a challenge to such as serve not God. The study of this question may be a wise anticipation of the judgment day. Now we may search for our reasons; and if they be found to be unsound, we may put our conduct right; but when we stand before the judgment-seat of Christ it will be too late for repentance. To form a court now in which to hear this cause, it is only needful that we should remember that the great God can judge the very secrets of our hearts. The Judge of all the earth is upon His holy seat. Before Him we now stand. While the doom of each is not yet fixed, the voice of the Almighty is heard, "Produce your cause," &c. 1. The great Searcher of hearts may come into the midst of such as are given to the love of present things, and say, "Produce your cause." What such will bring forward is this: they are not persons addicted to any particular vice; they are amiable, kind, sincere; they live without strife with men; they live without hostility towards God. But they have great love for things as they are: they are powerfully influenced by things seen and temporal; they are contented with their earthly portion; and they seldom have any strong concern or desire about the things not seen and eternal. Their cause is that of listlessness about the things of the soul, of an unwillingness to admit what seem to be melancholy thoughts, as they cast a shadow over a fair scene of earthly comfort, with which they feel that they can remain content. It is that of the orderly members of society, towards whom our respect and our affection are so soon drawn. It seems almost unkind to wake up such out of their soft sleep. But God says, "Bring forth your strong reasons" to justify such a life. And reasons are given. It is so pleasant to be at peace, that we care not to be disturbed. Yes, if there were to be no sudden shock of death: if this loved world were to continue unchanged: if there were no cunning enemy plotting while the careless sleep: if there were no holy service to be done for God, no brotherly counsel to be given to man! But love of ease is no strong reason to justify a careless career, which is to end in unrest for ever. You may say, we are of the quieter sort; and may we not float in the eddies of life, without being hurried on by the current of evil? Why cannot our religion be of the passive order? But the answer comes at once, Are you so safe as you endeavour to think? Is there really the calm which your spirits in their drowsiness think there may be? There are, no doubt, beautiful Christian graces which bloom best in the shade. But do not such daily open their petals, and breathe out fragrance towards heaven? The cause of the careless, or the worldly-minded, of such as sit still in sloth as to spiritual concerns, will not stand in the judgment. 2. How much less will that other man prosper, whose cause may be thus produced. He is a man willing to admit that much may be said in favour of a religious life. Up to a certain point he is prepared to accept and to carry into effect the duties which rise because of a man's relation to God who made him. But religion has been made to ask too much: is pressed too indiscriminately upon every period and transaction of life. The law of God cannot be observed, and therefore it ought to be lowered, or adapted to the condition of modern thought and feeling. The man will not pretend to justify all he does. But his strong reasons are that it cannot be otherwise. He lives in a world where perfect obedience is not to be expected. Other men sin, and their

sinning involves sin in him. He is made with passions which do and will take fire, when temptation finds its convenient seasons. He is ready to listen to advice how he may avoid the grossest sins; but he is not prepared to care about opinions concerning a holiness which he never hopes to reach. Behind these strong reasons men entrench themselves, and seem to keep the conscience untouched by the arrow from the Lord's bow. The cause so produced wants one great feature; there is no real sorrow for sin. The blame of sin is skilfully shifted from the sinner to his God. "Why hast Thou made me thus?" is the complaint which such a man makes. It is considered a misfortune rather than a fault, that he has not obeyed the commandment of the Lord. How can God justify a man who thus blames his Maker! How can a man justify himself, when it shall be brought out against him that if he had hated sin it might have been forgiven, if he had resisted sin it might have been overcome in the strength and according to the grace which God gives. Such reasons to support a cause will be weak in the day of the Lord. 3. A man will say, My life is not right, my conscience is not quiet, my position is not safe; but what am I to do? The religion of many so disgusts me that I have no faith to follow them. The opinions vary so much among those who call themselves Christ's servants that I am at a loss what to believe. My cause is bad: but which shall I accept as a better? And my reasons for remaining as I am are strong, from the difficulty as to whether I may not move and only sink lower. And such arguments satisfy a man for a time: they excuse, if they do not justify. But are they really sound? Is it true that there are no sincere followers of Jesus? Is it true that there are no saving truths which stand out as a rock, notwithstanding all that party spirit has done to hide it by party walls? Is Christ so covered that He cannot be found? I boldly assert that no such difficulties exist. There are, it may be, hypocrites everywhere. Sincere Christians are inconsistent and weak in many things; but salvation, God's grace, Divine life in the soul, is a real thing. The sinner who searches for a perfect Church or a perfect Christian, and stands aloof from Christ because such things are not to be found, may have grounds for finding fault with his neighbour, but he has no strong reason by which to defend himself. Such a cause, so supported, must fall to the ground, when the truthful test of God's own touch shall show what manner of cause it was. 4. But it is time to produce another cause: that of a man who holds the truth in unrighteousness; who is orthodox in creed and incorrect in life; who has the form of godliness, but denies the power thereof. It is the case of many to be found in the house of God on each Sabbath day: professors of Christ, but followers of the world, its vanities, or its sins. Such men bring no objections against the truth or service of God; but they do not savingly believe, they do not honestly serve. Religion with them is a thing without life. They have a horror of over-zeal. The reasonable man is earnest. He is calm and self-contained; but he has been strongly moved at the sight of sin, he has been deeply moved by the power of grace, and he cannot but give himself, body, soul, and spirit, to do his Lord's will. He, too, can produce his cause and bring forth his strong reasons. Is it not reasonable that, when God works by the Holy Ghost upon a sinner's soul, the effect should be felt and seen? Conclusion —The believer has his strong reasons. He says the time is short, and the work is great. He says sin is too terrible to be trifled with: salvation is too great a thing to be dealt with carelessly. The devil is in earnest—Jesus is in earnest —the wicked are in earnest; why should the Lord's people hang back, as from a cause they doubt or a conflict about which they feel afraid? And these reasons have the solidity of truth and the power of truth. They commend themselves to a man's judgment the more he weighs them well and the nearer he comes to the day of death. Let us all be warned. It is not a question about one man taking another man's advice. It is a far higher matter than a triumph of believer over unbeliever. As those who would not part when the Lord comes,—as those who cannot envy each other a place in heaven,—let us "give diligence to make our calling and election sure." (*J. Richardson, M.A.*)

Ver. 27. **One that bringeth good tidings.**—*Divine ordination:*—I. MINISTERS ARE DIVINELY ORDAINED. They come from God. "*I* will give." The ministry is not one of the literary professions, nor a secular office. Colleges and seminaries do not make them. II. THEY ARE A GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE. Neither the Church's merit, wealth, or respectability has a claim to them, nor does a salary hire them, nor ordination commission them in the highest sense. They are a benefaction.

III. THE MINISTER'S CHIEF WORK IS TO BE THE BEARER OF GOOD TIDINGS. It does not exclude other things that accompany salvation, but the Gospel proclamation is to be his specific, constant, cheerful, enthusiastic, confident employment. In season, out of season, in pulpit and private, his heart and lips are to overflow with the "good tidings." Because—1. They are what men, all men, all men everywhere and always need, and need most imperatively. 2. The more the good tidings are preached the more open is the way for everything else connected with the pastor's work, and the more effective all departments of his ministry. 3. It, and it alone, is the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation and sanctification. (*Homiletic Review.*)

CHAPTER XLII.

VERS. 1-17. **Behold My Servant.**—*Who is the "servant of Jehovah"?*—The following are, in brief, the leading opinions which have been held: (1) Hitzig's, that the Jewish people in exile is referred to, as distinguished from the heathen; (2) that of Paulus and Maurer, that the servant is the pious portion of the people; (3) that of Gesenius, that the prophetic order is intended; (4) that of Hofmann, combining (2) and (3), that it means Israel, the prophetic people, suffering on behalf of the heathen world; (5) that of Oehler and Delitzsch, that "the conception of the servant of Jehovah is, as it were, a pyramid, of which the base is the people of Israel as a whole, the central part Israel 'according to the Spirit,' and the summit, the person of the Mediator of salvation, who arises out of Israel." (*Prof. T. K. Cheyne, D.D.*) *The Mediator is the centre*:—1. In the circle of the kingdom of promise—the second David. 2. In the circle of the people of salvation—the true Israel. 3. In the circle of humanity—the second Adam. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *The servant of Jehovah*:—In the sublimest description of the servant I am unable to resist the impression that we have a presentiment of an individual, and venture to think that our general view of the servant ought to be ruled by those passages in which the enthusiasm of the author is at its height. "Servant of Jehovah" in these passages seems equivalent to "son of Jehovah" in Psalm ii. 7 ("son" and "servant" being, in fact, nearly equivalent in the Old Testament), namely, the personal instrument of Israel's regeneration, or, as we may say in the broader sense of the word, the Messiah. (*Prof. T. K. Cheyne, D.D.*) *Jehovah and Jehovah's servant*:—This servant is brought before us with all the urgency with which Jehovah has presented Himself, and next to Jehovah He turns out to be the most important figure of the prophecy. Does the prophet insist that God is the only source and sufficiency of His people's salvation? It is with equal emphasis that He introduces the servant as God's indispensable agent in the work. Cyrus is also acknowledged as an elect instrument. But neither in closeness to God, nor in effect upon the world, is Cyrus to be compared for an instant to the servant. Cyrus is subservient and incidental. . . . But the servant is a character, to delineate whose immortal beauty and example the prophet devotes as much space as he does to Jehovah Himself. As he turns again and again to speak of God's omnipotence and faithfulness and agonising love for His own, so with equal frequency and fondness does he linger on every feature of the servant's conduct and aspect: His gentleness, His patience, His courage, His purity, His meekness: His daily wakefulness to God's voice, the swiftness and brilliance of His speech for others, His silence under His own torments; His resorts—among the bruised, the prisoners, the forwandered of Israel, the weary, and them that sit in darkness, the far-off heathen; His warfare with the world, His face set like a flint; His unworldly beauty, which men call ugliness; His unnoticed presence in His own generation, yet the effect of His face upon kings; His habit of woe, a man of sorrows and acquainted with sickness; His sore stripes and bruises, His judicial murder, His felon's grave; His exaltation and eternal glory—till we may reverently say that these pictures, by their vividness and charm, have drawn our eyes away from our prophet's visions of God, and have caused the chapters in which they occur to be oftener read among us, and learned by heart, than the chapters in which God Himself is lifted up and adored. Jehovah and Jehovah's servant—these are the two heroes of the drama. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The servant, first Israel as a whole, then Israel in part*:—Nothing could be more clear than this.

that in the earlier years of the exile, the servant of Jehovah was Israel as a whole, Israel as a body politic. . . . Very soon the prophet has to make a distinction, and to sketch the servant as something less than the actual nation. . . . In modern history we have two familiar illustrations of this process of winnowing and idealising a people, in the light of their destiny. In a well-known passage in the "Areopagitica" Milton exclaims: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself and shaking her invincible locks; methinks I see her as an eagle renewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam, . . . while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means." In this passage the "nation" is no longer what Milton meant by the term in the earlier part of his treatise, where "England" stands simply for the outline of the whole English people; but the "nation" is the true genius of England realised in her enlightened and aspiring sons, and breaking away from the hindering and debasing members of the body politic. Or, recall Mazzini's bitter experience. To no man was his Italy more really one than to this ardent son of hers, who loved every born Italian because he was an Italian, and counted none of the fragments of his unhappy country too petty or too corrupt to be included in the hope of her restoration. To Mazzini's earliest imagination, it was the whole Italian seed who were ready for redemption, and would rise to achieve it at his summons. But when his summons came, how few responded, and after the first struggles how fewer still remained, Mazzini himself has told us with breaking heart. The real Italy was but a handful of born Italians; at times it seemed to shrink to the prophet alone. From such a core the conscience indeed spread again, till the entire people was delivered from tyranny and from schism, and now every peasant and burgher from the Alps to Sicily understands what Italy means, and is proud to be an Italian. But for a time Mazzini and his few comrades stood alone. It is a similar winnowing process through which we see our prophet's thought pass with regard to Israel. Him, too, experience teaches, that "the many are called, but the few chosen." Perhaps the first traces of distinction between the real servant and the whole nation are to be found in the programme of his mission (chap. xlii. 1-7). (*Ibid.*) *The ideal servant of Jehovah:*—That mysterious form of the ideal servant of Jehovah, which seems, as we read, to shift and change its aspect, was to Israel what the "colossal man" of the idealist is to humanity at large (*E. H. Plumptre, D.D.*) *The servant of the Lord:*—The figure, as it first appears in this half of what are called Isaiah's prophecies, evidently represents Israel as God intended it to be, chosen for His service and for the diffusion of His Name; the conviction gradually steals over the prophet that the nation cannot discharge these functions, but that the Israel within Israel, the devout core of the people, is the Servant of the Lord; and finally, the knowledge seems to have been breathed into him that not even "that holy seed" which "is the substance thereof" is adequate to do all that the Servant of the Lord is to do; and thus finally the figure changes into a Person, who can be and do all that Israel ought to have been and done, but was not, and did not. In other words, whether the prophet discerned it or no, the rôle of the Servant of the Lord is only fulfilled by Jesus Christ. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Cyrus and the Servant of Jehovah:*—His relation to Cyrus, before whose departure from connection with Israel's fate the Servant does not appear as a person, is most interesting. Perhaps we may best convey it in a homely figure On the ship of Israel's fortunes—as on every ship and on every voyage—the prophet sees two personages. One is the pilot through the shallows, Cyrus, who is dropped as soon as the shallows are past; and the other is the captain of the ship, who remains always identified with it—the servant. The captain does not come to the front till the pilot is gone; but, both alongside the pilot, and after the pilot has been dropped, there is every room for his office. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The ideal servant's work:*—The chief aspects of the ideal servant's work may be classed as follows: 1. He is to be the embodiment of a new covenant between Jehovah and His people, to restore the actual nation exiled at the time in Babylon, and to re-establish them in their own land (chaps. xlii. 6; xlix. 5, 6, 8). 2. But He has a mission not to Israel merely, but to the world: He is to teach the world true religion, and to be a "light of the Gentiles" (chaps. xlii. 1, 3, 6, xlix. 6). 3. He is to be a prophet, patient and faithful in the discharge of His work, in spite of the contumely and opposition which He may encounter (chap. l. 4-9). 4. Being innocent Himself, He is to suffer and die for the sins of others (chap. liii. 4-9). (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *The Trinity in unity:*—This is the language of the

Eternal Father; but it contains a description of our blessed Lord and Saviour in His character, as the Redeemer of the world. Then the Spirit of God is represented as resting upon Christ, to qualify Him for that work of redemption; and thus in this one verse we have brought before us suggestions concerning the Father's sovereign will, the Son's willing obedience, and the Spirit's fulness of grace manifested in the Person of the Son, and the setting Him apart for His real work. I. THE SCRIPTURAL REVELATION CONCERNING THE TRINITY IN UNITY. 1. No one can doubt that Holy Scripture teaches the unity of God. 2. Yet Scripture speaks of this one God, this one Jehovah, Israel's Lord, as revealing Himself in three distinct characters and relations, and only three. 3. Then Scripture attributes works and qualities to each of these three Persons which could not be attributed to them justly if each of them were not truly God. 4. Then Holy Scripture teaches, notwithstanding, that these Three Divine Persons, each spoken of as God, are yet one God, and this without any difference or inequality. II. THE PRACTICAL VIEW OF THE TRINITY WHICH THIS PASSAGE CONTAINS. We gather from it that it is the will of the Eternal Jehovah that the glory of the Trinity should be specially manifested in connection with the Person and work of Christ. Observe the description of the Second Person in the blessed Trinity. 1. He is God's Servant. How can the Second Person in the Trinity be spoken of as the Servant of the Eternal Father? The very expression denotes the manhood of Christ. He cannot be a Servant except by creation, and His body was created in order that He might sustain the position of Servant to the Eternal God. "A body," we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, quoting from the Psalms, "hast Thou prepared Me . . . . Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." Here is the Son speaking to the Father. Then the expression God's "Servant" denotes the humiliation of our blessed Lord (Phil. ii. 7). As God's servant we have to consider Him in connection with His office, as well as with His humiliation and with His manhood. The office which He had to sustain was to bring sinful men back again to God. 2. Then He is God's beloved—"Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth." 3. The Man Christ Jesus has the Spirit of God—"I will put My Spirit upon Him," that is, I will put it on Him as a garment. At the conception, and at His baptism and ordination to His work, this was specially manifested. Then Jesus had the Spirit for the special work which He had to perform as Mediator. There were three objects to be accomplished, if man was to have a suitable remedy. Man was ignorant of God's will through sin: he needed, therefore, a prophet to teach him, not only what to do, but the actual doing of it, and Jesus was anointed to be that Prophet. Then man was rebellious, and he needed, therefore, a king who should rule over his inward passions, and subdue them, as well as over his outward enemies, and quell them: and therefore Jesus was anointed, that He might sustain the office of King. And man was in a sinful condition, under the curse of the broken law, and therefore he needed a priest to sacrifice for him, and to make intercession for him, and Jesus was that Priest, anointed with the Spirit of God, in order that He might make that satisfaction, and offer that sacrifice, and present that intercession through which sinners may be brought nigh unto God. Thus qualified, the Saviour will "bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." (*W. Cadman, M.A.*)

The servitude of Jesus:—I. IN CHRIST, SERVICE AND FREEDOM WERE PERFECTLY COMBINED. He gave the service of being, the service of work, the service of suffering, the service of worship, the service of rest each to the very highest point of which that service is capable. But when He came, knowing as He did all to which He was coming, He came with these words upon His lips, "I delight to do it." II. CHRIST HAD MANY MASTERS, AND HE SERVED THEM ALL WITH PERFECT SERVICE. 1. There was His own high purpose, which had armed Him for His mission, and never by a hair's-breadth did He ever swerve from that. 2. There was the law. The law had no right over Christ, and yet how He served the law, in every requirement, moral, political, ceremonial, to the smallest tittle. 3. There was death, that fearful master with his giant hand. Step by step, inch by inch, slowly, measuredly, He put Himself under its spell, He obeyed its mandate, and He owned its power. 4. To His Heavenly Father what a true Servant He was, not only in fulfilling all the Father's will, but as He did it, in always tracing to Him all the power, and giving back to Him all the glory. III. THERE IS A DEPTH OF BEAUTY AND POWER, OF LIBERTY AND HUMILIATION, OF ABANDONMENT AND LOVE, IN THAT WORD "SERVANT," which none ever know who have not considered it as one of the titles of Jesus. But there is another name of Jesus, very dear to His people, "The Master." To understand "the Master" you must

yourself have felt "the Servant." (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *The dignity of service:* — He is not a man of clear and weighty judgment who sees nothing of honour even in the word "servant." Ill times have befallen us if we attach to that word nothing but the idea of humiliation, lowness, valuelessness. That word must be restored to its right place in human intercourse. If any man proudly rise and say he is not servant, there is a retort, not of human invention, which might overwhelm any who are not swallowed up of self-conceit and self-idolatry. We do not know what it is to rule until we know what it is to serve. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's programme for the world:*—This programme is entrusted to the servant of the Lord, who is the Christ of the New Testament. I. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEHOVAH AND HIS SERVANT. In all His life of ministry this Servant was assured of three things—1. That He was chosen of God for the service to which He came. 2. That He dwelt deep in the love of God His Father. 3. That His life lay entirely within the will of God. He was chosen, beloved, approved. All this is possible to those who say, "I am the Lord's." II. THE SERVANT'S DIVINE EQUIPMENT. "I have put My Spirit upon Him." III. THE MISSION OF THE SERVANT: ITS TEMPER AND METHOD. Christ came to reveal God, to restore all things to the pattern of the Divine mind, to make God's judgment the standard of all life and conduct, so that the world should be governed by the principles of God's righteousness. This is to be accomplished without noise or ostentation. This description of Christ's character is remarkable for its omissions: it is a striking list of omissions. The Spirit works by a process of exclusion in revelation and sanctification, and in the restoration of righteousness in the world. (*S. Chadwick.*) *The ideal Israelite:*—Long before Christ appeared in the flesh, He had already appeared in the Spirit. The chapter carries us back to a time when the conception of a Saviour definitely began. Up to then there had been vague presentiments; after then there was a character prepared for the Jesus who was to come. So it is with all heroes, they are needed before they are born; they could not work their work unless they were needed and discerned; they have prophets to beget them as well as parents. I. AN ACTUAL NAME APPLIED. The title of "God's servant" is one that runs through all Oriental language. The Israelite people at large had failed,—the Jewish people, as reformed by Josiah, had failed, — it remained for God to justify His purpose by manifesting a "new model," who should represent Him rightly to the Gentiles. II. AN IDEAL DESCRIPTION GIVEN. 1. This genuine man of God must be a man of gentleness, and yet He should inherit the earth. 2. A method equally new would prevail in religion; there the true Missionary would proceed with tolerance; He would not thrust His revelation upon aliens, He would open their eyes to behold their own revelation; they also had lamps, dimly-burning, but still alight. God's servant must not extinguish them, He must revive them. 3. But to be gentle in forwarding the right, tolerant in inculcating the true, tender in making allowance for the weak—all this belongs to consummate sympathy, and sympathy demands compensating qualities, for it has besetting defects. Converse with sensitive consciences is often enfeebling. Virtue goes out of us in the endeavour to impart strength, and the infection of fear overtakes the very physician. But our prophet has a strong intellect in view, a Helper who shall not be bruised by anything He has to bear. 4. There is about the perfect character the distinction of patience. He burns brightly in mind. He bears up bravely in heart, "until He have set judgment in the earth." This true service has been fulfilled by the Carpenter of Nazareth—His qualities are on record; His spirit lasts. (*B. H. Alford.*) *Messiah and His work:*—I. THE CHARACTER AND SPIRIT OF THE MESSIAH. II. THE WORK WITH WHICH, AS THE FATHER'S SERVANT, HE HAD BEEN ENTRUSTED. III. THE WAY IN WHICH HE WAS TO EXECUTE IT. "He shall not fail," &c. (*Original Secession Magazine.*) *The service of God and man:*—I. THE CONSCIENCE OF THE SERVICE. Before being a service of man, it is a service for God. "My servant." II. THE SUBSTANCE OF SERVICE. "Judgment for the nations shall He bring forth." "According to truth shall He bring forth judgment." "He shall not flag nor break, till He set in the earth judgment." III. THE TEMPER OF SERVICE (vers. 2, 3). IV. THE POWER BEHIND SERVICE (vers. 5, 6). (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) "*Behold, My Servant!*"—They are rare qualities which Jehovah calls us to behold in the elect Servant: a Divine modesty; a Divine humility; a Divine perseverance. I. THE MODESTY OF THE BEST WORK. God is always at work in our world, leading the progress of suns, refreshing grass with dew, directing the flight of the morning beams. But all His work is done so quietly, so unobtrusively, with such reticence

as to His personal agency, that many affirm there is no God at all. Thus was it with the work of Christ. He put His hand on the mouths of those who proclaimed His deity, or blazoned abroad His fame. This quality is God's hall-mark upon the best work. His highest artists do not inscribe their names upon their pictures, nor introduce their portraits amongst their groups. II. THE HUMILITY OF THE BEST WORK. He has put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted the humble and meek. And so was it with our Lord. He passed by Herod's palace, and chose Bethlehem and its manger bed. He refused the empires of the world, and took the way of the cross. He selected His apostles and disciples from the ranks of the poor. He revealed His choicest secrets to babes. He left the society of the Pharisee and Scribe, and expended Himself on bruised reeds and smoking flax, on dying thieves and fallen women, and the peasantry of Galilee. III. DIVINE PERSEVERANCE. Though our Lord is principally concerned with the bruised and the dimly-burning wick, He is neither one nor the other (see R.V., marg.). He is neither discouraged nor does He fail. This, again, is the quality of the best work. That which emanates from the flesh is full of passion, fury, and impulse. It essays to deliver Israel by a spasm of force that lays an Egyptian dead in the sand; but it soon exhausts itself, and sinks back nerveless and spent. It is impossible too strongly to emphasise the necessity of relying in Christian work on the co-witness of the Spirit of God. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Purpose and method of the Redeemer*:—I. THE REDEEMER'S PURPOSE. "He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles"; "He shall bring forth judgment unto truth," and He is to "set judgment in the earth." The word "judgment," as here used, has no better equivalent than righteousness, in the sense of that which is essentially right in heart and life, both toward God and man. This righteousness—rightness—in all the powers and operations of the soul, and in all its relations to God and the universe, is the master-need of mankind. The Redeemer has undertaken to meet this great need of the world. He came not to establish certain forms of theological thought and expression; not to set up certain ecclesiastical organisations and rituals—all these are of little worth, except in so far as they can be made the means to a vastly grander end. Jesus Christ came to establish essential righteousness in individual human souls, and so in the community and in the world. It is His grand purpose to enlighten the ignorance, to quicken the conscience, to energise the will, to purify the affections, and to exalt the aims of men, bringing them thus into harmony with God. He came to make every wrong right—to break the oppressor's yoke, to banish cupidity and caste, ignorance and selfishness, and every form of sin. In the prosecution of this sublime purpose the Redeemer calls all His disciples into co-operation with Himself. In this they are to find the development of their own spiritual character, and by this the world is to be won for Christ. II. THE REDEEMER'S METHOD. This is set before us by the prophet in a fourfold view—1. As authorised. "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him." Here the Redeemer is represented as acting under the appointment and authorisation of the Eternal Father. Nor is it difficult to perceive why this is necessary. God, as the Sovereign, against whom man has offended, was alone competent to determine whether any mediation could be admitted between Himself and His rebellious creatures, and, if any, what the nature of that mediation should be. It is essential to any man's faith in redemption that he should recognise it as of God from the beginning. The interposition of Christ is first of all, and more than all, the manifestation of the Father's impartial and everlasting love for lost men. The Redeemer is God, the equal of the Father in glory, majesty, power, divinity, and eternity; but He is God manifest in the flesh. As it was necessary that the Redeemer should be authorised, so it was necessary that the authority under which He acted should be explicitly attested. It was thus attested. "Mine elect in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him" (Luke iv. 14). This aspect of His mission was clearly understood by His apostles (Acts iv. 27, x. 38). At intervals during His ministry there came to Him Divine attestation; at its close He "was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead"; and having ascended to the Father He was constituted "Head over all things to the Church," principalities and powers being made subject to Him, for "it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." 2. As unostentatious (ver. 2). Messiah's mission was to be distinguished by no secular pomp, by no military glory. The Redeemer's appearance was to be lowly, His operations silent and unobtrusive. The Saviour of men

is great in gentleness. On this point prophecy is mysteriously impressive. History answers to prophecy. In the life of Jesus Christ there is a marvellous mingling of grandeur and humility. The same principle pervades the whole of His administration. There is marvellous grandeur, but there is deep lowliness. The Gospel has mysteriously subdued the hearts of men, forming into its own spirit tempers and habits the most alien from its nature. 3. As compassionate. "A bruised reed," &c. Advancing to the realisation of His sublime purpose the Redeemer will not overlook the smallest acquisition; and His attention will be especially directed to those who are specially needy, weak, and helpless. 4. As persevering. "He shall not fail," &c. He was not discouraged. He ploughed His way through all opposition from Bethlehem to Golgotha. The risen and exalted Redeemer is moving steadily on to His final and complete triumph. *(R. R. Meredith, D.D.)* *The Servant of Jehovah:*—I. THE CHARACTER HE SUSTAINS. "Behold, My Servant," &c. In this capacity God sustained and protected Him. He is also set forth as the object of His special choice and affection. "Mine elect," &c. He delighted in Him on account—1. Of the close relationship that existed between them. Not merely was He Jehovah's Servant, but His only-begotten Son. 2. The resemblance He bore to Him. 3. His having engaged to execute the Divine purposes. II. THE WORK HE HAD TO ACCOMPLISH. 1. For this work He was endowed with every requisite qualification. "I have put My Spirit upon Him." 2. The work assigned to Him was very extensive in its range. "He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." 3. The character of His work is here intimated. He was to bring forth "judgment"; for the religion He would establish was to be pre-eminently distinguished by truth and righteousness. III. THE MANNER IN WHICH IT WAS TO BE EFFECTED. 1. The absence of all ostentation and clamour. It is invariably found that it is not the most noisy that do the most work. 2. He was to evince great tenderness and compassion. "A bruised reed," &c. These words were verified in His conduct towards two classes—(1) The humble penitent. (2) His bitterest foes. This passage is thus applied by Matthew (chap. xii.). 3. Perseverance in the face of all difficulties and discouragements. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged," &c. *(Anon.)* *The coming Saviour:*—About these chapters, as a unit, a halo of Messianic brightness gathers, like the aureole with which painters surround the brow of Christ. In these verses (1–11) the prophet taught that—I. THE COMING SAVIOUR WAS TO SET UP A KINGDOM WHICH SHOULD BE UNIVERSAL (vers. 1, 4, 6). Those whom Isaiah addressed supposed that true religion was to reach the world, if at all, through the channels of Judaism; they thought the only way to heaven was through the portals of the Jewish Church. The prophet declares that the benefits of Christ's kingdom are to extend to Jew and Gentile alike. No distinctions of race or clime are to arrest its growth. No wonder that under the thrill of such a vision he shouts, "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth!" It is sometimes said that the religious spirit of the Old Testament is narrow; that it makes God bestow His favours on the few, and not on the many. Can, however, a larger measure of grace be conceived than is here expressed? II. CHRIST'S KINGDOM WAS TO BE EXTENDED BY PEACEFUL MEASURES (vers. 2, 3). The prophet addressed those who thought religious conquest was to be achieved by force. Hitherto conflicts had marked the intercourse of God's chosen people with the Gentiles. The Jews looked for their coming king to be warlike. How strangely, then, does Isaiah describe their conquering prince,—"He shall not cry," *i.e.* shout as He advances, "nor lift up," *i.e.* make demonstration of His power, "nor shall He cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgment unto truth," *i.e.* truth shall be His victorious weapon. The element in Christianity to which our text refers makes that which is feeble among men powerful for Christ. It also makes it possible for all Christ's servants to be efficient labourers. They become such by imbibing the spirit of the Master. Not all can publicly proclaim the Gospel, but every one can seek for the "same mind which was in Christ." III. CHRIST'S KINGDOM WAS TO REVEAL GOD'S SYMPATHY WITH MAN, ESPECIALLY IN HIS SUFFERING (ver. 7). The primary reference in these figures is undoubtedly to spiritual results. Eyes morally blind are to be opened, and captive souls emancipated from the prison-house of sin. It is, however, no less true that bodily and mental freedom are included in the blessings of Messiah's reign. The Church is now the representative of the Divine sympathy for suffering; and she should not forget that, as of old,

believers will be multiplied when it is seen that through her Christ now cares for bodies as well as souls. IV. CHRIST'S KINGDOM WAS TO FILL THE EARTH WITH JOY (vers. 10, 11). As lessons from our subject we learn—1. Christians should labour in hope. Isaiah suggests one of the strongest proofs of our Lord's divinity by affirming, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged until He have set judgment in the land." When we learn of the Master we catch a hopeful spirit. 2. The results of serving Christ are permanent. (*Sermons by the Monday Club.*) *Silent spread of Christianity:*—This prophecy accords with fact. Gibbon, in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, has the following words describing the silent but rapid spread of Christianity: "While the Roman Empire was invaded by open violence or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol." (*Ibid.*) *The coming Saviour:*—I. OUR LORD'S CHARACTER AS PORTRAYED IN PROPHECY. 1. That our Lord should come as a servant (ver. 1). (1) This was His own testimony when He came (Matt. xx. 28; John vi. 38). (2) This is the testimony of the apostles (Phil. ii. 6–8). 2. That our Lord was Divinely chosen for His work. "Mine elect" (1 Pet. ii. 6, 7). 3. That our Lord should be endowed with the Holy Spirit. "I have put My Spirit upon Him" (Matt. iii. 16, 17; Luke iv. 14, 18, 19; Heb. ix. 14; Heb. i. 9). 4. That our Lord would institute a religion for the Gentiles (ver. 1). Such is the force of the word "judgment." 5. That His Spirit would be most tender and gentle (vers. 2, 3). (1) This, surely, is a correct description of the historic Christ. His own testimony (Matt. xi. 29). The testimony of His apostles (Heb. vii. 26, xii. 2, 3; 1 Pet. ii. 21–24). (2) In this He gave His disciples an example. 6. That His courage would be equal to His gentleness (ver. 4). (1) It is not the noisy and boastful that are the most courageous and reliable. (2) The deeper our conviction of the truthfulness of our cause the more patient and gentle may we be in its advocacy. (3) The commission of Christ to His disciples proves His entire confidence in the success of His cause. II. OUR LORD'S COMMISSION FORETOLD IN PROPHECY. 1. In its authority (vers. 5, 9). The authority is the highest in respect to power and principle. 2. In its purpose (ver. 7). (1) Our Lord appropriates the terms of this commission to Himself (Luke iv. 17–19). (2) This is the commission He fulfilled in His life. III. BOTH THE CHARACTER AND COMMISSION OF CHRIST ARE JUST INCENTIVES TO THANKSGIVING TO GOD (ver. 10). 1. All should praise God. 2. To praise God for Christ intelligently we must personally experience His saving power. Lessons—1. The study of prophecy is the imperative duty of every child of God. 2. The most inspiring portions of prophecy are those which centre in the person and work of our Lord Jesus. 3. No prophecy can be fully understood that is not interpreted in the light of Christ's work. "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." 4. Christianity is a religion for the whole race (ver. 4). 5. The gentleness with which its advocates should be characterised and the beneficent designs of its mission must commend it, when rightly represented, to all nations, climes, and tongues. 6. Under no circumstances will our Lord justify His disciples in an advocacy of His Gospel in a spirit antagonistic to His own. 7. Let all disciples of Christ copy His life, spirit and love, and work for the gracious ends for which He lived and died! (*Homiletic Review.*) *The servant of Jehovah:*—This chapter exhibits to our view the servant of Jehovah, *i.e.* the Messiah and His people, as a complex person, and as the messenger or representative of God among the nations. 1. His mode of operation is described as being not violent but peaceful (vers. 1–5). 2. The effects of His influence are represented as not natural but spiritual (vers. 6–9). 3. The power of God is pledged for His success, notwithstanding all appearances of inaction or indifference on His part (vers. 10–17). (*J. A. Alexander.*) **Mine elect in whom My soul delighteth.**—*Christ delighted in by the Father:*—Christ Jesus was the elect of God, inasmuch as from all eternity infinite wisdom had chosen Him to execute the sovereign purposes of infinite mercy. We may pronounce that the Father delighted in His elect, because—I. THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST MAGNIFIED EVERY DIVINE ATTRIBUTE. II. IT ALSO MET EVERY HUMAN NECESSITY. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Vers. 2, 3. **He shall not cry.**—*Jesus Christ not a controversialist:*—He is not a debater; He does not belong to the society of men who walk up and down in the open square, called the "street," or *agora*, or the market-place, saying,

Who will talk with Me to-day? What shall we debate? My sword is ready, who will fence? He does not belong to the word gladiator; from that school He abstains. There were men who delighted in controversy in the open squares of the city. Such controversy took the place of modern literature, morning journals, and the means of publicity of every kind, open to modern society. Jesus Christ spoke whisperingly to hearts. Men had to incline their ear to hear Him. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Christ's message self-evidential*:—What He brings is its own evidence, and needs no beating of drums. (*Prof. F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Christ's ministry unhysterical*:—To be "screamy," to be "loud," to "advertise one's self,"—these modern expressions for vices that were ancient as well as modern, render the exact force of the verse. Such the servant of God will not be nor do. That God is with Him, holding Him fast (ver. 6), keeps Him calm and unhysterical; that He is but God's instrument keeps Him humble and quiet; and that His heart is in His work keeps Him from advertising Himself at its expense. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Christ unlike the prophets of Israel*:—This feature of the Servant's activity can hardly have been suggested by the demeanour of the prophets of Israel; and for that reason the prophecy is all the more wonderful as a perception of the true condition of spiritual work. It reminds us of the "still small voice" in which Elijah was made to recognise the power of Jehovah. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *The greatness and the gentleness of Christ*:—Jesus Christ has fulfilled this passage both in the spirit and in the letter. I. THE GRANDEUR AND CERTAINTY OF HIS WORK. It could not be expressed in stronger or more graphic words. "He shall bring forth judgment or righteousness according to truth. He shall not fail nor be broken till He have established judgment or righteousness in the earth, and the isles, or far-off lands, shall wait for His law or instruction." This is the Old Testament conception of the Divine work, the setting up of a kingdom of righteousness in the world. In the New Testament it is called the kingdom of heaven, of which righteousness is still the great characteristic. The essence of the aim of the Gospel of Christ may be summed up, therefore, in two words—to win men over to be right and to do right. That which separates men from God and the kingdom of heaven is some kind of wrong in the inward nature—that which arrays itself against the Divine will, which is the Divine law. The self-will which tries, but tries in vain, to trample down the Divine will, which endeavours to have its own way in defiance of all right and justice; the insatiate thirst of the passions for indulgence which must be obtained at whatever cost to honour and conscience, and the readiness to sacrifice truth and honesty and purity in order to achieve what the world calls success,—these things are the essence of all unrighteousness and sin—the cancerous disease of our spiritual nature, which Christ, the Great Physician, came to exterminate and heal. In order to do what is right we must become, first of all, personally right; for Christ traced all conduct up to character. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit," &c. He came to build up a society of such men and women, beginning with a small band of immediate personal disciples, whose affection to Himself should make them righteous, who should receive from Him the truths, the impulses, and principles which would enable them to carry the contagion of His Spirit to Greek, and Roman, and Jew, and make the cross on which He died the symbol of all goodness and all righteousness. II. THE SPIRIT AND METHOD OF CHRIST'S WORK. "He shall not cry," &c. 1. This is the Divine way of speaking to men, and instructing them in Divine truth. The strong wind can speak to the seas and mountains and forests; the earthquake can speak to Sodom and Gomorrah; the fire can speak to the raving prophets of Baal; but when He speaks to His servant He whispers in that still small voice which penetrates where the thunder would fail to be heard, to the deeps of Elijah's spirit, where the heart and conscience sit enthroned in silence. The deepest affections ever speak thus. The mother speaks to her child in the softest, most subdued accents of speech, and those accents reach farther into the child's heart than the loudest, harshest words of command could reach. When is the orator at the height of his greatest power? Not when he is loudest; not when he thunders forth invective and appeal in high-strung passion; but when the strength of emotion has subdued him, when the rich pathos of his feelings makes his voice tremulous and low; and he just breathes out the thought which you will never forget. This was Christ's method of instruction during His earthly ministry. The Sermon on the Mount breathes a Divine calm throughout; there is not one spasmodic sentence in it. 2. And He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax,

When the woman who had been a sinner ventured after Him into the house of Simon the Pharisee, where He sat at meat, and began to wash His feet with her tears and to wipe them with the hair of her head, He accepted the service without one thought of spurning her from His presence, because it was the service of a broken, penitent heart. But there is a positive as well as a negative aspect of this truth. He will not merely not break the bruised reed, He will heal and restore it to soundness: He will not merely not quench the smoking flax, He will replenish the exhausted lamp with fresh oil, and make it burn brightly again. This life is hastening to its close with us, and we may have a keen consciousness that our souls are bruised and broken by sin, and we dread to die. What can we do? We can be assured that there is a Saviour who sympathises with us, and who has power to lift the load from our conscience, and restore the breaking, fearful heart; a Saviour who is not willing that you should die as you are, but can even now pour the oil of hope and trust into the lamp of your life. Some of us may have been bruised and almost worn out, not so much by the reproach of our sins, as by the experience of trouble and suffering. (*C. Short, M.A.*)

Vers. 3, 4. **A bruised reed shall He not break.**—*The bruised reed*:—The reed, or "calamus," is a plant with hollow stem, which grew principally by the side of lakes or rivers. Those who have been in Palestine are familiar with it in the tangled thickets which still line the shores of the ancient Merom and Gennesaret, or, above all, in the dense copse fringing the banks of the Jordan. The plant might well be taken as an emblem of whatever was weak, fragile, brittle. The foot of the wild beast that made its lair in the jungle, trampled it to pieces. Its slender stalk bent or snapped under the weight of the bird that sought to make it a perch. The wind and hail-storm shivered its delicate tubes, or laid them prostrate on the ground. "A reed shaken by the wind" was the metaphor employed by One whose eyes, in haunts most loved and frequented by Him, had ofttimes gazed on this significant emblem of human weakness and instability. Once broken, it was rendered of no use. Other stems which had been bent by the hurricane might, by careful nursing and tending, be recovered; but the reed, with its heavy culm, once shattered, became worthless. In a preceding chapter (xxxvi. 6) it is spoken of as an emblem of tottering, fragile Egypt. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *A bruised reed*:—Say some an instrument was meant, and there was a rift in it, which spoiled the music. Jesus Christ said, We must repair this; something must be done with this reed; it was meant for music, and we must look at it with that end in view. He does not take it, saying, There is a rift in the lute, and the music is impossible; rend it and throw it away. He always looks to see if a man cannot be made somewhat better. Or "a bruised reed" may mean that wild beasts in rushing through to the water, or from the flood, have crushed the growing plants, so that they are bent, they no more stand upright; but Jesus Christ comes to heal them and to restore them. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The bruised reed and the smoking flax*:—God has His strong ones in His Church—His oaks of Bashan and cedars of Lebanon; noble forest trees, spreading far and wide their branches of faith and love and holiness; those who are deeply rooted in the truth, able to wrestle with fierce tempests of unbelief, and to grapple with temptations in their sterner forms. But He has His weaklings and His saplings also—those that require to be tenderly shielded from the blast, and who are liable, from constitutional temperament, to become the prey of doubts and fears, to which the others are strangers. Sensitive in times of trial, irresolute in times of difficulty and danger, unstable in times of severe temptation; or it may be in perpetual disquietude and alarm about their spiritual safety. To such, the loving ways and dealings of the Saviour are unfolded. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Rudiments of religion in the heathen world*:—It is an interesting question whether these rudiments of religion are conceived as existing in the heathen world or in the breasts of individual Israelites. The former view is, no doubt, that to which the national interpretation of the servant most readily accommodates itself, and is also most in keeping with the scope of the passage as a whole. But in later sections a mission in and to Israel is undoubtedly assigned to the servant, and a reference to that here cannot be pronounced impossible. (*Prof. J Skinner, D.D.*) *The bruised reed*:—I. INSIGNIFICANCE ESCAPES NOT CHRIST'S ATTENTION. There is no insignificant life, nor insignificant incident of life. All is fraught with the importance of endless existence. II. UNWORTHINESS FORFEITS NOT CHRIST'S REGARD. Nothing more worthless than a bruised reed. Yet He will not break,

it. As there is no trifle that escapes His notice, so there is no unworthiness that transcends His gracious regard. Where is the bruised reed that the Redeemer has ever broken? Is it the dying thief? Is it Mary Magdalene? Is it Saul of Tarsus? III. UNPROFITABLENESS ABATES NOT CHRIST'S LOVE. Nothing more unprofitable than a bruised reed. The heart that yields no large return for all His care He loves and blesses still. The unprofitable bruised reed He will not break. (*Homiletic Review.*) *God's negatives imply strong affirmations* :—As that negative assertion is the Hebrew way of conveying a strong affirmative, it is equivalent to saying that He will bind up the broken heart, that He will cement the splintered stem of the hanging bulrush, endowing it with new life and strength and vigour, causing it to "spring up among the grass, as willows by the water-courses"; that He will pardon, pity, comfort, relieve! (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Fragrance from the bruised soul* :—In the case of some aromatic plants, it is when bruised they give forth the sweetest fragrance. So, it is often the soul, crushed with a sense of sin, which sends forth the sweetest aroma of humility, gratitude, and love. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." (*Ibid.*) *Bruised reeds* :—It is quite a relief to come across words of such gracious import as these, and to learn that there is One having to do with us, while immeasurably above us, in whose heart pity has a place, in whose eyes are tears as they look on our woes, whose touch is soft while strong, whose voice has no harshness in it when addressing the weak and failing—for we live in a cold, callous, cruel world, still darkened by the foulest crimes, where thousands are handled roughly and are driven into out-of-the-way places to die, unattended, unhelped, and unblessed, except, perhaps, by the angels of God. Read history: it is written largely in letters of blood. Read your newspaper, that mirror of the world's daily life, and weep over fallen human nature as you do so. Read your scientific books, and you will find vivisection preached so far as animals are concerned, and "natural selection" and the "survival of the fittest" so far as the race is concerned. "Let the weak perish, let the afflicted be cut off," says a pitiless science—thus following the ancient Spartans, who killed off their sickly and deformed offspring, and Plato, who favoured infanticide. These people would deliberately and in cold blood break the bruised reed and quench the smoking flax. Into such a world as this Christ comes, comes to teach us that God is love, that the strongest Being in the universe is the gentlest, that all life is precious, that even maimed humanity is worth saving, that the man who has been smitten by a mighty misfortune is to have the tenderest attention, that the man most in the mud is to be lifted out, so that his powers may unfold themselves in winsome and undecaying blossoms by the river of life. The slender bulrush, with its sides crushed and dinted, its head hanging by a thread, stands for that large class who have been injured by evil of any kind, and to all these Jesus deals out an unwonted, unheard of, restorative tenderness. I. SOME ARE BRUISED BY ANCESTRAL SINS. Our scientists now accept and emphasise the great Mosaic doctrine, "The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me." Many are seriously handicapped by hereditary taints. "The great men of the world are the forest kings of the social landscape; the rich are its olives, the clever are its orchids; the fashionable are its climbing roses; the merry are its purple vines; but here at the bottom, in the dirt, are the bruised reeds of humanity, the outcast, the forsaken, the ill-starred, the poverty-stricken, the weak, the wronged, the fallen." To which did Jesus give His best, His primary attention? He won for Himself the name, "A friend of publicans and sinners." When His disciples queried Him as to who was responsible for a man's blindness, He refused to be drawn into a discussion of the law of heredity to satisfy their unfeeling curiosity. To Christ the blind man was something more than a scientific or theological problem—he was a brother whose blindness was an appeal for help, and He helped him by opening his eyes. II. SOME ARE BRUISED BY PERSONAL SIN. There are many who realise that their lives are knocked out of their proper shape. How many of us have robbed, degraded, and damaged ourselves! God meant us to be temples, but we have desecrated the hallowed shrine. God meant us to be kings, but we have given our crowns away. God meant us to be priests, but we have made ourselves vile. God meant us to be His children, but we have wandered away and become Satan's serfs. No one has injured us half as much as we have injured ourselves. What a contrast is Jesus even to the best of His followers in the treatment of self-injured men! Someone has said, "How surprising it seems that

we find in Jesus no feeling of scorn for man." Surprising? There was not a shade of a shadow of contempt in His nature, not even for the sorriest sons of Adam. III. SOME ARE BRUISED BY THE SINS OF SOCIETY. Some are more sinned against than sinning. Society must be indicted as a great sinner. Full often it is thoughtless, careless, cruel, wicked. It has a don't-care sort of mien. It cares nothing for others' rights, feelings, happiness. Its maxim is, "Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost." Thus the reeds are trodden on, and there is small wonder that they have hard thoughts of man and God. Whatever our treatment of them, our Lord metes out to them a royal generosity, a most delicate consideration. When He was under Calvary's shadow the soldiers put a reed into His right hand—they did it in mockery, but they knew not what they did. That reed was a sceptre, the symbol of the reign of gentleness. The bruised reed may be nothing to us—but to Him who knoweth all things it suggests music, beauty, usefulness. (*J. Pearce.*) *The weak Christian comforted*:—Nothing is more common than for the inspired writers to represent spiritual and Divine things by an allusion to those which are natural. Notice—I. SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BELIEVER'S WEAKNESS. 1. He has knowledge, but it is as yet imperfect. 2. He has faith, but as yet it is comparatively powerless. 3. He has hope, but it is faint and feeble. 4. His joys are few and transient. But these characteristics of the Christian's weakness are also the sources of his sorrow. II. SOME OF THE PLEDGES OF THE BELIEVER'S SECURITY. "He will not break," &c. If faith be genuine, though but like the smallest grain of seed, He owns it; if hope be legitimate, though feeble, He owns it; if love be sincere, though languid, He owns it. The pledges of the believer's security are many and great. 1. Weak believers, equally with the strong, stand in a Divine relation to God. 2. They are, equally with the strong, the purchased possession of the Redeemer. 3. The weak believer is, equally with the strong, supplied out of the inexhaustible store of Divine grace. (*S. Bridge, M.A.*) *The bruised reed*:—I. WHO ARE SET FORTH UNDER THE FIGURE OF A BRUISED REED? It is a description that well suits all believers, without exception. Some are comparatively stronger than others. How is this where all are so weak? Because they have a deeper, more deeply felt experience of weakness. They live more by faith, lean more on Jesus, are brought into deeper poverty of spirit, receive Him more fully. Those branches next the stem are always the strongest. But our text sets forth the weak believer, and one who is conscious of it. It is not only a reed, but a bruised reed. Perhaps heavy afflictions wound the believer, and temporal troubles become strong spiritual temptations. It is storm upon storm, tempest upon tempest, and the poor reed not only bends beneath it, but is bruised beneath it. The world is unkind, friends are unkind, saints are unkind, and faith being weak, God seems unkind; and then the soul, full of suspicion, is unkind to itself, and suspects its own grace. What a bruising is this! Perhaps a deep sense of sin and inward corruption is added to this. II. OUR LORD'S CONDUCT TO SUCH. He will not break this bruised reed. 1. His faithfulness will not permit it. These are of those whom the Father has entrusted to His love. 2. His holiness will not permit it. Here is a spark of His own kindling, a germ of His own planting, a new nature of His own creating, a child of God, one who loves Him—will He bruise such a one? 3. His tenderness will not permit it. Will a kind physician neglect his patient? Will a shepherd forget his wandering sheep? Will a mother dash her sick child to the earth? Conclusion—1. Beware lest you make your feebleness an excuse. There is all fulness in Christ. 2. Beware lest you increase your feebleness. Sin enfeebles, neglects enfeeble, the world enfeebles; want of peace in the conscience enfeebles; living on anything but Christ enfeebles. 3. Admire that condescending Saviour who can stoop to this bruised reed. 4. Admire the compassion of the Saviour. 5. Still more admire Him who has supported, who has all grace to help. 6. Be contented to be ever weak in yourself. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *The compassion of Christ*:—I. INQUIRE WHY THE PERSONS SPOKEN OF MAY BE COMPARED TO THE BRUISED REED AND SMOKING FLAX. 1. Both these objects have a mean appearance, and are deemed of little use: and low and humble Christians are much the same. Especially if in a declining state, they bring but little honour to their profession, and often afford matter for reproach. 2. The bruised reed has some strength, and the smoking flax some fire, though both in a small degree; so the Christian, though he has but a little strength, like the church at Philadelphia, yet he is still alive, and the light of Israel is not quenched. 3. Many are ready to break the bruised reed and quench the smoking

flax. Great also are the oppositions and discouragements which weak believers meet with, and yet they are still preserved. 4. The bruised reed needs to be supported, and the smoking flax to be enkindled: so does the Christian need to be strengthened, and quickened afresh by Divine grace. II. NOTICE WHAT IS IMPLIED IN CHRIST'S NOT BREAKING THE BRUISED REED, NOR QUENCHING THE SMOKING FLAX. Much more is implied than is expressed. The Lord will not put the weak believer to those trials which are disproportioned to his strength. He will not suffer him to be tempted above what he is able to bear; but will with the temptation also make a way for his escape. The following things are also implied. 1. That as Christ will not break the bruised reed, so neither will He suffer others to do it. 2. Instead of breaking the bruised reed, He will bind it up, and strengthen it; and will cherish the smoking flax till it break forth into a flame. He who notices the smallest sins to punish them, will also notice the weakest efforts of grace to encourage and reward them. III. AN IMPROVEMENT OF THE SUBJECT. 1. Let weak Christians be encouraged from hence to commit themselves to Christ, and place an entire confidence in His faithfulness and compassion. 2. Let us imitate this part of our Lord's conduct, and carry it towards others as He carries it towards us. 3. It becomes us to beware that we do not abuse the mercy of our Saviour, by supposing that we have weak grace, when, indeed, we have none; for it is real and not counterfeit piety to which He shows His tender regard. Nor yet by contenting ourselves with weak grace, though it is true. 4. If weak Christians shall not be neglected, much less the strong. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *The source of Christ's perfect tenderness to sinners* is none other than the Divine compassion. It was the love and pity of the Word made flesh. 1. It is plain that this gentle reception even of the greatest sinners implies that, where there is so much as a spark of life in the conscience, there is possibility of an entire conversion to God. Where there is room to hope anything, there is room to hope all things. Such is the mysterious nature of the human spirit, of its affections and will, such its energies and intensity, that it may at any time be so renewed by the Spirit of the new creation as to expel, with the most perfect rejection, all the powers, qualities, visions, and thoughts of evil. 2. Another great truth implied in our Lord's conduct to sinners is, that the only sure way of fostering the beginning of repentance is to receive them with gentleness and compassion. On those in whom there is the faintest stirring of repentance the love of Christ falls with a soft but penetrating force. To receive sinners coldly, or with an averted eye, an estranged heart, and a hasty, unsparing tongue, will seldom fail to drive them into defiance or self-abandonment. A sinner that is out of hope is lost. Hope is the last thing left. If this be crushed the flax is extinct. Truth told without love is perilous in the measure in which it is true. There is in every sinner a great burden of misery, soreness, and alarm; but even these, instead of driving him to confession, make him shut himself up in a fevered and brooding fear. And it was in this peculiar wretchedness of sin that the gentleness of our Lord gave them courage and hope. It was a strange courage that came upon them; a boldness without trembling, yet an awe without alarm. What little motions of good were in them, what little stirrings of conscience, what faint remainder of better resolutions, what feeble gleams of all but extinguished light,—all seemed to revive, and to turn in sympathy towards some source of kindred nature, and to stretch itself out in hope to something long desired, with a dim unconscious love. It is an affinity of the spirit working in penitents with the Spirit of Christ that made them draw to Him. It was not only because of His infinite compassion as God that Christ so dealt with sinners; but because, knowing the nature of man, its strange depths and windings, its weakness and fears, He knew that this was the surest way of winning them to Himself. (*H. E. Manning, D.D.*) *The transforming tenderness of Jesus*:—He uses and loves and transfigures broken reeds. They become pens to write His truth. They become instruments of sweet music to sound forth His praise. They become pillars to support and adorn His Temple. They become swords and spears to rout His enemies; so that, as Mr. Lowell sings, "the bruised reed is amply tough to pierce the shield of error through." And He loves and employs and fans into bright and glowing flame dimly burning wicks. They are changed into lamps that shine, into beacon-fires that warn, into torches that hand on His message to the generation following, into lighthouse rays and beams that guide storm-tossed sailors into the desired haven. (*A. Smellie, M.A.*) *The long-suffering of Messiah*:—A passage setting forth the gentleness of the new

Prince of Righteousness promised to Israel. I. THE ANALOGIES OF HIS FORBEARANCE. 1. Few of nature's forms are more lovely and symmetrical than the tall cane of the reed rising by the marsh or river edge. One of the elements of our pleasure as we look at it, is derived from our sense of its marvellous power of resisting the pressure of the wind or the dashing of the waves. It is one of the triumphs of nature's architecture. Yet let but a rough stroke fall suddenly upon it, and all its glory is abased. Every passing wind only aggravates the injury. Of what good is it henceforth, but to be cut down and cast into the oven! Yet this, which we should esteem reasonable in the husbandman, is precisely what the Messiah does not do with respect to souls that have been similarly injured. 2. The other illustration of the prophet is from the home or the temple. The oil-lamp was one of the most common objects there. The wick fed by the oil is able to sustain a flame which, although feeble, is clear, and sufficient for the small chambers of the poor. The oil, however, is supposed to be exhausted, and the wick is sending forth a weak, smoky, disagreeable light, soon to subside into darkness. Would it not be better, one might ask, to put out such a light altogether than to endure its disagreeable stench, or, all unprepared, find ourselves plunged in darkness? These two images set before us suggestions of what would be reasonable actions on the part of man, when considering merely human ends. These two things are—1. Types of spiritual states. 2. Suggestions of judicial action. II. THE ULTIMATE AIM OF HIS FORBEARANCE. "Until He bring forth judgment unto truth." The gentleness of Christ without some such obvious explanation might appear moral indifference, or amiable eccentricity, or insane belief in the inherent goodness of men. This aim gives it an entirely new, a far nobler aspect. 1. To every man is given an opportunity of putting himself right with God. The force of circumstances will be counterbalanced so that the will and affections may work freely; inequalities, opposition, &c., will be neutralised or allowed for in so far as they affect conduct. 2. Judgment will be withheld until the career of man is complete. Good and evil alike will work themselves out. There is a tragic power of evolution latent in all sin. Righteousness, too, is as a seed. 3. The character of this judgment, therefore, will be final and absolute. (*St. J. A. Frere, M.A.*) *"A bruised reed" and "smoking flax":*—The two metaphors are not altogether parallel. "A bruised reed" has suffered an injury which, however, is neither complete nor irreparable. "Smoking flax," on the other hand—by which, of course, is meant flax used as a wick in an old-fashioned oil lamp—is partially lit. In the one a process has been begun which, if continued, ends in destruction; in the other a process has been begun which, if continued, ends in a bright flame. So the one metaphor may express the beginnings of evil which may still be averted, and the other the beginnings of incipient and incomplete good. If we keep that distinction in mind, the words of our text gain wonderfully in comprehensiveness. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The strong "servant of Jehovah":*—It is to be noticed that in verse 4 we have an echo of these metaphors. The word translated "fail" is the same as that rendered in the previous verse, "smoking," or "dimly burning"; and the word "discouraged" is the same as that rendered in the previous verse, "bruised." So then this "servant of the Lord," Who is not to break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, is fitted for His work because He Himself has no share in the evils which He would heal, and none in the weaknesses which He would strengthen. His perfect manhood knows no flaws nor bruises; His complete goodness is capable of and needs no increase. Neither outward force nor inward weakness can hinder His power to heal and bless; therefore His work can never cease till it has attained its ultimate purpose. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged," shall neither be broken by outward violence, nor shall the flame of His saving energy burn faint until He hath "set judgment in the earth," and crowned His purposes with complete success. (*Ibid.*) *Christ the arrester of begun evil, and the nourisher of incipient good:*—We have here set before us three significant representations of that Servant of the Lord, which may well commend Him to our confidence and our love. I. AS THE RESTORER OF THE BRUISE THAT IT MAY NOT BE BROKEN. "He shall not break the bruised reed." It is "bruised," but the bruise is not irreparable. And so there are reeds bruised and "shaken by the wind," but yet not broken. And the tender Christ comes with His gentle, wise, skilful surgery, to bind these up and to make them strong again. To whom does this text apply? 1. In a very solemn sense to all mankind. In all the dints and marks of sin are plainly seen. Our manhood has been crushed and battered

out of its right shape, and has received awful wounds from that evil that has found entrance within us. But there emerges from the metaphor not only the solemn thought of the bruises by sin that all men bear, but the other blessed one, that there is no man so bruised as that he is broken. And Christ looks on all the tremendous bulk of a world's sins with the confidence that He can move that mountain and cast it into the depths of the sea. 2. But then the words may be taken in a somewhat narrow sense, applying more directly to a class. "The broken and the contrite heart," bruised and pulverised as it were by a sense of evil, may be typified for us by this bruised reed. And then there emerges the blessed hope that such a heart, wholesomely removed from its self-complacent fancy of soundness, shall certainly be healed and bound up by His tender hand. Wheresoever there is a touch of penitence there is present a restoring Christ. 3. The words may be looked at from yet another point of view, as representing the merciful dealing of the Master with the spirits which are beaten and bruised. II. AS THE FOSTERER OF INCIPIENT AND IMPERFECT GOOD. "The dimly burning wick He shall not quench." Who are represented by this "smoking flax"? 1. I am not contradicting what I have been saying, if I claim for this second metaphor as wide a universality as the former. There is no man out of hell but has in him something that wants but to be brought to sovereign power in his life in order to make him a light in the world. You have got consciences at the least; you have convictions, which if you followed them out would make Christians of you straight away. You have got aspirations after good, desires, some of you, after purity and nobleness of living, which only need to be raised to the height and the dominance in your lives which they ought to possess, in order to revolutionise your whole course. There is a spark in every man which, fanned and cared for, will change him from darkness into light. Fanned and cared for it can only be by a Divine power coming down upon it from without. 2. Then, in a narrower way, the words may be applied to a class. There are some of us who have a little spark, as we believe, of a Divine life, the faint beginnings of a Christian character. They say that where there is smoke there is fire. There is a deal more smoke than fire in the most of Christian people in this generation. And if it were not for such thoughts as this about that dear Christ that will not lay a hasty hand upon some little tremulous spark, and by one rash movement extinguish it for ever, there would be but little hope for a great many of us. Look at His life on earth; think how He bore with those blundering, foolish, selfish disciples of His. Remember how, when a man came to Him with a very imperfect goodness, the Evangelist tells us that Jesus, beholding him, loved him. And take out of these blessed stories this great hope, that howsoever small men "despise the day of small things," the Greatest does not. How do you make "smoking flax" burn? You give it oil, you give it air, and you take away the charred portions. And Christ will give you, in your feebleness, the oil of His Spirit, that you may burn brightly as one of the candlesticks in His temple; and He will let air in, and take away the charred portions by the wise discipline of sorrow and trial sometimes in order that the smoking flax may become the shining light. The reason why so many Christian men's Christian light is so fuliginous and dim is just that they keep away from Jesus Christ. III. AS EXEMPT FROM HUMAN EVIL AND WEAKNESS, as the foundation of His restoring and fostering work. "He shall not burn dimly nor be broken till He hath set judgment in the earth." There are no bruises in this reed. That is to say, Christ's manhood is free from all scars and wounds of evil or of sin. There is no dimness in this light. That is to say, Christ's character is perfect, His goodness needs no increase. There is no trace of effort in His holiness, no growth manifest in His God-likeness, from the beginning to the end. There is no outward violence that can be brought to bear upon Him that shall stay Him in His purpose. There is no inward failure of strength that may lead us to fear that His work shall not be completed. And because of all these things, because of His perfect exemption from human infirmity, because in Him was no sin, He is manifested to take away our sins. (*Ibid.*) **The smoking flax shall He not quench.**—*The smoking flax*:—I. A STATE OF GRACE IS SUPPOSED. The figure is that of a lamp. Such are believers (Matt. v. 15, 16). II. THE FEEBLENESS OF THAT STATE. "Smoking flax." There is some light, yet but little, and that little seems all but ready to be extinguished. There is something of the light of God's Word in the soul, a real spark of grace, but it seems little more than this. Some warmth of affection, but it acts feebly. Many causes conspire to produce this. Some have but the first spark. All

things seem ready to put it out. Strong corruptions, fleshly passions, vanities of the world, evil companions, entire inexperience are all extinguishers. Others have little light in the school of self-knowledge—the danger of temptation, the evil of the heart, the worth of Jesus, the character of God. There is much of the smoke of vain confidence, fearlessness of consequences, tampering with things dangerous, and this very smoke obscures the light still more. Some are in great prosperity—the wick grows tall and all is dim. In some, the light is obscured by neglects with a certain degree of wilfulness in them. In some, by want of deep humbling and thorough repentance on account of sin. In some, by ceaseless engagement, that scarcely allows any real dealing with God. In some, the constant, undeviating habit of looking at themselves rather than Christ, living more by sense than faith. In short, we may dim the light by whatever grieves the Spirit. III. THE CONDUCT OF OUR LORD WITH RESPECT TO IT. He shall not quench it. He will greatly exceed this. He will tend this smoking flax. The flax is His own, the light His own, the oil His own, all His heart is shown in all His actings here. He will dress it. True, He may cut down the wick—humble, lower, abase. He will increase the light. "He giveth more grace." He will perfect it. Conclusion—1. Perhaps there are some whose hopes of worldly happiness are like a dying taper, and, alas! they have little, if any other, hope. Such a beam was in the heart of poor Manasseh. Is it but the faintest, the feeblest, yet does it take thee poor and needy to the Saviour? Will He cast out? Never! 2. If the blessed Saviour does not despise, neither should we. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Smoking flax:*—I. WHAT STATE THIS METAPHOR REPRESENTS. 1. A smoking flax represents a state in which there is a little good. The margin is "dimly burning flax." It is burning; but it is burning very dimly. There is a spark of good within the heart. 2. You are like smoking flax, because your good is too little to be of much use to anybody. What could we do with a smoking flax if we had it here to-night, and the gas was all out? 3. Smoking flax, then, has a little fire, but it is so little that it is of small service, and, what is worse, it is so little that it is rather unpleasant. 4. Though the good of it is so little that it is of very little use to other people, and sometimes is very obnoxious, yet there is enough good in you to be dangerous in Satan's esteem. He does not like to observe that there is yet a little fire in you, for he fears that it may become a flame. II. WHEN ARE SOULS IN THAT STATE? 1. Some are in that state when they are newly saved—when the flax has just been lighted. 2. Sometimes a candle smokes, not because it is newly lit, but because it is almost extinguished. I speak to some Christians who have been alight with the fire of grace for many years, and yet they feel as if they were near the dark hour of extinction. But you shall not go out. The Lord will keep you alight with grace. 3. Sometimes the wick smokes when worldliness has damped it. 4. At times a wick burns low because a very strong wind has blown upon it. Many men and women are the subjects of very fierce temptations. III. WHAT DOES JESUS DO WITH THOSE WHO ARE IN THIS STATE? He will not quench the smoking flax. What a world of mercy lies in that word! 1. He will not quench you by pronouncing legal judgment upon you. 2. He will not quench you by setting up a high experimental standard. 3. He will not judge you by a lofty standard of knowledge. The Lord has some of His children whose heads are in a very queer state; and if He first puts their hearts right He afterwards puts their heads right. 4. The Lord will not quench you by setting up a standard by which to measure your graces. It is not, "So much faith, and you are saved. So little faith, and you are lost." If thou hast faith as a grain of mustard-seed it will save thee. Come along, you little ones,—you trembling ones! Jesus will not quench you. He will blow upon you with the soft breath of His love till the little spark will rise into a flame. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 4. **He shall not fail nor be discouraged.**—*The hopefulness of Jesus Christ:*—Our God is the God of hope; and the Bible is the book of hope. If we are to be true servants of God and disciples of Jesus Christ we must be partakers of this glowing hopefulness. To be discouraged is to fail. To hope is to be strong. The prayer of St. Paul for the Christians in Rome we need often offer for ourselves (xv. 13). This strong hope is essential to the successful worker. The good soldier of Jesus has for his helmet the hope of salvation. The Spirit of God comes to impart this gift. Hope grows strong as it feeds upon the promises. Of every one of us this word should be true—"He shall not fail nor be

discouraged." The hope of the world is in Jesus Christ. It is well to begin a little farther back, at xli. 28. Man cannot find within himself the remedy for the ills of humanity. But when all is black and hopeless, there is another "Behold." The rosy morning fills the sky. "Behold My servant whom I uphold," &c. The hope of God is in Him whom He hath appointed the Saviour of the world. And our hope is in beholding Him. Here is the unfailing spring of our hope. "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged." Let us look at this hope of our Saviour. It is broad based, and its foundation is deep. The tower of His confidence stands four-square to all the winds of heaven and all the blasts of hell. I. IT IS THE HOPE OF ONE WHO KNOWS THE NEEDS OF HUMANITY. There is a shallow hope that thinks it can heal men's wounds by hiding them; or that they can banish ill by giving it some scientific name which quite satisfies everybody. But let the mind go on to think of the sin about us—the thousand shapes of ill that throng and crowd each life; the hidden sins; the sins of our great cities. He knows it all as none else can ever know it—He who was the naked conscience of the world, and upon whom was laid the iniquity of us all. Yet of Him it is written: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." II. THIS IS THE HOPE OF ONE WHO HAS A MOST LOFTY IDEAL. There is a shallow hope that is easily able to fulfil itself by bringing down the ideal of life until it fits the case. If you would have men what they should be, it is easily done—bring down what they should be to the level of what they are. Love may afford to be blind, but the strength of hope is in its eyes. A hope that cannot see what is, and can only see what is not, is a false hope. Hope, true hope, must take the measure of what is, and the full measure of what should be. This is the hope of Jesus Christ. III. THIS IS THE HOPE OF ONE WHO COMES INTO CONTACT WITH THE WORST SIDE OF THE WORST PEOPLE. A policeman said to me one day, "It is a very easy thing for you to have faith in folks, sir: but it is very hard for me." "Why so, my friend?" I asked. "Well," said he, "you see the best of folks and you see them at their best: you see them because they are good. But I see folks because they are bad. And when you see nothing but badness it is hard to have any faith in any goodness anywhere." I sympathised deeply with that man and with thousands who are in like evil case. But this triumphant hope of Jesus Christ is the hope of One whose life and work is in relation to sin. He knows the force of adverse circumstances. IV. THE HOPE OF JESUS CHRIST ARISES FROM HIS ESTIMATE OF MAN'S WORTH. Jesus Christ alone has made man worth more than gain or pleasure: and Jesus Christ alone can keep man so. V. THE HOPE OF JESUS CHRIST IS SEEN IN HIS METHOD (vers. 2, 3). Gentleness is the token of assured power. Bluster is commonly the mask of weakness and fear. Coercion, compulsion, are the methods of a baffled or a bewildered authority. Patient hopefulness, gentleness, brotherliness—these are the Divine methods of uplifting men. VI. THE HOPEFULNESS OF JESUS CHRIST IS ROOTED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. "He shall set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law." There are those who have sought to remedy our social ills by pity without judgment and without law. Their gifts have pampered the transgressor and pauperised the poor. But the remedy of Jesus Christ is in "a new heart and a right spirit." (*M. G. Pearse.*) *Is Christianity a failure?*—We often hear it said that Christianity is a failure. As if foreseeing this state of mind, two thousand five hundred years ago the prophet sang these sweet notes, saying: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." The purpose of Christ is the conquest of this world, and in carrying out this great work He is not to fail or be discouraged until the system of truth which He teaches is everywhere understood; until the principles of all government shall be brought into harmony with His Word, and men everywhere shall understand and practise the great lessons of truth and holiness. The universality of His kingdom is expressed in the phrase, "Till He hath set judgment in the earth"—in all the then known habitable globe; and, looking beyond to the unknown, or to the men but partly known, the expression is added, "And the isles shall wait for His law"—in other words, the progress of Christ's kingdom should be continually onward until its principles should prevail over all the known kingdoms of the earth, and the undiscovered portions of it also should receive His law. The work which He proposes to do is a mighty work; and the phrase represents Him as waiting. I. I am not surprised, however, that MEN ARE READY TO SAY THAT THIS PURPOSE MUST BE A FAILURE; for—1. The aim is so great, the project so vast, that it seems to man impossible. There have been great kingdoms set up on this earth of ours. But there was never a kingdom which reached to

its utmost bounds. 2. Men think Christianity must be a failure because the agencies seem inadequate. 3. Because it has not accomplished its work. 4. They tell us that Christianity is likely to be a failure because, they say, there is a conflict between science and religion. II. NOW LET US LOOK AT THIS SUBJECT. It is one of the favourite expressions of these men that in the order of this world there shall be the "survival of the fittest"—that the weaker shall pass away, and the stronger shall remain. Now, if we contrast Christianity with other forms of religion, where shall we find its failure? We may say to-day, simply as a fact, that it still remains, and, surpassing any other system in its strength and beauty, we shall see its survival over all. 1. Compare it with Paganism in its palmiest hours—the days of the philosophy of Greece and the power of Rome, when its temples shone with splendour, when its poets sang with grace, when sculpture and architecture gathered around it their forms of beauty; when it had its legends of mythology; when it had its men of strength and power to be as pillars for it. Scepticism then existed. But all the scepticism of Greece or Rome never closed one temple, never dethroned one of their imaginary deities. In the midst of scepticism popular faith went right on, and the temples had their devotees and worshippers. Judaism taught the knowledge of the one true God, yet it made no advances against idolatry. On the other hand, idolatry brought its terrible fruits into the midst of Judaism, and the people who had heard the voice of the living God turned and served idols. But what sceptical philosophy could not do, and what Judaism could not do, Christianity has accomplished. Men without earthly power, men persecuted, men in prison, men reproached, went telling the story of a living and dying and ascended Christ, and as they told this story, the temples became deserted and the idols fell, until to-day there is not a god worshipped on earth that was worshipped in the time of the philosophy and glory of Greece and Rome. Christianity is making inroads everywhere. Paganism has gone, Brahmanism is going, and Confucianism is going down. Christianity is just raising herself. 2. But you tell me there is infidelity! And what is infidelity? A negation—a something not a belief. It is a negation of system; it has no system. Where are its temples? Where are its schools? Where are its hospitals? Where were they ever? What did it ever try to do for man anywhere, or in any land, as an organised system? There have been men, strong men, learned men, wise men, who have been infidel; but they have never embodied their creed in an organisation; they have never worked together powerfully for the elevation of the race. I was in Berlin with the Evangelical Alliance. I went to Potsdam to the old palace of Frederick. There we were shown into a room where some of us held our consultations. This was the room where Voltaire studied and wrote part of his works, where he and Frederick deemed they were about to overthrow Christianity. And yet in that very hall we came to consult about the best means of spreading Christianity over the world. Voltaire said he lived in the "twilight of Christianity," and so he did. But it was not, as he fancied, a twilight deepening into darkness, it was a twilight opening up into the brighter day; and the Sun of Righteousness shines now in spiritual beauty over our entire world. 3. But they tell us sometimes that the discoveries which are being made are unsettling the foundations of Christianity. 4. They tell us that Christianity has not done its work in the time it has run. I admit it. But what about it? These men want time for making this earth. They say it took millions of years. Won't you give me as much time to cure this world and turn sinners into saints as you want to turn a monkey into a man? They demand ages for the one, but are not willing to give us time for the other. The times are full of promise. Christianity is growing stronger. (*Bp. M. Simpson, D.D.*) *The accomplishment of Christ's purpose:*—I. THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST. II. THE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY. III. THE ASSURED VICTORY OF CHRIST. (*J. Fleming, B.D.*) *A great work and an invincible patience:*—I. THE GODLIKE WORK WHICH THIS GREAT SERVANT OF JEHOVAH UNDERTAKES. II. THE GODLIKE FAITH AND PATIENCE WITH WHICH HE PROSECUTES IT TO ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT. (*J. Kennedy, D.D.*) *Christ's vast redemptive undertaking*:—Here is a servant of God, before whose eye a future golden age is not a shadowy hope or vision, but a clearly defined reality; and who Himself undertakes to bring it to pass. He will set judgment in the earth. Is He beside Himself? Is He befooled by a benevolent imagination? Is He a visionary dreamer, without knowledge of Himself or of mankind? If ever there was a sound mind, a perfect mind, in a human body, it was that of Jesus Christ—His very enemies being judges. And yet, with full purpose of soul, and with a

clear consciousness of the difficulty of the task, He undertakes to set judgment in the earth. How vast the undertaking is—in its breadth covering all the nations of men, in its depth penetrating to the thoughts and innermost passions of the human soul, in its height rising to the claims of the Eternal God—may be learned from the prophet who ascribes it to Him. Isaiah had formed no superficial estimate of the wrongness of the world. Men were wrong utterly in their relations to one another; wrong utterly in their relation to God; and wrong utterly in themselves. (*Ibid.*) *The progress of Christianity slow but sure* :—This is our answer to those who examine us concerning this matter. 1. The slowness of the progress of Christianity, even if exaggerated in the statement of it, does not stagger our faith; for we see in it God's own manner of working. 2. The progress, or rather, no progress, of the world's own thinking in the highest regions of thought, during the period of the existence of Christianity, proves the world to be as dependent on the light of Christianity as it was eighteen hundred years ago. 3. While Christianity is as needful as ever, happily we have evidence that it is as mighty for good as ever. Nothing has yet occurred to shake our faith in Christ; and while our faith in Him remains unshaken, we shall confide in the prophetic oracle which assures us that He shall set judgment in the earth. (*Ibid.*) *Christ's work no failure* :—Previous verses at the close of chap. xli. indicate the utter failure of the hope of man from man. How often it is so in human history; man fails to find leadership and help in man! In expounding the text, I shall need to open up the whole passage. Follow me, therefore, and obey the first word of the chapter, which is, "Behold." 1. We are commanded at all times to behold the Son of God. But specially in cloudy and dark days ought we to behold Him. When after having looked, and looked long, you see no man and no counsellor, then this precept has an emphatic force about it, "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold," and, when all other saviours fail, look to the Saviour whom God has set up. 2. Our great comfort is that the Lord Jesus Christ is always to be beheld. Behold Him, and your fears and sorrows will fly away. The text leads us to consider what is the work which Jesus Christ has undertaken, in which He will not fail nor be discouraged. He has come to "set judgment in the earth," and "the isles shall wait for His law." The earth is to be delivered from misrule and sin, and men are to be submissive to His instruction and direction. Whatever He has undertaken, He will perform; whatever commission He has received, He will fulfil. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged" till all His work is done. I believe in the final perseverance of the Lord Jesus Christ. I. LET THIS TRUTH BE CONSIDERED AND BELIEVED. 1. It is certainly a very marvellous enterprise which our Lord Jesus Christ has undertaken. The salvation of a single soul involves a miracle. The salvation of myriads upon myriads of the human race: What shall I call it but a mountain of marvels? The problem staggers us. The systems of evil are colossal. The hold of evil on the race is terrible. Man is inveterately a sinner. By the use of an accursed logic he puts darkness for light and light for darkness, and thus stultifies his conscience, and hardens his heart. If, perchance, you convince his judgment, you have not won his affection, you have not carried his will, you have not subdued his mind. Nothing but Omnipotence itself can save a single soul. What must be that mighty power which shall cause nations to run unto the Lord! 2. The task is rendered the more severe because our Lord Jesus at this present works largely by a Church, which is a poor and faulty instrument for the accomplishment of His purpose. Let this battalion and the other waver as it may, He who holds the banner in the very centre of the fight will never be moved: He will hold the field against all comers. 3. Notice who He is that hath undertaken all this. "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth." He who is thus spoken of will not fail nor be discouraged for—(1) He is God's own special Servant. (2) Then God says of Him, "My Servant whom I uphold." If God upholds Him, how can He fail? The text may be read, "Behold My Servant upon whom I lean," and the picture is of a great Oriental monarch who comes forth leaning upon a favourite lord, whom he honours by placing him in that position, indicating thereby that he trusts his affairs with him, and regards him as his right-hand man, a very pillar of the State. We say it with reverence, God the Father leans on Jesus the Christ. He rests His honour and glory with the person of the incarnate God. (3) Then the Scripture adds this very significant word, "Mine elect in whom My soul delighteth." The chosen of God, the most choice one that God knows, shall He prove a failure? God said of the world, that it was very good; but we read not that His soul delighted in it: but, see, the very soul of the God-

head is moved and filled with delight because of the Saviour, commissioned to redeem. (4) Furthermore, our Lord is the abiding-place of the Holy Spirit. "I have put My Spirit upon Him." He who is owned, honoured, trusted, sustained, loved, and anointed of God cannot but be successful. (5) The success of Jesus is guaranteed by the decree of God. It is written, "He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." Oh, those blessed "shalls" and "wills"! 4. It may be that at times we fear that the Gospel is not prospering nor fulfilling the purpose for which God hath sent it. Possibly this may arise out of our Lord's way of working, which is so different from what our minds would choose. "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street." You are in an awful hurry, are you not? But He is never in haste. You would make a great stir and noise, but Jesus will not thus spread the Gospel. You would go out and fight all the enemies of truth, and set clamour against clamour, cry against cry; but "He shall not strive." You would shout, and rage, and rave; but He shall not cry. You would advertise to the ends of the earth; but He shall not cause His voice to be heard in the street. When Mohammed commenced his enterprise he announced that Paradise was to be found beneath the shadow of swords, and numbers of brave men rushed to the battle; they swept everything before them, and stained continents with blood: they carried the name of Allah and Mohammed over Asia and Northern Africa, and seemed intent on conquering Europe: and yet the work done will not endure. The prophet and his caliphs did indeed strive, and cry, and cause their voices to be heard in the street: but Christ's system is the very reverse of that. Behold His battle-axe and weapons of war! Truth Divinely strong, with no human force at the back of it but that of holiness and love; a Gospel full of gentleness and mercy to men, proclaimed not by the silver trumpets of kings, but by the plain voices of lowly men. The Kingdom comes by the Holy Spirit dropping like dew on human hearts, and fertilising them with a Divine life. 5. Note well the spirit in which He works. "A bruised reed," &c. You cannot work in hot haste in this spirit. Gentleness makes good and sure speed, but it cannot endure rashness and heat. We know reformers who, if they had the power, would be like bulls in a china-shop; they would do a great deal in a very short time. But the world's best Friend is not given to quench and bruise. II. LET THIS TRUTH BE BELIEVED AND ENJOYED. 1. Enjoy it by recollecting that Jesus has finished the work for His people. 2. He will finish the work in His believing people. 3. He will finish His work by His people. If you have the Revised Version, the margin will give you some rather singular information. The text might be read thus: "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench: yet He shall not burn dimly nor be bruised." Though He deals with bruised reeds and smoking flaxes, yet He Himself is not crushed, nor does His light become a mere glimmer. 4. The text has in it great comfort to those of you who are as yet outside of the Church of God. Read the sixth and seventh verses—"He shall not fail nor be discouraged," till He has done, what?—the Divine will, and this is a part of it: "To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." Turn your sightless eyeballs this way. "Ah!" saith one, "but I am worse than that, I am shut up in prison." Read the seventh verse again:—"To bring out the prisoners from the prison." "Oh, but," saith one, "in my case it is blindness and slavery united." Listen, then! He has come to "bring them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The constancy and tenderness of Christ*:—I. THE OBSTACLES WHICH JESUS CHRIST MEETS IN HIS WORK OF KINDNESS TO MAN. 1. We may advert to these obstacles as they are general, as they attach to man under all circumstances. 2. But let us advert to the obstacles which any single human being presents to Christ when He comes forth in the power of His grace to seek and to save! Let any man look into his own heart, let him advert (1) To the nature and bent of his inclinations. (2) To his indisposedness to receive instruction. (3) To the use which he makes of that instruction when received; and he will be at no loss to discover the difficulties which lie in the path of his Deliverer. II. THE PATIENCE WITH WHICH HE ENCOUNTERS THOSE OBSTACLES. III. THE VICTORY OVER THEM WITH WHICH HIS EFFORTS WILL ULTIMATELY BE CROWNED. (*G. T. Noel, M.A.*) *The setting of judgment in the earth*:—I. THE GREAT WORK WITH WHICH CHRIST, AS THE FATHER'S SERVANT, IS HERE DECLARED TO BE ENTRUSTED. It is the work of setting judgment in the earth, so that the isles shall wait for His law. As the Father's Servant in the economy of redemption, Christ has been set King upon the holy hill of Zion, and

constituted Head over all things for the Church which is His body. I. What is it to set judgment in the earth? By "judgment" here and in the preceding verses, we are evidently to understand true religion—the faith of the Gospel—Christianity in its widest acceptation, as embodying the rule of Christ's righteous administration—the grand regulating principles of all His administrative acts. And so to set judgment in the earth means to establish the Christian religion throughout the world. The term "law" in the latter clause of the text, while it has much the same meaning as judgment, may be viewed as denoting, in particular, God's written Word, considered specially as a rule of life and duty. For this the "isles"—a poetical expression for the distant Gentile nations—"shall wait." That is, either they shall wait with a vague unconscious longing until it come to them, they remaining in darkness and spiritual death till its blessed life-giving light dawn upon them; or, the meaning more probably is, when judgment is being set in the earth, the nations shall embrace it as the means of their enlightenment and regeneration, and shall wait on Christ as their King, to receive and submit to His law as the supreme rule of all their conduct. So in Matthew we find this clause paraphrased thus—"In His name shall the Gentiles trust." 2. That there is most urgent need for this work of setting judgment in the earth, and bringing the isles to wait for Christ's law being done, is what none will question who believe that God made man upright, but that he hath sought out many inventions. Men individually in their natural condition, and the nations of the earth in their national capacity, are in a state of open determined revolt against the Most High. But has nothing been done in the way of fulfilling this hope-inspiring prediction? Since these words were uttered, not a little has been effected in this direction. Most evident it is, however, that as yet it is but the day of small things in this work. 3. And truly a stupendous task this is—a task which none but He on whose shoulder the government has been laid, and to whom it has been entrusted, could ever hope to effect—the task of setting judgment "in the earth"; not in one land or over one continent only, but in every land and among every people under heaven, whatever their condition and character. 4. Not less beneficent in its character is this work than stupendous in its nature. For it involves the present highest well-being of men as individuals, as families, as Churches, and as nations, as well as the future eternal welfare of untold myriads of precious souls. This mighty, beneficent, God-glorifying work of setting judgment in the earth includes—(1) The world-wide diffusion of the Word of God and proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, and the needed opening up of the way for these. (2) The believing acceptance of the saving truths of the Gospel by those who hear it. (3) As the result of the universal diffusion of the Gospel, accompanied by the working of God's Spirit upon men's minds and hearts, there must come a world-wide profession of faith in Christ and subjection to His authority, along with practical godliness in the daily life. (4) "And the isles shall wait for His law." These words clearly teach us that the setting of judgment in the earth includes, or will issue in, the universal subjection of the nations to the law of Christ as the rule of their conduct. The Statute-books of the nations will be purged, and nothing but laws fully sanctioned by, and consistent with, the law of Christ shall find a place there. Regulated by Christ's law in all their national transactions, the nations in which judgment is set, will, out of regard to the honour of their Divine Governor, be solicitous to choose and appoint as rulers only those who possess the character and qualifications which God's Word prescribes. II. THE MANNER AND SPIRIT IN WHICH THIS STUPENDOUS WORK IS TO BE CARRIED ON AND THE CERTAINTY OF ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth." 1. How is all this to be brought about? Not miraculously, but through human instrumentality, accompanied by the prospering blessing of God's Spirit. As to the spirit in which this work was to be carried on by Him to whom it was entrusted, we learn something both from the text and the preceding context. But if this was the Messiah's spirit, as it is His spirit still, it was not because He lacked strength or courage to assert Himself against His enemies. As He does not conquer by violence, but by gentleness, so He shall not be arrested and conquered by violent opposition. No foe that comes against Him, and no weapon formed against His cause and kingdom, shall ever prosper. 2. Notice the blessed certainty of the accomplishment of this great work, which the emphatic form of expression here employed holds out to us. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." And why shall He not fail? God has promised it and confirmed His promise with an oath, and what God has promised and sworn

can never fail of accomplishment. All power has been given to Christ as Mediator for this very purpose. And He makes this cheering fact the foundation on which He rests the great commission to His Church. "All power is given unto Me—go ye therefore and disciple all nations." For the accomplishment of this blessed work on earth the whole Church has been looking and longing, praying and labouring, age after age, ever since she was called into existence; and these longing anticipations—these fervent prayers—these earnest labours, the result of supernatural influence, shall not be in vain. Conclusion—(1) This subject shows us what is the grand duty of the Christian Church as a whole, and in all her sections and members; it is just, as workers together with Christ, to labour zealously, unweariedly, in the noble enterprise of setting judgment in the earth. (2) In carrying on her great mission in the world, the Church in all her parts and members should seek to be brought into fuller sympathy with her living Head and to drink more and more deeply into His spirit. (3) Greater encouragement to take part in the on-carrying of this great work, and to persevere unweariedly and hopefully in it, in the face of all discouragement and opposition, we could not have, than what is here given us. (4) Is it so that Christ shall not fail nor be discouraged? And are we enlisted under His banner and leadership? Then surely we ought not faint-heartedly to fail or be discouraged in holding fast the truth as it is in Him, and in exhibiting a testimony in its behalf. (5) Nor should we fail or be discouraged in holding forth the Word of life to our benighted and perishing fellow-men, but should persevere and abound yet more and more, in our missionary efforts at home and abroad. (6) He who as Lord of all is engaged in this mighty work of setting judgment in the earth, is also the Advocate with the Father, pleading His people's cause, and securing that their prayers shall be heard. (*Original Secession Magazine.*) *The Person and mission of our Lord:*—1. Christianity possesses the qualities which constitute it of right the universal religion. 2. Its author has undertaken to make it the universal religion in fact. 3. He will be ultimately completely successful, as prophecy clearly declares. I. CHRISTIANITY HAS THE ELEMENTS OF TRUTH AND ADAPTATION IN SUCH PERFECTION AS TO BE SUFFICIENT FOR ALL RACES AND ALL TIMES. In making this claim it is not necessary to deny whatever of good may exist in other religions. If we contemplate the subject philosophically, judging of it by the wants of human nature, we reach the inevitable conclusion that it is fitted to be the universal religion. But we are here led to inquire: What is religion in its essential nature apart from all the forms in which it may incarnate itself? The universal religion, call it by what name you will, must give such a revelation of the Author and Ruler of all things, and of man's relations to Him here and hereafter, as to render it certain that man can, despite sin and death, attain to everlasting blessedness. 1. Its sufficiency must be settled by practical tests. The life after death must be made so certain as to be the chief and abiding source of man's present happiness, and motive in his greatest efforts and activities. This implies forgiveness of sin and victory over death, and also consciousness of obedience to God. This soul-rest from bondage to the fear of death the universal religion must provide. 2. It must provide for responsible man at every stage of his development—in its movements from deepest ignorance to the highest possible attainments of which he is capable. It must go to the sheerest idolater, to the lowest peasant, to him who is highest in authority; must meet the wants of the most enlightened sage. It must be the chief stimulus of civilisation. Science cannot overthrow it, civilisation cannot dispense with it. 3. It must meet the wants of every race. 4. This universal religion must have the power to renew itself from time to time, to prevent its becoming an empty form — a dead letter. However we may account for it, there is a strange power in Christianity to renew itself in great reformations and revivals — to renew itself in individuals and in the race. II. THE AUTHOR OF CHRISTIANITY HAS REVEALED IT AS HIS PURPOSE TO PUSH ITS CONQUESTS UNTIL IT SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER RELIGIONS. The living power by which this religion renews itself as perpetually as nature renews the face of the earth in every returning spring, the Messiah promised to pour out upon His disciples till all nations are instructed in His principles, and yield a hearty obedience to Him. The true conception of Christianity, therefore, is not that of a sage who proclaims a system, and, dying, leaves it to work its own way in a hostile world; but rather of One who has given His life to seal its truth, and, rising from the dead, comes back to His disciples to fill them with supernatural energy, that under His personal supervision they may go forward to

its complete establishment. Thus the best test of the true Church is found in her members working along the line of this universal conquest. The Christian conquest is distinguished from any other which may bear a possible semblance to it, by the peculiar and subordinate sphere which all physical power in governmental relations must sustain to it. III. In ancient times, when the warrior returned from battle with his trophies, he adorned with them the heathen temples. Under this imagery THE HOLY PROPHETS FORETELL THE GOOD TIME COMING WHEN ALL NATIONS WILL ADORN THE TEMPLE OF CHRIST with all the boundless resources of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures. (*C. Graham.*) *Christ's final triumph* :—1. It seems not unreasonable to think that, since the plan of redemption has been from the beginning of the world the great object of the Divine dispensations, and since means so very striking and unusual have been employed in bringing it forward, it will surely produce effects, even in this world, proportionable to the magnitude of the preparation. 2. But it will be said, if Christianity for so many ages has made little progress in the world, and if, even among its professing followers, its influence is far from being productive of universal holiness, what reason can we have for supposing that it will ever be otherwise? 3. Observe that the corruptions which have obscured the lustre of the Gospel, originally owing to the mixture of human speculations, were long fostered by a system of priestcraft, which, being once detected, is the less likely again to arise. Under that system men gradually acquired the power of shutting out from their brethren the pure sources of knowledge, and thus innumerable errors and prejudices were propagated, the effects of which have not wholly disappeared even in our own days. But the circumstances of the world are now so much improved, that it does not seem possible any such power will be ever again acquired, or at least retained for any considerable length of time. And further, there is in the mind of man so strong a thirst for knowledge, that some, according to their talents and opportunities, are always arising to search after it; and we may rest assured that this thirst for knowledge, aided by Christian zeal, will extend to the interesting truths of revelation, as well as to the various branches of human science. 4. But let it be granted that the Gospel, through the progress of inquiry, shall be restored even to its simplest form, and its excellence and truth clearly displayed; still, what reason have we to think that men's lives will be universally influenced by it, since hitherto that has been so far from being the case, that, on the contrary, infidelity seems to have kept pace with the increase of knowledge? With respect to increasing infidelity, it is nothing more than might naturally be expected when, after a long period of ignorance, prejudice, and even imposture, men first begin to inquire and discuss. The evil is only temporary, and will cease with the causes which lead to it. Men will at length return from the extremes into which they run. 5. With respect to the influence which pure Christianity may be expected to have on its votaries, we observe—(1) That a difference of circumstances may be expected to produce a difference of effects. (2) The more the native beauty of the Gospel appears, men will be the more likely to embrace it with sincerity, and for its own sake. (3) When Christianity is wholly disencumbered of the tenets and observances which obstruct its reforming power; when it is universally admitted to be a doctrine according to godliness; when the illusions by which men foster their negligence, and the pleas by which they lull asleep their consciences, are all given up; when the truth is clearly and fully understood, that without real, heartfelt holiness no man shall see God,—we may with safety conclude that then the moral and sanctifying spirit of the Gospel will acquire an influence far beyond anything we have yet seen. 6. It may perhaps be said that little hope can be entertained of so favourable a change on the hearts and lives of men, unless human nature be itself changed; since, in all past ages, mankind have been imperiously hurried away by the strength of their passions. But it is equally certain that these are not uncontrollable; since, though not wholly subdued, for that would be hurtful, they have been, at an earlier or later period of life, gradually brought under subjection by multitudes of good men in all ages. They are inflamed, besides, by example, and by the temptations which mankind throw in one another's way; and surely it is conceivable that these are circumstances which may not only gradually cease to inflame, but may come at length, in the progress of improvement, rather to check the undue indulgence of our passions. Consider, moreover, the power of habits formed before the heart be yet hardened, or the feelings blunted; and is it not possible that to the instruction of the young a growing attention may be paid, and endeavours be more earnestly and universally

employed to instil into them from their tenderest years the habits of piety and virtue? Were this supposition realised, it alone, independent of all other circumstances, would powerfully contribute to that universal diffusion of the influence of Christianity which we are taught to expect. 7. We may appeal to experience. We know what the Gospel can accomplish, from the example of many individuals. Should it be admitted that the effects now enumerated may very naturally arise at length within the limits of the Christian Church, it will follow, as a just conclusion, that the Gospel may then be expected to spread over all lands. 8. There is a further consideration, of very high importance. It is, that by means of prophecy, there is an evidence for the truth of the Gospel provided, which will accumulate as ages advance. 9. We may add that, the world being wholly under the administration of that Divine Being who watches over the interests of Christianity, the ordinary course of human events will doubtless concur with the progress of the Gospel, and both tend to the same point. 10. Practical observations. (1) Next to heaven itself, there is not perhaps a more elevating subject of contemplation than the state of things which shall take place during the Messiah's reign on earth. (2) From what has been said, let us draw a confirmation of our faith. The present system of things will not be dissolved till the Gospel have wrought out its final triumph, and be preached for a witness to all nations. (3) Since we know that righteousness and truth are finally to prevail, let it encourage us to promote that great object. (4) The prophecies of Scripture are partly given, that they who believe may possess their souls in patience. (*T. S. Hardie, D.D.*) *The want of the world, and the way of supplying it*:—I. MORAL RECTITUDE IS THE GREAT WANT OF THE WORLD. We take the words "judgment" and "law" as expressing the same generic idea—rectitude; that is, a rightness in man in all the powers and operations of his soul, and in all his relations to God and the universe. This rectitude is his want of wants. The want of it involves the want of all other good. 1. Rectitude will put an end to all the painful feelings which afflict the individual soul. Conflict of passions—fear—jealousy—envy—ambition—remorse; these, and kindred feelings which torment the individual soul, will all disappear when rectitude is established. 2. Rectitude will put an end to all the social evils which afflict the state. Monopoly—injustice—oppression—cupidity—the source of poverty and feuds—would all go were rectitude established. 3. Rectitude would put an end to all religious evils which afflict the world. Rectitude is the panacea; it will heal all the evils. Well may the "isles wait" for it. Universal conscience is crying out for rectitude. The fact that they wait for it implies—(1) That they have a deep belief in its existence. (2) That they have a capacity to receive it. (3) That they feel its necessity. II. THERE IS A GLORIOUS BEING ENGAGED TO ESTABLISH RECTITUDE IN THE WORLD. "He shall not fail." Who is He? The "Servant," the "Elect" of Jehovah. Christ's work is to establish rectitude. He died, and lives again, "to put away sin." 1. His life gives the highest expression of rectitude. 2. His death gives the highest motives to rectitude. 3. His Spirit supplies the highest helps to rectitude. III. THIS WORK OF ESTABLISHING RECTITUDE IS CARRIED ON WITH INVINCIBLE PERSEVERANCE. "He shall not fail," &c. There are four things which cause men to fail and be discouraged in an enterprise—1. The want, at the outset, of a full appreciation of all the difficulties that would arise in the working of it out to completion. But Christ saw the end from the beginning. All the arguments of infidelity, all the efforts of persecutors, all the opposition which prejudice, craft, and depravity would ever raise in any age, He foresaw, and was prepared to meet. 2. The want of a thorough sympathy with the undertaking. Men sometimes begin a work from certain motives—gain or fame, or it may be from benevolence—but with no hearty sympathy; and the consequence is that their little interest in it gradually decreases, until at last they give it up altogether; they "fail" and are "discouraged." Will Christ never "fail or be discouraged" on this account? Never! His whole heart is in it. He has proved His interest in it by giving His life to promote it. 3. The want of a thorough acquiescence of the conscience in the undertaking. Men sometimes begin a work, and they find that it is not such that their conscience approves of. Though it may be lucrative—though it may lead them to fortune and fame—yet their conscience disapproves it; and by its constant rebukes they are forced to give it up. But Christ will never "fail nor be discouraged" on this account. It is a righteous enterprise; it is fulfilling the will of Heaven. 4. The want of time to complete the undertaking. Men often begin a work to which they attach vast importance, and which meets the entire sympathies of their hearts and consciences, and fail in its accomplishment for the want of time. Death comes and breaks our

purposes, and leaves our work undone. But Christ will never "fail nor be discouraged" on this account. He is alive to live for ever. Let us have faith in the work of establishing rectitude in the world. (*Homilist.*) **The isles shall wait for His law.**—*Isles* or *coasts*. This word, denoting properly the isles and coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, is used in chaps. xl.–lxvi. representatively of distant regions of the earth, which are, moreover, in several of the passages personified by the prophet. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *Islands* have not been formed by chance; they are part of the wise and far-reaching design of Him who "weighed the mountains in scales," and holds the ocean in "the hollow of His hands." He made for a special purpose those little fragments of the earth, and shut them off from the great continents by the waters of the sea, and placed them exactly where they are. Many islands are the mountain-tops of old submerged lands; and what a wonderful change took place in the old climate and productions in consequence. Instead of snowy and stormy wastes, where only a meagre vegetation struggled for life, there sprang up a lovely paradise of calm blue skies and tropical luxuriance. Many islands have been formed by volcanic outbursts; and it is amazing what a vast number of islands have been created by the labours of soft, tiny creatures, hundreds of which a child's tiny hands would squash, and surrounded with coral reefs which have stood out against the wildest waves of the ocean. Islands are of the most beautiful parts of the world; they have usually milder climates than continents, are less exposed to parching droughts; they have more frequent rain and dew; the sunshine, not so scorching, is tempered by sea breezes and silvery clouds; the vegetation also is of a softer kind; the leaves of the trees, instead of being hard and dry and much divided, as on continental areas, are broad and tender and delicate. Who has not heard of the summer isles where the breezes are fragrant with spices, and birds of the most gorgeous plumage flit through the groves of graceful palm trees? Lace-like waterfalls drip languidly from rocks. The dreams of the most ancient nations placed the heaven of bliss in fabled isles, where they exaggerated and idealised all the favourable conditions in the loveliest landscape with which they were familiar. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *The Divine separation of mankind*:—God has formed islands and separated them from the great lands, and richly furnished them for human habitation, in order that mankind by means of them might be broken up into smaller sections. On continents human beings have always been apt to corrupt each other. He separated mankind into distinct communities, placed them in different scenes and circumstances, and effectually kept them apart by means of tractless seas, and thus the passions of men were confined within the narrowest limits, and rendered comparatively innocuous. By this method of separation national character was also formed and educated; and the one type of human nature at the beginning developed itself into every possible modification by the force of different circumstances and experiences. If there were no individuality among nations mankind would make no progress, all human societies would lose the mental activity which distinguished them. For such serious and gracious purposes God separated mankind into different nations and races, and placed them amid varied scenes of nature and circumstances of life. And into this Divine method of dealing with mankind the existence of islands fitted admirably as part of one wise and gracious scheme. God made use of islands as places in which infant races might receive the education and the discipline which should afterwards qualify them for enlarged intercourse with each other when the sea should cease to be an estranging barrier, and by improved methods of communication should be a marriage-ring uniting nations. It was on islands chiefly that those who greatly influenced their fellows were educated under God's own eye, and in close communion with heaven. It was in islands chiefly that those great events began which ever and anon raised the human race from ignorance and vice to nobler aspirations and purer ideals. How much does the world owe to the isles of Greece, gilded with the eternal summer of human memory, where poetry and art and all that dignifies and blesses human life originated! How much does the world owe to the little islands of Great Britain and Ireland, which have colonised the largest portions of the globe, which have been the bulwark of political freedom and the channel of world-wide enterprise, and to whose hospitable shores the white wake of every ship is the fitting avenue of approach! (*Ibid.*) *Islands and the Gospel*:—But vast as has been the influence of islands in connection with the civilisation of the world, they have had still greater influence in connection with religion. Islands have been identified from the beginning with the progress of Christ's kingdom; and there is not in all history a more romantic chapter than

that which records the part which islands have played in diffusing the knowledge of Jesus Christ throughout the world. The men, outside the apostolic band, who were most influential in the spread of Christianity, were the natives of islands. Nazan, the ancient disciple, as he is called, who it is supposed took part in the first preaching of the Gospel throughout Galilee by the seventy disciples whom Christ sent out two by two, and whose lavish hospitality and great zeal in the service of the Church drew forth the love and admiration of all the brethren, was a native of the island of Cyprus. So also was Barnabas, to whom, after Paul, the early Church was more indebted than to any one else. It was to the birthplace of this remarkable man that the first missionary expedition of the Christian Church was sent. Several years before the mainland of Europe received the Gospel, Paul and Barnabas were consecrated by the Holy Spirit for the special purpose of evangelising the important island of Cyprus, which was the bridge of commercial intercourse between the Eastern and Western worlds. By the stepping-stones of this and other islands—of the Levant, of the Grecian Archipelago—Christianity proceeded on its westward march from the land where it was nurtured on the lap of Judaism to the conquest of the nations, in fulfilment of Christ's own command to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." After the time of the apostles the early missionaries of Christianity to Europe sought refuge in the islands which lie off the coast of the Mediterranean, for there they could have the best security from the troubles of those rough ages. Near the shore of Cannes, in the south of France, there is a little island covered with ecclesiastic ruins called the island of St. Honoré, which is one of the most impressive spots in the world. It was by that island that the Christianity of Palestine and Egypt in the fifth century came to Western Europe independent of Rome. There St. Patrick was educated, who brought the Gospel to Ireland; from thence St. Columba brought it to Scotland, and we all know how Iona, the little island amid the clouds and mists of the wild Atlantic, formed the centre which drew to it, and from whence were dispersed, all the spiritual and intellectual forces of Christendom during its darkest ages. Besides Iona, Lindisfarne, or Holy Isle, off the coast of Northumberland, afforded retreat to St. Cuthbert and to his followers, from whence they preached the Gospel to the rude populations of the mainland. And Malta in the Middle Ages preserved the fire of religion burning brightly when it was all but extinguished in other places, and by the Knights Templars, who were stirred by a wonderful enthusiasm in the cause of Christ. It was to the East Indies that the first missions of the Roman Catholics were sent; and the Island of Ceylon was the point of vantage from whence South India was taken possession of for Christ. St. Francis Xavier, that most devoted of missionaries, carried the Christian faith to the island of Japan, and fevered and died on the island near Canton, from whence he attempted to attack the root of the mighty superstition of Buddhism in the jealously-guarded land of China, instead of merely lopping off branches. And, turning to other parts of the world, Captain Cook's wonderful discoveries among the South Sea Islands created profound interest in the new types of humanity which they revealed, and led to the formation of the London Missionary Society. (*Ibid.*) *Islands sunk in savagery, yet Christianised:*—It may be said that the inhabitants of remote islands, on account of their isolation from great centres of civilisation, have lost the highest capacities of the race, and have sunk to the lowest depths of savagery. Throughout the fair paradises of Polynesia, when first discovered, idolatry prevailed in its most grovelling form, degrading the nations, and tribal wars kept the people in a state of constant alarm; cannibalism cast a haunting shadow over many a lovely island, and threatened to exterminate the population. Who does not remember the brutal murder of Captain Cook on the scene of one of the grandest of his discoveries; and the martyrdom of Williams and Patterson amid circumstances of the utmost atrocity towards those to whom they had proved the truest friends? There is hardly a single island in the Pacific but has its bloody record of the slaughter of these devoted men who first came to them with the message of Divine peace. And yet nowhere else have the triumphs of the Cross been so remarkable as on the islands that witnessed these barbarous acts. The simplicity and pliability of disposition peculiar to insular races which have made them the easy slaves of cruel practices, have made them, on the other hand, more susceptible to the power of Divine grace. They were not hampered by the shackles of religious organisations which had grown up during ages, and which had extended their roots so far and deep that they could only be torn up at the risk of destroying the whole social fabric that rested upon them. They had no

elaborate caste like India, no gigantic ritual like China, because of the almost insuperable barriers in the way. They were far less self-sufficient than those who inherited the ancient religious and social systems of the great continental areas; they were, like children, ready to be attracted by any novelty. And so in spite of their superstition and measureless depravity, like the publicans and sinners of our Lord's time, they were ready to receive the kingdom of heaven, readier to receive the kingdom of heaven than the heathen of the continental lands when in God's good providence that kingdom of heaven came to them. The Sandwich Islands, where Williams was martyred, the Fiji Islands, notorious for their cannibalism, the islands of New Zealand, the abode of the most crafty and cruel savages, all were brought more or less under the influence of Christ. The history of the spread of Christianity in Japan and Madagascar, the courage and fortitude of the converts through years of relentless persecution, and the calmness with which they endured tortures from which death was a merciful relief, form one of the most thrilling chapters in the history of Christian missions. (*Ibid.*) *Islands the cradles of new movements*:—Naturalists tell us that our earth from time to time has been exhausted by bearing countless generations of plants and animals; and has only recovered its fertilising materials under the baptism of the great waters, and become fit for bearing new life when the sea changed its bed. Continents are losing the elements which are necessary for building up the bone and brain of man by the streams and rivers that carry them away to the ocean; and islands, owing to the way in which they have been produced from the sea, are rich in such elements, and are therefore fitted to nourish and to maintain vigorous races. This is one reason why islands, more than continents, have been the cradles of new movements connected with the progress of man; and it may be, reasoning from this analogy, that if we in this old island impart to the young isles of the sea the knowledge of the law of Christ for which they are waiting, newer and more vigorous manifestations and developments of that law may be met in those islands than we have yet seen. Christianity may acquire a new impulse from the fresh force and enthusiasm of new races, and the things that have been latent in it may blossom and bear fruit in a new soil for the good of the world. It may be that the isles of the sea that now wait for the law of Christ, shall in turn communicate that law to the regions from which they originally derived it, and which, from their sloth and selfishness, have sunk into ignorance and darkness, just as the candlestick that was removed from places once bright with the light of the truth because of their carelessness, was set up in our heathen island long ago. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **Thus saith God the Lord, He that created the heavens.**—*The oneness of God in revelation and in nature*:—The first of the two verses is a description of God; the second is a declaration of His purposes. What is the declaration which is introduced so impressively? It is often an idiom of prophetic speech, and especially of the style of Isaiah, when a declaration is to be made respecting the work of redemption, to give it the form of a direct address to the Messiah, and to declare to Him the thing which God was about to perform. Such is the idiom now before us. "I," that is, "the God of nature" who had just been described,—"I, the Lord, have called Thee in righteousness"—that is, "I who created the heavens, have summoned Thee as the Redeemer of men, in execution of My righteous purpose." "I will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee"—that is, "I, the Former of the earth, will be faithful unto Thee." "I will give Thee for a covenant of the people, and for a light of the Gentiles"—that is, "I, the Author of the souls of men, will give Thee as a pledge of My love, and the nations shall be redeemed." The sentiment is that the God of nature is the God also of redemption. From the fact that the Author of nature and the God of revelation are one, we may infer—I. THAT RELIGIOUS INVESTIGATION SHOULD BE CHARACTERISED BY THE SPIRIT OF DOCILE INQUIRY. If there be one thing which more than another vitiates the methods by which men form their religious opinions, it is the want of the humility of inquirers after truth; and yet, if there be one thing more firmly settled than another in the methods of science, it is that the docility of inquiry after truth is the only spirit becoming to scientific discovery. How often are we compelled to note the distinction, that in religion men feel at liberty to create their opinions; while in natural science, and in all that domain of truth which lies outside of the realm of conscience, they feel bound to seek for their opinions. In the one case we assume that we know, in the other we consent to be taught. II. THE PRESUMPTION THAT IN A REVEALED THEOLOGY WILL BE FOUND A

DEFINITE AND POSITIVE SYSTEM OF TRUTH. Side by side with Christian dogmatism there grows up a Christianised scepticism, within the range of scriptural thought. We must presume, especially, that when we open this revelation of God in language, we shall come upon certain verities which shall be patent, on the face of the record, to unperverted inquiry. We do not so much find them here, as that they find us. They are verities which unbiassed readers in all ages will read here, and will believe; verities which infidelity will always read here; and verities which it is as unphilosophical for a believer in the inspiration of the Bible to deny, as it is for any sane mind to refuse credence to the elementary facts of geology, or of anatomy. Moreover, we must presume that these Scriptures contain a theology, not only of robust material, and of graphic outline, but of such firmness of construction that it can be positively preached. It must be free from self-contradictions, as other sciences are, so that an athletic faith can use it. And we must look for a theology which, when it is thus preached, shall prove itself to be a power in the earth. III. THE CERTAINTY THAT THE FACTS OF THESE TWO DEPARTMENTS OF GOD'S WORKING WILL NEVER CONTRADICT EACH OTHER. IV. THAT WE SHOULD EXPECT TO FIND THE REVEALED GOVERNMENT OF GOD TO BE A SYSTEM CHARACTERISED BY SACREDNESS AND UNIFORMITY OF LAW. In the natural world we find no such thing as caprice. Why, then, should we not expect to find in a revelation respecting the moral world, a similar omnipresence and omnipotence of law? It would be instructive to pursue this analogy between law in the natural world and law in God's moral government to certain other results. We might see—1. How accordant with nature it is that the laws of religion cannot be violated with impunity. 2. How natural it is that fatal consequences in respect of religion should follow from apparently trifling disobedience of God's commands. 3. The foundation which is laid in the nature of things for that law of God's government by which sin often reaches over from the time when it is committed, and strikes its penalty in a remote experience of the sinner. 4. We might infer the credibility and the probability that the sins of one brief life on earth should pass on, beyond the grave, to reap their reward in eternity. 5. The naturalness of the faith that, if God has devised any remedial scheme to meet the emergency of sin, it must be one that shall honour delicately and rigidly the sacredness of law. V. THAT WE HAVE REASON TO EXPECT THE OCCURRENCE OF MYSTERIES IN A REVEALED THEOLOGY. The mysteries of theology always meet us before we have travelled far on any track of religious inquiry. But this is no anomaly peculiar to religious thought. Science in the world of matter is thwarted in all its investigations, sooner or later, by insolvable mysteries. VI. A CONFIRMATION OF OUR FAITH IN THE CERTAINTY OF THIS WORLD'S CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY. We are too often unmindful that the creation of this world and the redemption of this world are, in a truthful sense, parallel acts of omnipotence. It is as certain that the one will occur as that the other has occurred; for the revelation of that which God will do in the one case is as worthy of trust as the history of that which He has done in the other. This luxuriance of metaphor which the kingdom of nature yields up to the portraiture of the kingdom of grace, springs from no fortuitous resemblances. Our God is one God; and therefore it is that a mind inspired to foresee the success of omnipotence in redemption, carries over into this moral kingdom its conceptions of the working of omnipotence in nature. The mountains, rivers, seas, flocks of Kedar, sun, moon, in which God has wrought, become, not only the emblems, but the pledges of the mighty works which He will do for man's recovery. (*A. Phelps, D.D.*) *The analogy between God's working in revelation and in nature:*—The analogy between these two departments of God's working discloses some striking resemblances of method in the details of His work. 1. A resemblance between the Divine methods of working in nature and in grace is seen in the law common to both kingdoms, that great results ensue from feeble beginnings. 2. It is also a law of the two kingdoms of God's working, that results are often for a long time suppressed from human view. Kepler said, when he published his system of astronomy, that the world had waited six thousand years for some one to read the heavens aright. The coal mines of Pennsylvania and the quarries of Quincy were forming before the garden of Eden existed. Who can tell us why the western continent lay for fifty-four centuries unknown to the dominant races of men? Our God is one God. 3. It is furthermore a law in the two kingdoms of God's working, that results often come to human view suddenly and by seeming accident. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. But have we not told our children of the falling apple, which was so instructive to the mind of Newton; and of the invention of the mariner's compass by an unknown genius; and of the gold mines

of California, which a labourer accidentally discovered in building a sawmill? Our God is one God. 4. It is a law of the two kingdoms of God's working, that His work proceeds with great apparent waste. This work of the world's conversion is a costly labour. But God's plans have this evidence of their greatness, that they go on with that which to us appears like waste. The earth every year produces food sufficient for three times its burden of inhabitants. The sun wastes two-thirds of its beams on trackless waters and deserts. The stars are not put out, like your street lamps, when the traveller has no further need of them. Poets have sung of flowers that waste their sweetness. God works on a generous scale. Even of suffering He is not sparing in the laws of His providence. How much of apparently useless suffering is endured under the laws of disease! What a waste of life do we see everywhere in the death of the young! In this seeming prodigality of the Divine procedure, we see evidence that God has plans too deep for us to fathom. And these plans run under the two systems of nature and of grace alike. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 6. **I the Lord have called thee in righteousness.**—*God's covenant with man:*—We are apt to understand that there are two covenants, respectively called the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. 1. Let us define what a covenant is. In its primary sense it signifies a mutual compact or agreement between two parties. The covenant is kept on the one side by those conditions being ratified in a full and faithful observance of them; on the other side by the conferment of the benefit upon the completion of the conditions. 2. When viewing God and man as the two parties between whom a covenant has been made, we perceive that there have been two covenants entered into; in each the benefit offered by the Father has been the same, viz., eternal life, but the terms or conditions are different. (1) In the covenant of works, the condition to be accepted and ratified by man was single, that is, obedience to the moral law of God, which law contains within its sanctions not merely an obedience to any positive commands or implied wishes, but an inward heart-observance of a complete holiness, this complete holiness being in fact itself the law, and any deviation whatever from the prescription of a complete holiness being an infraction of the law, and consequently that flaw in the covenanted obedience on man's part, which destroys the covenant altogether, and thus, annulling it, renders it nugatory. (2) The conditions in the covenant of grace are twofold, repentance and faith, obedience to the law constituting no part of the terms on which God will confer the promised boon, though according to this, He will regulate the degrees of glory to be known and shared in and through the heavenly immortality. For the law of God has never been repealed, and never can be; neither does the covenant of grace at all make void the law, nay, as the apostle says, "it establishes it." 3. An ordinary attention to the constitution of these two covenants will show us that there is between God and man, now (the "now" taking in the position and history of man from the fall, to the finished and ultimate recovery of redemption) but this one covenant of grace. Consider, and this partly by contrasting the two, in what this second or new covenant consists. (1) It agrees with the first in this, (*a*) that the ultimate object is the same, viz., everlasting life for man; (*b*) that in God's part of the contract the promise attached to it is the same. (2) It differs from the other in these respects. That a third party is introduced—the Mediator Christ Jesus, the Son of God. That on man's part the conditions are different, repentance and faith being in the stead of obedience. 4. See the vital importance of understanding the truth with respect to the two covenants. There are not two covenants. There never have been two co-existing covenants. When man broke the first, it was at an end. Morally speaking, it could not be re-instituted; because, the nature of man having become sinful, and this sinfulness a necessary entailment on all his children, it was rendered impossible for man to keep a covenant of works. And a covenant broken is no longer a covenant. God, then, in His mercy and love, instituted another covenant, the same as to intent, but differing in its conditions for man, prescribing conditions which he could observe, because of the new provision made in the Mediator Christ Jesus, by whom the law should be inviolably kept, and so a justifying righteousness procured, and by whom a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice should be made in the offering of His own spotless body for the sins of the whole world. See how this strikes at the root of all man's pride and self-dependence, and attempts at working out a self-righteousness for his justification. See, too, the surpassing consideration of God for the poor, condemned helpless, sinner. See also the wondrous

force of our text. It was to the dearly-beloved Son that God said, "I, the Lord, have called Thee in righteousness," &c. Because on Him devolved the work of rescue, because He is the Mediator, because He will ensure the final victory, because in Him the new covenant was opened, in Him established, by Him maintained, Himself is called the covenant. To reject Him is to reject the covenant; to look anywhere else for salvation, to attempt any other way to God's favour than by Him, to try any other terms than those of His Gospel, is to reject Him; and that is to reject the covenant of God and to enter into covenant with death. (*R. H. Davies, B.A.*) *God's calling*:—The act of calling here implies—1. Selection. 2. Designation. 3. Providential introduction to God's service. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Called in righteousness*, in accordance with a steadfast and consistent purpose. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) **And give Thee for a covenant of the people.**—"*A covenant of the people*," a negotiator between God and the people. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Israel a Mediator*:—Not only the Messiah, but the Israel of God was sent to be a mediator or connecting link between Jehovah and the nations. (*Ibid.*) *The new covenant of free grace*:—I. WHO IT IS THAT SPEAKS THIS GRACIOUS LANGUAGE. The Lord. II. THE PERSON TO WHOM THIS GRACIOUS LANGUAGE IS DIRECTED AND SPOKEN. Christ. III. WHAT HE SPEAKS UNTO CHRIST HERE, even gracious language in respect of us. "He will give Him for a covenant." IV. UNTO WHOM THE FATHER GIVES CHRIST FOR A COVENANT. "Unto the people, and unto the Gentiles"; that is, to Jews and to Gentiles, to all sorts of people. V. THE END AND PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE FATHER GIVES HIM TO BE A COVENANT UNTO THE PEOPLE. "To open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of prison." (*T. Crisp, D.D.*) *Christ a covenant to open blind eyes*:—I. WHAT IT IS FOR CHRIST TO BE A COVENANT, OR, THE COVENANT. II. WHAT IT IS FOR CHRIST TO BE GIVEN TO BE A COVENANT. III. WHAT IT IS FOR CHRIST TO BE A COVENANT TO OPEN THE BLIND EYES. IV. TO WHOM THIS CHRIST IS GIVEN TO BE A COVENANT. (*Ibid.*) "*A covenant of the people*":—The idea must be something like this: the Divine ideal represented by the Servant of the Lord becomes the basis of a new national life, inasmuch as it expresses that for the sake of which Jehovah enters into a new covenant relation with His people. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *A word to go home on*:—The saintly Miss Frances Ridley Havergal literally lived and moved in the Word of God. It was her constant solace, delight, and inspiration. It is related of her that, on the last day of her life, she asked a friend to read to her the forty-second chapter of Isaiah. When the friend read the sixth verse, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee," Miss Havergal stopped her. "Called—held—kept—used," she whispered. "Well, I will just go home on that." And she did "go home on that," as on a celestial chariot, and the home-going was a triumph, with an abundant entrance into the city of God. (*Christian Budget*).

Ver. 7. **To open the blind eyes.**—*Opening blind eyes*:—What a grievous affliction is blindness! It was no frivolous boon which Christ, in the days of His sojourn on earth, thought proper to confer, when, in the external sense, He opened blind eyes. In the paragraph of which the text is a part, Jehovah is describing the Messiah in His spiritual character and work; and, great as the marvel of removing natural blindness was, and great as similar miracles were which Christ performed, their principal value consisted in their being symbols and pledges of those spiritual operations which He could accomplish on the souls of men. I. THE CALAMITY OF SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS WHICH HAS OVERTAKEN OUR RACE. You would very greatly aggravate the evil of natural blindness by dilating on the numerous and diversified beauties of nature, for the poor blind man sees none of these things! But how much greater is the calamity by which the soul is excluded from the sight of the glory of God! There is very high criminality connected with the origin of this spiritual blindness. The Divine displeasure never arises without a cause, or beyond the cause. What, then, must have been the cause which led to such a fatal condition? The incontestable and melancholy fact is, that man has sinned! As there was high criminality connected with the origin of this blindness, so there is high criminality connected with the continuance of it. If men, struck with this blindness, were to humble themselves on account of it, it would be some alleviation of the matter; but, generally, I find men taking advantage of their darkness, and receding further and further from God; and, indeed, many of them seem never to be so completely happy as when they have most effectually succeeded in banishing all

thought of God. This spiritual blindness is so complete that it leads a man to pervert the very instruments which God has appointed for its removal. Take an observation of the state of mankind around us, and see whether or not it sustains this description. II. THE GREAT ORDINANCE OF JEHOVAH FOR THE REMOVAL OF THIS CALAMITY. See what light Christ has thrown on the character of God! Consider the light which He has thrown on the providence around us. The difficulties of the virtuous, and the shouting success of the villainous, almost seemed, to conscientious men, to indicate very bad management on the part of God; and they have had recourse to a great many theories to explain it. Christ has thrown light on the afflictions which happen to the people of God. And on that immortality which is before us. And on the spiritualities which are required within us. III. THE GRANDEUR OF THAT OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT BY WHICH THE REMOVAL OF THIS SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS IS EFFECTED. (*J. E. Beaumont, M.D.*) *New sight causes great joy:*—I do not wonder that, when a man gets this light into his soul, he should be overjoyed. A young woman had lived to the age of eighteen without seeing at all. Dr. Boyle watched the performance of an operation upon her, and he has described, as only a philosopher could describe, what took place. For some time they were afraid she would lose her reason, so overcome was she by the innumerable beauties which so suddenly burst in upon her. (*Ibid.*) *A social saviour:*—This is the kind of man needed in all ages. We have critics enough, we have judges in great abundance, we have speculators more than can be overtaken by statistical genius; we want another kind of man, and we seek for him no better description than that which is outlined by the prophet. We want moral helpers, social saviours, personal healers and comforters. Shall we apply these words to the Lord Jesus Christ? They will fit the occasion exactly. In Him they would seem to secure their amplest and completest realisation. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Christianity opens eyes*—never closes them. (*Ibid.*) *Victor Emmanuel, emancipator:*—We gladly survey the effectual operations of Jesus the Saviour, the true Victor Emmanuel, who comes to set men free from the bondage of their sins. I. CONSIDER WHO IT IS THAT SENDS JESUS CHRIST TO ACCOMPLISH THE LIBERATION OF THE SONS OF MEN, because much will depend upon the Liberator's credentials, the authority by which He is warranted, and the power by which He is backed. We sing for joy of heart as we see that the Infinite God Himself commissioned the Lord Jesus to be the Deliverer of men; and He did this—1. In His capacity as Creator (ver. 5). 2. He also describes Himself as the life-giver (ver. 5). 3. The faithful God. "I the Lord have called Thee in righteousness" (ver. 6)—that is to say, the God who sends Christ the Saviour is not one who plays with words, and having given a promise to-day, retracts it to-morrow. 4. The ever-blessed sender of the Lord Jesus is omnipotent. "And will hold thine hand, and will keep Thee." By which is meant that God will give to the Mediator all His power. Christ is the power of God. II. THE SENT ONE HIMSELF. 1. Jesus is a chosen one. "Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth" (ver. 1). 2. Jesus is anointed to this work. "I have put My Spirit upon Him." The Holy Spirit is the greatest of all actors in the world of mind. He it is who can illuminate, persuade, and control the spirits of men. 3. The Redeemer is spoken of as being gentle and lowly of heart, which should commend Him much to every lowly and contrite spirit (ver. 3). 4. The Christ who has come to save the sons of men is persevering to the last degree (ver. 4). III. THE WORK ITSELF. The Messiah's work of grace is divided into three parts. 1. To open the blind eyes. Man's understanding is perverted from the knowledge of God, from a true sense of sin, from a realisation of Divine justice, from a right estimate of salvation. The understanding, which is the eye of the soul, is darkened. But when the anointed Saviour comes, He removes the scales of our mental ophthalmia, and in the light of God we see light. 2. To bring out the prisoners from the prison. Habits of sin, like iron nets, surround the sinner, and he cannot escape their meshes. Faith in the Lord Jesus is the end of bondage and the dawn of freedom. 3. Bringing them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. This we will refer to those who are truly emancipated, and yet by reason of despondency sit down in the dark dungeon. IV. WHAT IS THE DESIGN OF GOD IN ALL THIS? "I am the Lord: that is My name: and My glory will I not give to another" (ver. 8). (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Stages of liberty:*—Men are in various stages of liberty. We are not all equally the free men of God. There are men even now who are under the disadvantage of prejudice. Even to-day superstition lives—

chilling, fear-exciting, soul-depressing superstition. There are those who still live in the letter of the Word. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **I am the Lord: that is My name.**—*Names:*—The name of a thing, provided it is a true and adequate one, denotes the essential nature of that thing. When a chemist has discovered a new substance, he is, of course, compelled to invent a new name for it; and he seeks a term that will indicate its distinctive properties. When, for instance, that gas which illuminates our streets and dwellings was first discovered, it was supposed to be the constituent matter of heat, and the name "phlogiston" was given to it—a name that signifies inflammability. But when Cavendish afterwards more carefully analysed its nature and properties, and discovered that it enters very largely into the production of water, it received the name of hydrogen. In each of these instances the term was intended to denote the intrinsic nature and properties of the thing. That nomenclature which Adam originated at the express command of God, and which the pen of inspiration has recorded as a fact, though it has not specified it in detail, must have been pertinent and exhaustive. The names were the things, the natures, themselves. (*G. T. Shedd, D.D.*) *Names:*—Plato (Cratylus, 390) represents Socrates as saying that "the right imposition of names is no easy matter, and belongs not to any and every body, but only to him who has an insight into the nature of things." (*Ibid.*) *God's name:*—God has a name—not given to Him by Adam, or any finite creature, but self-uttered and self-imposed. The denomination which God prefers for Himself, the name which He chooses before all others as indicative of His nature, is I AM, or its equivalent, Jehovah. Whenever the word Jehovah is employed in the Old Testament as the proper name of God, it announces the same doctrine of His necessary existence that was taught to Moses when he was commanded to say to His people that I AM had sent him unto them. The English name for the Deity, our word God, indicates that He is "good"—making prominent a moral quality. The Greek and Latin world employed a term (*θεὸς*, deus) that lays emphasis upon that characteristic of the Deity whereby He orders and governs the universe. (This etymology is given by Herodotus, ii. 52.) According to the Greek and Roman conception, God is the imperial Being who arranges and rules. But the Hebrew, divinely instructed upon this subject, chose a term which refers not to any particular attribute or quality, but to the very being and essence of God, and teaches the world that God must be—that He not only exists, but cannot logically be conceived of as non-existent. (*Ibid.*) *The glorification of God:*—The text leads us to raise the question, What is it to glorify God? It is implied in glorifying God—I. THAT WE THINK OF HIM AND RECOGNISE HIS EXISTENCE. "The duty required in the first commandment," says the Larger Catechism, "is to worship and glorify God, by thinking, meditating upon, and remembering Him." No higher dishonour can be done to any being than to forget and ignore him. But this is the habitual attitude of man's mind toward the Everlasting God. It does not relieve the matter to say that this is mere passive forgetfulness, and that there is no deliberate effort to do dishonour to God. This passive forgetfulness itself is the highest kind of indignity; and is so represented in the Scriptures. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." This unthinking forgetfulness of the greatest and most glorious Being in the universe betokens an utter unconcern towards Him. Now, whoever would glorify God must begin by reversing all this. No man has made even a beginning in religion, until he has said, reverently, and feeling the truth of what he says: "Thou art Jehovah, the Great I AM; that is Thy name and Thy nature; and Thy glory Thou wilt not give to another, neither Thy praise to graven images." II. THAT WE THINK OF HIM AS THE FIRST CAUSE AND LAST END OF ALL THINGS. Here, again, we can arrive at the truth by the way of contrast; by considering what is the common course of man's thought and feeling. Man naturally thinks of himself as the chief cause, and the final end. 1. Whoever would glorify God must think of and recognise God as the First Cause of all things. If he possesses a strong intellect, or a cultivated taste, instead of attributing them to his own diligence in self-discipline and self-cultivation, he must trace them back to the author of his intellectual constitution, who not only gave him all his original endowments, but has enabled him to be diligent in the use and discipline of them. If he possess great wealth, instead

of saying in his heart, "My hand and brain have gotten me this," he should acknowledge the Providence that has favoured his plans and enterprises, and without which his enterprises, like those of many men around him, would have gone awry, and utterly failed. Whatever be the earthly good which anyone holds in his possession, its ultimate origin and authorship must be carried back to the First Cause of all things. And this, too, must become the natural and easy action of the mind and heart, in order perfectly to glorify God. 2. It is implied in glorifying God, that we recognise Him as the last end of all things. Every being and thing must have a final end—a terminus. The mineral kingdom is made for the vegetable kingdom; the vegetable kingdom for the animal kingdom; the animal kingdom for man; and all of them together are made for God. Go through all the ranges of creation, from the molecule of matter to the seraphim, and if you ask for the final purpose of its creation, the reply is, the glory of the Maker. And this is reasonable. For God is the greatest and most important, if we may use the word in such a connection, of all beings. In the light of this doctrine we see—(1) The need of the regeneration of the human soul. (2) Why the individual Christian is imperfectly blessed of God. His service is imperfect. There is much worship of self in connection with his worship of God. How many of our prayers are vitiated by unbelief; but unbelief is a species of dishonour to God. It is impossible, in this condition of the soul, that we should experience the perfection of religious joy. "I am Jehovah," saith God; "that is My name, and My glory will I not give to another." (3) This subject discloses the reason of languid vitality in the Church, and its slow growth in numbers and influence. The Christian life is in low tone, because the Church gives glory to another than God. (*Ibid.*) *The glorification of God:*—It is an objection of the sceptic, that this perpetual assertion in the Scriptures that God is the chief end of creation, and this perpetual demand that the creature glorify Him, is only a species of infinite egotism; that in making the whole unlimited universe subservient to Him and His purposes, the Deity is only exhibiting selfishness upon an immense scale. But this objection overlooks the fact that God is an infinitely greater and higher being than any or all of His creatures; and that from the very nature of the case the less must be subordinated to the greater. Is it egotism, when man employs in his service his ox or his ass? Is it selfishness, when the rose or the lily takes up into its own fabric and tissue the inanimate qualities of matter, and converts the dull and colourless elements of the clod into hues and odours, into beauty and bloom? There would be egotism in the procedure, if man were of no higher grade of existence than the ox or the ass. There would be selfishness, if the rose and the lily were upon the same level with the inanimate elements of matter. But the greater dignity in each instance justifies the use and the subordination. And so it is, only in an infinitely greater degree, in the case when the whole creation is subordinated and made to serve and glorify the Creator. The distance between man and his ox, between the lily and the particle of moisture which it imbibes, is appreciable. It is not infinite. But the distance between God and the highest of His archangels is beyond computation. (*Ibid.*) *The rights of God maintained:*—God is jealous of His honour. The first four commandments of the decalogue have special reference to His rights, and are couched in the most forcible and impressive terms. But, though these injunctions are reasonable, they have been repeatedly violated by all the nations of the earth. This declaration was made in connection with the mission of the Messiah. But the text is of vital interest to ourselves. It is not the idolater only that dishonours God; but every impenitent sinner, and every unfaithful follower of Christ. I. THE IMPORT OF GOD'S NAME. "Jehovah." By this name God revealed Himself to Moses" (Ex. vi. 3). 1. It means the Being that exists. 2. It implies that He is the Fountain of all being. 3. That He is also the Preserver of all being. And the sublimest feature in His providence is that which was exhibited in the redemption of mankind. The name Jehovah leads us to this point. It implies that God is the Saviour of the world, and for this reason, above all others (since, for a sinful world there could have been no preservation without redemption), the great Preserver of the world. That this, too, is the import of the name, is evident from the attributes ascribed to God in connection with it, by Moses: "Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." In Christ, the character of God as the merciful I AM, is clearly manifested (John i. 14.) II. THE GLORY WHICH BELONGS TO HIM. The term "glory" is sometimes used in reference to the visible symbol

of Jehovah's presence—the Shechinah; at other times it denotes the manifestation of His power and wisdom in creation, and at other times again it is employed in a more general sense, to set forth the attributes and perfections of His character. But in the text the word is equivalent to honour, worship, adoration, or whatever else God lays claim to from His creatures' hands, and hence the latter clause of the passage may be viewed, though with an intensity of meaning, as explanatory of the former. "My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images." That is, that which belongs to Me as Jehovah, I delegate to no one. What, then, is the glory which belongs exclusively to God? 1. His is the glory of the creation of all things. He is the Fountain of being. 2. His is the glory of the world's redemption. 3. His is the glory of the application of redemption to the case of each individual believer in Christ Jesus. 4. His is the glory of the advancement of mankind in knowledge, holiness, and peace. III. HIS DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN HIS RIGHTS. "I will not give My glory to another, neither My praise to graven images." In this impressive declaration God speaks to men of every class, of every country, and of every age. This declaration may be viewed as corrective of—1. The sin of idolatry. 2. The sin of pride. 3. The sin of unbelief. (*Thornley Smith.*) *The glory of God incommunicable:*—I. THE DIVINE SUPREMACY. "I am the Lord, that is My name." 1. This assertion involves the idea of the Divine existence. 2. The assertion suggests the idea that He stands infinitely distinguished from all creatures in the manner or mode of His existence. 3. This language intimates dominion. He is related to nature, and He is related to nature necessarily and intimately, because nature is the production of His skill and power. We cannot think of God as the Creator, without being compelled to acknowledge His right and authority to legislate and govern. 4. This phrase is applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the most valid of all testimony in connection with the point, namely, the express and unqualified assertion of the Redeemer Himself, "Before Abraham was, I am." Here we have the same terms employed, and employed in the same sense. II. THE DIVINE PURPOSE. "My glory will I not give to another, nor My praise to graven images." 1. He will not give His glory to nature. Nature exists, but only exists as an effect. In nature there is no originality. 2. He will not give His "praise to graven images." 3. He will not give His glory to the Church. (1) He does not give His glory to the ministers of the Church. They are only the stewards of the mysteries of His kingdom. They are but the messengers of the Churches. They are but stars, deriving all their light from the great orb of day. (2) God, we are likewise assured, will not give His glory to ordinances. The sacraments, whatever may be the mystery and the sacredness associated with them, are but means. Conclusion—1. Learn from this subject the value of the Bible. This is the only and the great source of all correct information and sound theology as to the essence and moral character of God. 2. You may gather from this text and subject, that Deity is propitiated, and "waits to be gracious." 3. You may fairly infer from the subject that such as have the great I AM for their Friend are placed in the most desirable and blessed circumstances. (*J. Newton.*)

Ver. 9. **Behold, the former things are come to pass.**—*The philosophy of promise:*—One may observe, in reading Scripture, the general principle that God usually gives a promise of that which He means to bestow. Before Christ came, the Father was continually speaking of His coming. Love meets man as a heralding fragrance before the actual bestowal of blessing. Why are covenant blessings the subject of promises? I. IN ORDER TO DISPLAY GOD'S GRACE. 1. The freeness of His grace. The promise to which the text specially alludes is "to open the blind eyes," &c. The blind referred to were not born in the days of Isaiah. God promises before we know our need or seek His face. There are many conditional promises in Scripture; but all God's promises rest on an unconditioned covenant of grace (Rom. ix. 25). 2. The fulness of His grace. It is unmerited; Christ died for the ungodly. 3. The power of it. He will open the blind eyes, &c. God is great in nature, but greater in grace. II. TO AROUSE OUR HOPES. Religious inquirers should find the promises of God unspeakably precious. There are promises enough in the Scriptures to stimulate hope in all. Christian believers even need to be told of what God will do, in order to encourage their hope. III. TO EXERCISE OUR FAITH. God desires to exercise our confidence in Him. IV. TO EXCITE OUR PRAYER. Prayer is sure to follow hope and faith. All God's promises

which are not fulfilled are meant to stimulate prayer. V. TO FOSTER GRATITUDE AND ASSURANCE WHEN THE MERCY HAS BEEN RECEIVED. Man is made glad when he sees that God's Word has not returned to Him void; then comes the inference, if He has done all this for me in the past, He will do as much for me in the future. In the next chapter the argument is, I will do, because I have done. This is the firm foundation of our hope,—our past experience of the faithfulness of God; and strong faith is God's due. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) "*Former things*" and "*new things*":—"Former things," *i.e.* things formerly predicted. These predictions do not belong to the present prophet, but to others. The "new things" are the redemption of Israel from Babylon, and, through it, the revelation of the true God to all nations. (*Prof. A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. **Sing unto the Lord a new song.**—"*New things*" and a "*new song*":—The "new things" become the impulse and matter of "a new song," such as was never yet heard in the heathen world. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Joy among the heathen*:—Reduced to ordinary prose style, it is a prediction that changes are to take place joyfully affecting the condition of the whole world. (*J. A. Alexander.*)

Ver. 11. **Let the inhabitants of the Rock sing.**—*Christ the Christian's Rock*:—I. SHOW IN WHAT RESPECT CHRIST MAY BE COMPARED TO A ROCK. 1. Christ is a Rock, in regard of His omnipotent power. 2. Christ is a Rock, in regard of that ineffable glory to which He is now exalted. Rocks may lie low and deep in the ground, but rise with artless grandeur and inimitable beauty, and their lofty heads divide the clouds. 3. Jesus Christ is a Rock in regard of His faithfulness, and the unchangeable nature of His perfections. Those storms and tempests which spread d solation, and bury whole islands and countries in ruins, remove not the rocks out of their place. But Jesus is firmer than they. 4. Christ is a Rock, in regard of His majesty and beauty. II. SHOW HOW GOOD MEN MAY BE CALLED INHABITANTS OF THE ROCK 1. Because that is their dwelling-place. 2. They are inhabitants of the Rock, as that is the place of their nativity. All the inhabitants of this Rock are born in the image of the Son of God; a new and peculiar race. 3. They may be called inhabitants of the Rock, as they are a people who dwell on high. Their souls and all their nobler powers soar above the mean pursuits of this world. 4. They may be called inhabitants of the Rock, as they are to abide there for ever. 5. They are inhabitants of the Rock, as all their supplies come from Christ. From this doctrine we may learn—(1) The infinite wisdom of God in laying our help upon Christ. (2) That the figurative expression of Christ, under the notion of a rock, magnifieth the power of God on which our faith may rest. (3) The wickedness and folly of all who oppose the Son of God. (4) The folly and wickedness of those who build their hopes of eternal life upon any other foundation than Christ, the Rock. (5) The great duty of all who hear the Gospel's joyful sound, to fly to Christ, the Rock. (*J. Johnston.*) *Christ the Christian's song*:—I. WHAT KIND OF A SONG IT IS WHICH THE SAINTS ARE CALLED TO SING. It is a song on redeeming love. 1. A new song. It proceeds from a new heart, which is animated with new mercies. 2. A spiritual song. It is unmingled with carnal joy, or that of the hypocrite, which is short and unfruitful of solid comfort. It is from above, and animates all the powers of the soul. It will never become obsolete, but afford endless pleasure to the redeemed. 3. A song of distinction. Every heart is not formed for such exalted praise. The feeble powers of nature, unassisted by Divine grace, cannot learn this new song. 4. A song of victory. The saints of God are clothed in white, an authentic emblem of their faith and victory. 5. A song upon a sacrifice. 6. An everlasting song. Not the joy of the hypocrite, soon kindled, and soon extinguished; the powers of the soul are enlarged, and rendered fit for those endless raptures of joy and praise. II. THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THIS SONG. 1. Jesus Christ our Lord manifested in human nature. 2. The manifestation of Divine judgments. When the Judge of all the earth came down, and delivered His ancient Israel from Egyptian bondage, He routed Pharaoh and His hosts, by such signal judgments as spread His fame far and wide: "His name was great, and His praise glorious through the whole earth." Moses and Israel sang, "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." When Rome, as ancient Babylon, fell to rise no more, the heavenly Church is brought in as a chorus, to praise God for His righteous judgments and faithfulness. This excellent hymn of praise, sung by the united voices of saints and angels, strongly represents to all Christians, and every Church on earth, what grateful sense they

ought to have of the Divine faithfulness in their protection, and of His righteous judgments in punishing the persecutors of truth and religion. 3. The infinite worthiness of Christ the Lamb of God. 4. The believer's union to the Divine Redeemer. 5. Communion with all the persons of Deity. That sincere believers in Christ enjoy such a communion, is most obvious from the sacred Scriptures. (*Ibid.*) *Safety in the rock:*—The hare, that trusteth to the swiftness of her legs, is at length overtaken and torn to pieces; when the coney, that flieth to the holes in the rocks, doth easily avoid the dogs that pursue her. (*J. Trapp.*)

Ver. 13. **The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man.**—*Jehovah, the Warrior-Saviour:*—The Lord stirs Himself up to bring in the "new things." (*Prof. A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **I have long time holden My peace.**—*The Divine thought and pain:*—Remember it is God who speaks these words of Himself, and then think of what they mean of unshareable thought and pain, of solitary yearning and effort. But from the pain comes forth at last the power (ver. 15). (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *The destruction of sinners sudden and inevitable:*—God long bears with the provocations of men, and therefore they imagine He pays no attention to their deeds; but they are deceived; the time of His forbearance is limited. I. THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD. "I have long time holden My peace." God, unlike man, is neither hasty, impetuous, nor resentful. Sinners cannot justly complain that God does not afford them time for repentance; God has long borne with the ingratitude and perverseness of sinful men; their crimes are numerous, their provocations great. This period of God's forbearance and compassion is a season of grace and mercy. II. THE DIVINE FORBEARANCE WILL NOT LAST FOR EVER. It will surely terminate, and then commences the awful, though long delayed, hour of vengeance. (*S. Ramsey, M.A.*) **I will destroy and devour at once.**—*God terrible yet gracious* (with vers. 15, 16):—The solemn practical truth of the text is that God can do the most terrible things and the most gentle; that power belongeth unto God and also mercy. Look at the doctrine of the text—I. IN RELATION TO BAD MEN WHO PRIDE THEMSELVES UPON THEIR SUCCESS AND THEIR STRENGTH. The doctrine is that there is a power beyond man's, and that nothing is held safely which is not held by consent of that Power. The so-called success of the bad man has yet to stand the strain of Divine trial. Though his strength be as a mountain, it shall be wasted; and the world shall see how poorly they build who build only for the light and quietness of summer. Remember, we are not stronger than our weakest point, and that true wisdom binds us to watch even the least gate that is insufficient or insecure. II. AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO ALL MEN WHO WORK UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF GOD. God declares Himself gentle to those who truly need Him. He promises nothing to the self-sufficient; He promises much to the needy. The text shows the principle on which Divine help is given to men,—the principle of conscious need and of willingness to be guided. A true apprehension of this doctrine will give us a new view of daily providences, namely, that men who are apparently most destitute may in reality be most richly enjoying the blessings of God. Clearly, we are not to judge human life by outward conditions. Blindness may not be merely so much defect, it may be but another condition of happiness. It is because we are blind that He will lead us. It is because we are weak that He will carry us. It is because we have nothing that He offers to give us all things. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's terribleness and gentleness:*—It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. Our God is a consuming fire—God is love. The combination of great power and great restraint, and, indeed, the combination of opposite qualities and uses generally, is well known in the ordinary arrangements of civilised life and the daily operation of the laws of nature. The measure of greatness is the measure of terribleness. What is constructiveness but the beneficent side of destructiveness? The fire that warms the chamber when properly regulated, will, if abused, reduce the proudest palaces to ashes. The river, which softens and refreshes the landscape, if allowed to escape its banks, may devastate the most fruitful fields. The engine, which is swiftly bearing the laughing child to his longed-for home, will, if mismanaged, occasion the most terrible havoc. The lightning, which may be caught and utilised by genius and skill, can burn the forest, and strike armies blind. We are familiar with such illustrations of united opposites,

and our knowledge of them inspires our enterprise, and attempers with prudence the noble audacity of practical science. (*Ibid.*) *True conceptions of God important in character-building:*—God is not to be described in parts; He is to be comprehended in the unity of His character. A child describing the lightning might say, "It was beautiful, so bright, and swifter than any flying bird, and so quiet that I could not hear it as it passed through the air"; this would be true. A tree might say, "It was awful, it tore off branches that had been growing for a hundred years, it rent me in twain down to the very root, and no summea can ever recover me—I am left here to die"; this also would be true. So with Almighty God; He is terrible in power, making nothing of all that man counts strong, yet He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. Men are bound to be as common-sense in their theology as they are in the ordinary works of life, and in building character they are to be at least as forethoughtful and sagacious as in building their houses of stone. How do we conduct our arrangements in building a house? Suppose that it were possible for a man never to have seen any season but summer, and suppose such a man called upon to advise in the erection of a building: you can imagine his procedure; everything is to be light, because he never heard a high wind; water-pipes may be exposed, for he never felt the severity of frost; the most flimsy roof will be sufficient, for he knows nothing of the great rains of winter and spring. Tell such a man that the winds will become stormy, that the rivers will be chilled into ice, that his windows will be blinded with snow, and that floods will beat upon his roof, and if he is a wise man he will say, "I must not build for one season, but for all seasons; I must not build for fine days, but for days that will be tempestuous; I must, as far as possible, prepare for the most inclement and trying weather." That is simple common sense. Why be less sensible in building a character than in building a house? We build our bricks for severity as well as for sunshine, why build our characters with less care? If in summer we think about the frost, why not in prosperity have some thought for adversity? If in July we prepare for December, why not in the flattering hour of exultation think of the judgment that is at once infallible and irresistible? As he would be infinitely foolish who should build his house without thinking of the natural forces that will try its strength, so is he cursed with insanity who builds his character without thinking of the fire with which God will try every man's work of what sort it is. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 16. **And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not.**—*God leading the blind:*—The blind are they whom transgression and wickedness have robbed of power of spiritual insight. The unknown ways in which Jehovah leads them are the ways of redemption, known to Him alone and now revealed in the fulness of times. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *The unknown path:*—God would lead Israel by a way that had not yet been trodden; He would redeem her from Babylon, not as He delivered her from Egypt in the distant past, but by inclining towards her the heart of her captor. I. THE UNKNOWN, UNTRODDEN PATH BEFORE US. 1. It is an unknown path which we are about to tread. Let the child or even the young man draw an outline of his anticipated career, and let that line be compared with the one which really marks his course; what a divergence will there be! 2. It is an untrodden path. As the second great Divine deliverance of Israel differed materially from the first, so God's dealings with individual men differ with the several periods of their life. II. THE GUIDANCE OF OUR GOD. "I will bring." "I will lead." There are two ways by which God leads His people. 1. By controlling their circumstances. God may preserve us from taking the wrong path by providentially blocking the way in which we might otherwise have walked; or, He may keep us from a false movement, or induce us to make the true one by bringing us unto the fellowship of some wise friend whose timely counsel either dissuades or determines us. 2. By influencing their minds. He is nearer to us than our nearest friends; and He can influence us more powerfully than the wisest and strongest of our teachers or guardians. III. HIS DISPOSITION AND FREEDOM TO HELP US. 1. That God is disposed to help us, we need not doubt. (1) His sovereignty over Israel would account for all His watchfulness over that people; and His Fatherhood of every human spirit will certainly ensure His Divine interest in each one of His children. And if this were an insufficient bond to constrain such condescending notice, we have but to remember that Jesus Christ is the Divine Saviour and Friend of every one of His people, most tenderly united to each of them by the strongest ties. The Good Shepherd cares, and cares much,

for every sheep of His flock. (2) Our Lord's intimation of the Father's care for all His creatures, and His own *a fortiori* argument therefrom ("Ye are of more value than many sparrows") is convincing proof to all Christian minds that our God is "thinking upon" us, that He is mindful of our necessities, and is shaping our course from day to day. 2. That God is free to help us, we may also be assured. Nothing is more incredible than that the Father of spirits, the Saviour of souls, should, by the established order of nature which He has constructed, have to cut Himself off from His human family that, however earnestly they cried to Him, He would not be at liberty to respond to them. That He should not weaken our sense of the imperative claims of duty and diligence by too obviously and constantly interposing on our behalf, we can readily understand. It is but necessary that He should touch some link in the chain of causes which is out of our sight; thus, with unseen but unfettered hand, He works on our behalf. IV. OUR DUTY AND OUR COMFORT. 1. Our duty is threefold. (1) To become His children indeed, in the very fullest sense, by living faith in Jesus Christ. (2) To live before God as His obedient children, that our service and submission may win His Fatherly delight and His parental longing to bless us. (3) To ask for His constant guidance in daily prayer. 2. Our comfort is great indeed. God will be our guide. He will be our vanguard, and be our rereward (chap. lii. 12). (*The Thinker.*) *God the Guide of His blind people:*—True wisdom will confirm the decision of Scripture, not only as to spiritual things but as to all things, when it says, "If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything," *i.e.* if he regard himself as perfect in knowledge, "he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." If we look to our own path in life, we find ourselves uninformed concerning that which lies before us. But the Word of God does not more explicitly reveal to us our ignorance and blindness, than it offers to us a great and infallible Guide. Let our minds be directed to the inquiry, whether or no this promise is verified in the experience of God's people. I. In answer to this question we first reply that such a guidance may be traced in the dealings of God with His children BY HIS PROVIDENCE. A historian of the Reformation has placed in the forefront of his immortal work this sentence respecting it: "This history takes as its guiding-star the simple and pregnant truth that God is in history" (D'Aubigné). And that single sentence contains a world of important truth. The recorded history of the Jewish nation affords a beautiful illustration of the truth that God is active in all human affairs. And had God inspired another prophet to write the history of any other nation, yea, had God inspired a prophet to write your individual history, or my own, we should be astonished to see how busy the hand of God had been in its every stage and turn. II. God leads His children by a way they know not IN THE DEALINGS OF HIS GRACE, *e.g.*, the woman of Samaria; the assembly which stood before Peter on the Day of Pentecost; the blaspheming, persecuting Saul; the jailer at Philippi. God is characteristically a God who is found of them that sought Him not. The Divine methods for leading the believer to growth in grace are not less unexpected. Even on the believer's deathbed is often and gloriously illustrated the teaching of our text. As the path by which God leads His people is, in its beginning, and in all its progress, so is it in its termination, one which they know not. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." (*W. E. Schenck.*) *Divine guidance:*—1. In Scripture the word "blind" is used respecting the prejudiced and the proud. Their minds are perverted. The Pharisees could see no beauty in Christ, no excellence in His teaching, no evidence of Divine mission in His works. They were "blind leaders of the blind." It is employed also to denote the characteristic dulness and stupidity of the Israelites, as a people, perpetually lapsing into idolatry, breaking off from God, unable to see the blessedness of the path of truth and righteousness. 2. But there is still another meaning that is important. The word may mean simple ignorance. It may describe one who cannot see the right path because there is a mist upon it, and he is perplexed on account of this. There may be tenderness in the word rather than anger; gentle purposes of love implied rather than condemnation or rebuke. This helps us to understand the passage. The way of providence and grace in the darkness and perplexity of life may be thus graphically and forcibly expressed. I. We have the frequent MYSTERY of God in providence and grace. We know not, and cannot trace, the way of God. The material, the vegetable, the animal, worlds are full of what is inscrutable. Thus it is with the course of individual life. We pursue our path, not knowing what may arise. We go forth like Abraham, "not knowing whither we go." Yet

there is an eye that sees all, a mind that directs all, a hand that overrules all. We believe that every man lives in the Divine thought. Each has his separate course, duties, and responsibilities, from which he can no more escape than his shadow. Every one, like John, is called to fulfil this course. And God knows all. But to us, life has to discover itself as we go on, and often passages in it, and the end, look strange as compared with the beginning. We purpose one thing but God means another, *e.g.* Joseph, Elisha, Amos, Wm. Carey, &c. So also as to grace. The leadings of God to fulfil His purposes are leadings of the blind. The methods He takes to enlighten the mind have infinite variety. While unconsciously men pursue a path they think their own, lo! it leads them within the circle of Divine influences which they never anticipated. Who would have thought that the vehement persecutor who stood by while the stones crashed down on Stephen, before he entered Damascus on his further errand of malice, would be met and subdued by all-conquering mercy? Who could have predicted that Lydia, of Thyatira, in pursuit of her business at Philippi, would find her heart opened to receive the truth, and be led to rejoice in far greater riches than the most prosperous trade could bring? What a surprise to Philemon that his runaway slave, who had played the thief, should be blessed under the apostle's ministry at Rome! Little did Francis Xavier think, when he entered the college of St. Barbe a gay and haughty youth, that one whom he scorned and despised would be the means of his conversion, and that the text, "What shall it profit a man?" so frequently repeated, would be the arrow of the Almighty to his soul. Little did West, the sceptical lawyer, think, when he sat down to tear in pieces, as he purposed, the arguments that prove the resurrection of Christ, that he would end in owning their unanswerableness, and his own spirit should bow before God. As little did another conceive that in attempting to hold up in caricature and contempt the apostle Paul, the spiritual power and greatness he beheld should lead him to become a disciple too. Passing words, casual association, incidental events, have had wonderful spiritual results. Men have regretted circumstances that have yet been made instrumental to their conversion. A young man has wept to lose a situation, but unwittingly has been led to another, where Divine grace has made him a "new creature." God works invisibly; His instrumentalities and agencies we often fail to recognise; but they are mighty to fulfil the counsels of His will, and thus "He brings the blind by a way they know not." II. The KINDNESS as well as mystery of the Divine method is taught us in this passage. Probably, at some time, occasion has prompted you to guide for a few steps a blind man. He has wished to cross the road, and there is peril; or, groping his way along, there is some object which, unless he avoids it, will cause injury. The human tenderness that is in you has led you to be kind and true. But if such a spirit animates an imperfect man, shall we not take the Scripture assurance that the spirit of kindness characterises the infinite God, whose name is announced as Love? 1. The Divine guidance is kind because it is wise. Our God is of infinite counsel. He knows our nature, tendencies, capacities, impulses, the action and influence of everything upon us. There are mountain passes, we are told, before traversing which the guides blindfold the travellers. They could not endure to see the awful precipices on either side. So it may be in some of the paths of life there are perils, and God's guidance is an enigma, because He is dealing with us thus. 2. God's guidance is kind because it is patient. He bears with our disobedience and ingratitude, puts up with our manifold affronts and defiance, suffers long with our infirmities, and still exerts new influences that His gentleness may prevail. 3. God's guidance is kind because it is supporting. You have sometimes in country walks approached a hill. It has seemed to rise with special steepness, but you have advanced, and strength has been equal, refreshing air and pleasant scenery have cheered. You have threaded your way through some intricate route towards a house or village, and thought you would never find it; but a token here and a footstep there have encouraged, and your journey's end has been gained. So up life's hills of difficulty and along its tortuous paths, a Divine hand leads and a Divine voice cheers. III. The FAITHFULNESS of the Divine guidance. "Not forsake." You have sometimes seen, perhaps, standing on the pavement or in a passage some little crying child. A careless mother has left it for a while, little thinking of distress or danger. Every sentiment of pity within you is moved, as in its sobs it cannot tell either its name or home. You may be reassured. The mother will return soon. But if it were indeed abandoned to cold and misery, in the driving storm and falling snow, no heart

so hard but must be deeply compassionate. But this would be surpassed by the thought of a Christian, forsaken, if we could so conceive. A child of God deserted, with promises broken, blessings withdrawn, hopes disappointed, cast off in caprice and weariness—the woe of such an one would rise to the very height of distress. But this can never be. He has pledged His word, and with Moses we should exclaim, "What would become of Thy great name?" The universe in ruins would be an appalling wreck. But this could be nothing compared with the wreck of the Divine character. Dr. Whewell has said, "The whole earth from pole to pole, from centre to circumference, is employed in keeping a snowdrop in the position best suited for the promotion of its vegetable health." Doth God provide for the flower; and shall He not guard His people? (*G. Macmichael, B.A.*) *The way in which God leads His people:*—Our object will be to show that, from the beginning to the end of their pilgrimage, God leads His people in a way, which previous to experience they know not. I. The true nature of CONVICTION OF SIN is a thing of which the called of God have no distinct knowledge, prior to experience. There is, no doubt, a great diversity in the exercises and circumstances of souls under conviction. Before this they may have formed a conception of the feelings of a convinced sinner. They imagined that by some flash, like lightning, conviction of sin would be effected. Very commonly the awakened person strives to produce conviction of the kind conceived, by bringing up to view the most frightful images. But if the convinced sinner could realise all the feelings of which he has conceived, and for which he longs and prays, the end of conviction would not be at all answered; for the end of conviction is to lead the sinner out of himself; to destroy all self-confidence and self-complacency. But if he could experience such feelings as he wishes, he would think well of himself, as being in the frame in which he ought to be. The views and feelings produced by the conviction of the Spirit, lead the soul to despair—to despair of ever saving itself. It is an unexpected thing, of which the blind could form no practical conception, that the nearer the sinner approaches towards deliverance, the further he recedes from hope and comfort, in his own apprehension. That is found true, therefore, in spiritual things, which has been noticed in natural things; that the darkest hour is that which immediately precedes the dawning of the day. II. CONVERSION also turns out in experience to be a very different thing from what was anticipated. Awakened sinners, having heard of persons being translated from darkness to "the marvellous light" of the Gospel, and having, perhaps, heard or read of some remarkable conversions, expect to be brought through the new birth in a way perfectly similar to these extraordinary cases, which, however, are very imperfectly understood. They, therefore, endeavour to place themselves in the same circumstances as those in which others were when they found peace with God; and they continue to look and wait for some sudden and almost miraculous change. These expectations are never realised, and are always erroneous; for when this blessed change actually occurs, the light is commonly like that of the dawn: obscure at first, but shining more and more to the perfect day; and instead of the views being miraculous or strange, they appear to rise in the mind like other thoughts and feelings. The only marked difference is, not in the manner of the views, but in the spiritual beauty and glory of the objects contemplated. The soul, under the leadings of the Spirit, is often brought near to Christ, when it apprehended He was far off. III. God leads His once blind but chosen people in the way which they know not, as it relates to THE MEANS AND PROGRESS OF THEIR SANCTIFICATION. IV. Another thing in the dispensations of God to His people which, prior to experience, they never distinctly understood, and which cannot easily be explained, is His leaving them for a season to backslide; and then RECOVERING THEM by the exercise of the same sovereign grace which first brought them into the path of life. V. Finally, the people of God are often CONDUCTED THROUGH THE "VALLEY AND SHADOW OF DEATH" in an unexpected manner. (*A. Alexander, D.D.*) *The blind travellers:*—The experience of the Jews and the experience of Christians are so closely analogous that the one is used in Scripture as a type of the other. I. THE CONDITION DESCRIBED. 1. The blindness of the traveller. Is the figure too strong to describe our case? You can look upon the past, and memory will throw her clear light on salient points of the journey. But when you turn round and try to explore the future, you are struck blind, you can see nothing! You cannot tell how long the journey is going to be, or how short; what heights, what depths, you may have to cross, or where they are. 2. The strangeness of the way. "A way they knew not—

paths they have not known." You once drew out a map of the course you intended to pursue—will you lay beside it the map of the course you have pursued? What a difference between programme and performance! And so it will be in the future—"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." 3. The obstacles in the road. My text tells of "crooked things" and "crooked places"; how true to nature and experience! II. THE CONSOLATION PRESENTED. Remember that it is addressed to God's own people—in other words, to penitent sinners, to humble believers. 1. Here is a promise of the wisest guidance. Blind man, you don't know the way—but God does! 2. Here is a promise of the mightiest help. "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight." 3. Here is a promise of the firmest faithfulness. III. THERE IS ANOTHER JOURNEY TO BE MADE. This is the journey to heaven itself—that more glorious Canaan than any that the Jews sighed for in their captivity in Babylon. But it is "the land that is very far off"—and how shall we find the way? Now this is not so easy as some would have us suppose; for here, too, we are blind travellers—and the way is strange—and there are terrible obstacles in the road. It is a mercy when we discover our condition, and cease trying to guide ourselves; and cry, "Lord, we are blind—do Thou lead us! Lord, save us—or we perish!" What provision has been made for us in the mercy of God? Christ—Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life! Lay hold of Christ, blind traveller! and never for a moment relax your hold. Here is guidance, help, faithfulness, all-sufficient and unchanging. (*F. Tucker, B.A.*) *Guidance for the blind:*—I. THE CONDITION OF SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS. By the fall of our first parent, darkness hath come over the spirit of every man born into the world. In heathen nations and in heathen days, although there were some faint and feeble aspirings after truth, in the main men were in the depths of darkness. This is not merely the original condition of every man, but is in part the condition of the regenerate also. Yet there are things, unto which man, even at the most advanced of his earthly condition, cannot attain. It is not hard to point out some of the advantages that result from this state of concealment in which God keeps His people. 1. It tends to their humility. 2. It keeps them dependent. 3. This blindness belongs to the very nature of faith; without it, faith can have no existence. 4. Moreover, it tends to the comfort of God's children. If all were laid open, then sorrow and sadness would come before their time. II. THE PROMISE OF DIVINE DIRECTION. "I will make darkness light before them," &c. Mainly God delivers information to His people in two ways. 1. He gives it by the written Word. 2. He has given us the volume of providence to be the commentary upon the volume of revelation. (*S. Robins, M.A.*) *Mysterious providences:*—I. SHOW THAT THE LORD'S WAYS ARE MYSTERIOUS. Of this we have many instances in His works, both of providence and grace. 1. Take, *e.g.*, the case of Moses. Or, turn from the leaders to the people who were led. 2. But to turn from Scripture to individual experience. How mysterious God's dealings with each one of ourselves, from our birth to the present day! 3. If we turn from God's works of providence without, to His work of grace within, how mysterious indeed are the ways of our God! II. Though God's ways are mysterious, HIS INTENTIONS ARE NEVERTHELESS MERCIFUL. III. THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE HIS LOVE IS ABIDING. Conclusion—1. If God's ways are mysterious, be careful to avoid forming rash judgments respecting them; beware lest you speak of them unadvisedly with your lips. 2. Still further, if we know God's intentions to be merciful, how safe are our ways in His hands! 3. If God's love be abiding, should we not lie in His hands, as clay in the hands of the potter? Should we not seek to bring every thought unto the obedience of Christ? Should we not shelter ourselves under every trial in Him who is "a strong tower and house of defence"? (*J. Lombard.*) *The spiritual condition of man:*—I. THE SUBJECTS OF DIVINE GRACE. II. THE OPERATIONS OF DIVINE GRACE. There are more paths than one. The path of repentance is followed by the path of faith in Jesus—faith in the truths of the Gospel—faith in the promises of God. There is another "path," which, by nature, is "not known"—the path of obedience. They are led in the way of holiness. III. The EFFECTS OF DIVINE GRACE. "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." Who can make darkness light before them but the Fountain, the Author, the Source of light and life and being, and all the blessings connected with life? (*S. Drew, M.A.*) *Divine leadings:*—I. THE SPECIAL DEALINGS OF THE LORD WITH HIS PEOPLE. "I will bring the blind," &c. II. THE UNALTERABLE DECISION ON THEIR BEHALF. "And not

forsake them." (*James Wells.*) *Darkness made light:*—This text is a prophecy of the return of Israel from Babylon after their captivity. We find from the history of Ezra how the little remnant that set out from Babylon was brought safely to Jerusalem. Their way from Babylon was a striking picture of our way to the heavenly home that is promised to us. I. MARK THE WAYS OF GOD AS MYSTERIOUS WAYS: that is, not understood by the light of nature, or of intellect. 1. God's children by nature are blind (Eph. ii. 3; Psa. xiii. 3). 2. We cannot understand savingly a single truth of God's Word by our own light, inquiry, teaching, application. We know not the nature of sin, nor God as a God of pardon, peace, and hope. 3. We continue blind until each step is unfolded to our view, and spiritual apprehension clears our way (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). 4. Blind also to the way God is really dealing with His children. II. VIEW GOD'S WAYS AS MERCIFUL LEADINGS. "I will make darkness light before them." "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." All! Some clearly in sunshine. But how is it in trial, when He thwarts instead of indulges? There may be times when we are unable to see what is the next step to take. Watch the Lord's time. Wait at the throne of grace. Don't forget that trial is God's appointed mercy. There is mercy in the end, if not in the beginning. By our not seeing our way we are taught to live by faith. III. THE WISDOM OF HIS DEALINGS. "I will make crooked things straight," &c. Solomon asks (Eccles. vii. 13) who can make the crooked straight? Why, none but God. Many of God's ways in providence and in grace seem to us very crooked, but we must trust, and judge of them by the end. Job, Joseph, &c. Judge God in His own way and wait. Out of apparent confusion comes real order. Apparent severity shows itself to be real kindness. IV. GOD'S DEALINGS ARE FAITHFUL. "These things will I do . . . and not forsake them." Think of the character of Him who makes the promise. (*C. Bridges.*) *The blind befriended:*—I. TO WHOM THE PROMISE IS MADE. II. THE PROMISE THAT IS MADE TO THEM. "I will bring," &c. 1. God Himself will be the guide of His people when they feel their blindness. To lead blind men is not an office generally sought; it is not supposed to be attended with any great honour; but it is a very kindly office, and one which any Christian man may be right glad to render to his afflicted friend. But only think of God Himself coming and guiding the blind! He will not leave you to stumble and grope your way, nor will He bid you depend upon your fellow-Christian, who is as blind as yourself, but He will be your guide. 2. Being their guide, He will lead them in ways they never went before. Of course, when a blind man knows the way, he can almost go without the guide. 3. Although the way by which we go be a way that we know not, we shall be led safely in it; for it is not only said, "I will lead them," but "I will bring them," which is more. You may lead a man, but he may be unable to follow you. III. WHAT SHALL COME OF IT? "I will make darkness light," &c. 1. If you are in the darkness of trouble, trust in God and the trouble will vanish. The trouble may remain, but it will no longer distress you. 2. There is a crook in every lot, but trust in God. He can make the most crooked thing that ever did happen suddenly turn out to be the very straightest thing that ever occurred for our welfare. IV. WHAT WILL BE THE END OF IT? Your life will be strewn with mercies, fulfilled promises. "These things will I do unto them and not forsake them." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The blind led:*—I. OUR GLORIOUS LEADER. "I will bring them," the Lord says, "I will lead them." In other places He tells us He has prepared a kingdom for us; here He tells us He will conduct us to it. But He does not accomplish this in His own person. In the beginning of this chapter, He introduces His dear Son to us as His servant, chosen by Him to bring to pass all His merciful designs concerning us. That dear Son therefore is become to us a Leader and Guide. "Behold, I have given Him," the Lord says elsewhere "for a witness to the people, a Leader and Commander to the people;" and St. Paul, when speaking of God as bringing His many sons unto glory, places immediately the Lord Jesus at their head, calling Him "the Captain of their salvation," at once their Saviour, their Ruler, and their Guide. Here is another proof then that Christ's appointed work was not ended when He had offered Himself for our sins. That was the beginning, rather than the end, of it. II. THOSE WHOM THE LORD IS LEADING. "The blind." III. THE ROAD ALONG WHICH THE LORD IS LEADING US. He speaks of it—1. As new to us. 2. As dark or mysterious. IV. THE OCCASIONAL LIGHT AND RELIEF WHICH THE LORD PROMISES TO HIS PEOPLE IN THEIR WAY. "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." It is useless

for us to attempt to do it. Nor must we look to our fellow-men to do it for us. Our help in this case, as in every other, cometh from the Lord. V. A PROMISE OF PERMANENCY AND UNCHANGEABLENESS IN JEHOVAH'S LOVE TO THE PEOPLE HE IS GUIDING. "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." The Lord speaks here like one who has fully made up His mind to do what He promises, knows He can do it, and is determined He will. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Safe walking for the blind:*—I. THE PERSONS HERE SPOKEN OF. II. THE WAY, THE PATHS, IN WHICH THEY ARE FOUND. III. THE BLESSED GUIDE THEY HAVE, AND WHAT HE DOES FOR THEM. The Eternal God trusts them not to cherubs nor seraphs; to angels nor archangels; to ministers nor men; He trusts them not to themselves, but He is Himself their guide. It was He that brought them out of darkness; and it is He that keeps them out of darkness. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *The leader of the blind:*—The sky is not more beautifully bespangled with stars than the Bible is filled with promises. How completely these promises have been fulfilled in all those who have reached Immanuel's land! But, Christians, "you are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you;" but thus far He has been your helper. What He has done for you is only a pledge of what He will do. Let us survey Him—I. AS OUR LEADER. II. AS OUR INTERPRETER. "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." This is clearly distinguished from the former. You may "lead the blind by a way that they know not, and in paths that they have not known," while you may not explain to them, but only tell them to depend on you as a guide, while they are unconscious of anything except progress. But it is not so with God. God illumines all whom He guides. The knowledge He gives to His people is gradual; and we may observe four instances in which He makes "darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." 1. As to doctrine. 2. As to experience. In regard to prayer they are sometimes perplexed. It is the same also with regard to joy. Milne, the ecclesiastical historian, said, "Had I been as destitute of comfort some years ago as I am now, I should have been exceedingly confounded; but I have learned not to live on lively frames, but on God's own word. I know that He is faithful who hath promised." So, also, in regard to assurance. 3. With regard to practical duties. 4. With regard to some of His providential duties. God's way is sometimes in the sea, and His footsteps are not known. But sometimes the darkness is dispelled even now. III. AS HIS PEOPLE'S UNCHANGEABLE FRIEND. "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." They deserve to be forsaken, and this they will acknowledge readily enough. They may think themselves forsaken, and we have instances of this upon record. But they may be forsaken. God Himself speaks of this in His Word. But observe the time: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee." So it is in the apprehension of faith; so it is always very short when compared with eternity. Then observe the manner of His forsaking them, for however we may explain this, it must be consistent with His assurance of not forsaking: "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." There are three ways in which God may forsake His people, and yet the promise of the text may remain substantially the same—1. In their outward condition. He can reduce them in their circumstances, bereave them of their dearest relations, remove their possession and enjoyments, and leave them bare and destitute. But all this is very compatible with His presence. 2. As to the enjoyment of spiritual comfort. "Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled." But when these spiritual consolations are suspended, there are great searchings of heart, much that shows the Spirit of God to be with them; for this could not come from nature. 3. As to the exercise of grace, not the existence thereof. Here we may refer to good Hezekiah. God, in the midst of trouble and a fearful invasion, left him for a while to see what was in his heart. Peter for a season also was left to himself. Jesus said, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not"; but it did fail. It did as to its exercise, not as to its principle. (*W. Jay, M.A.*) *God conceals that He may guide:*—Away in the interior of China, I once climbed a precipice that was almost perpendicular, if indeed it did not overhang. Steps had been cut out for the feet in the sandstone, and stout iron chains had been pinned within a few inches of the steps to afford support to the hands. My face was turned towards the rock as I went up, and I never thought of the gulf that yawned beneath. When I came to descend, I found I could not accomplish it with my face turned towards empty space and my eye looking down into the dim abyss, and with no solid object in the field

of view. I was mastered by an inveterate dizziness, and should have dropped, but for the timely assistance of a friend. I had to shut out the thought of the terrible abyss by turning my face to the rock, whilst my friend preceded me in the descent, and guided my feet into the successive stepping-places. Many of God's mysteries are things that He has hidden from us to the glory of His pity and gentleness. He has to guide us over a great many of the perilous places of life in blindness. It would be death if the veil were taken away. He has to bring us down a great many fearsome descents with our face to the dead rock. If we could take in the whole position we should be overwhelmed. (*T. G. Selby.*) *Providence in the life of Cowper:*—Of all the writings of William Cowper, probably the hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way," is best known. How Cowper came to write this hymn forms one of the most remarkable episodes of his eventful life. Cowper had one of his fits of melancholy, and persuaded himself, so his biographers assert, that God wanted him to offer himself as a sacrifice. He decided to carry out this idea, and, hiring a post-chaise, drove to the river Ouse. The night was dark, and the coachman by some means or other mistook the way, and instead of arriving at the exact spot where Cowper had intended to drown himself, the poet found himself at his own door. On entering the house Cowper sat down and composed his most famous hymn. (*Christian Budget.*) *God blindfolds that He may lead:*—We are so timid and tender and unschooled that God has often to place the shadow of His hand across our vision, just as the Alpine guide will blindfold a nervous traveller, so that he may guide him unharmed across some terrific chasm. (*T. G. Selby.*) *Obedient following:*—A traveller in South Africa was anxious to go to a certain place which could only be reached by the aid of a Kaffir guide. Into his hands the traveller was compelled to commit his life, and he says: "It was not long before I saw that the old man was guiding me along some recognised path invisible to my eyes, but plainly designed to carry us round clumps of thorn and treacherous stones. Not a landmark could I see to indicate the turnings of the route, but our guide was never at a loss." Only by implicit obedience did the traveller reach his goal. (*Christian.*) **I will make darkness light before them.**—*Darkness, light; and crooked things straight:*—I. THE BELIEVER'S DARKNESS IS TURNED INTO LIGHT, AND THE CROOKS OF HIS LOT ARE STRAIGHTENED. 1. The frequent grim darkness. (1) Much of it is of his own imagining. Many of our sorrows are purely home-spun, and some minds are specially fertile in self-torture. (2) Much existing darkness is exaggerated. (3) Troubles disappear just when we expect them to become overwhelming. (4) When the trial comes, God has a way of making His people's trials cease just as they reach their culminating point. (5) Every trial was foreseen, and has been forestalled. (6) However severe the trial, God has promised that as our days our strength shall be. (7) Especially dwell upon the promise that the Lord will make your darkness light. How is it done? Sometimes by the sun of His providence. Often by the moon of Christian experience, which shines with borrowed light, but yet with sweet and tranquil brightness. Frequently by a sight of Jesus going before, and by hearing Him say, "Follow Me; fear not; for in all your afflictions I am afflicted." 2. The crooks of the believer's lot. (1) One may lie in your poverty. (2) Another in some very crooked calamity. (3) If free from these, he has at least a crooked self. The others would matter little but for this. It may be you have crooked temptations—temptations to profanity, &c. 3. God will make all the crooked things straight. (1) It may be that some are straight now; the making straight is only to make them seem so to us. Our crosses are our best estates. (2) God can bend the crooked straight, and what will not bend He can break. The crooked character has been bent straight; the judgment of God has taken away the crook out of the household, so that the righteous might have peace. If He do not this, He will give power to overleap the difficulty (2 Sam. xxii. 30). II. SOME WORDS TO THE SEEKER. 1. Some doctrines are dark to you. God makes all light to faith. 2. Perhaps your darkness rises from deep depression of mind. Faith must precede its dispersion. 3. Your crooked natural disposition God can make straight. Note—(1) That which saves is not what is, but what will be. (2) It is not what you can do, but what God can do. (3) This work may not be yours at once, but it shall be soon. III. TWO LESSONS TO BELIEVERS. 1. If God will thus make all your darkness light and all your crooked things straight, do not forestall your troubles. 2. Always believe in the power of prayer. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God brings safely through:*—"How shall we pass through this

trial, dear?" asked an anxious wife of her Christian husband at a time of great perplexity. "Ask me six months hence," he replied, "how we have passed through it, and I will tell you."

Vers. 18-20. **Hear, ye deaf.**—*Divine expostulation:*—Thus the Lord expostulates with His ancient people, and thus He has reason to expostulate with us. 1. We are deaf, in a spiritual sense, when we do not attend to the Divine admonitions, or give earnest heed to the word of instruction; and we are blind, in the same sense, when we do not perceive the glory of the Gospel, and the force and beauty of Divine truth. 2. Before one step in the way of salvation can be taken, this hindrance must be removed. The eyes of the blind must be opened, and the ears of the deaf must be unstopped. Hence there is a call to the deaf to hear, and to the blind to look that they may see. This is like the command of our Saviour to the man with the withered hand, to stretch it forth, and implies that this deafness and blindness was their fault, as well as their misfortune. In dependence upon His promise they ought, therefore, to stir themselves up to the discharge of their duty. 3. That the nations who have not the light of the Gospel should want spiritual senses is no wonder; but that those who are, by profession, the "servants" of God, and His "messengers," or those to whom His messengers are sent, and perfectly instructed, should be blind and deaf, is much to be lamented. 4. The sincere followers of Christ whose eyes and ears He has opened to attend to His saving instructions; who love the Gospel, and have been led by it to repentance, faith and newness of life; who do not habitually neglect, but rather prize the ordinances of religion, and the means of grace; even these may be charged with not exercising, as they ought, the spiritual senses which God has given them. (*W. Richardson.*) *The ear and the eye as symbols:*—With a bold freedom do the writers of both the Old and New Testaments fasten the attention upon the sense of hearing. Throughout, the ear is the symbol of obedience. As by its common use the sense is the medium of interpretation of sounds, whether of nature or of the articulate expression of fellow-men, so, by further reference and deeper analogy, it stands as the avenue through which Divine communications may pass to the soul,—it may be in a still small voice. One might suppose, considering the high esteem in which obedience is held in the sacred polity of Israel, considering that obedience is ever regarded in the Old Testament as the test of national and individual loyalty to Jehovah, that the metaphor of the ear would occur more frequently than that of any other sense. Yet it is not so. A glance at any serviceable concordance will show that it is from the eyesight that evangelist and apostle, as well as psalmist and prophet, are furnished with their most telling spiritual illustrations. The reason for this is plain. If the sacred penman made the sense of hearing his object-lesson, it could only be one. It could only help him to emphasise the single conception of the duty and blessing of learning to obey. With the eyesight the manifold character of the teaching answered exactly to the complex faculties of the organ of vision. A concordance, better still an intimate knowledge of Holy Scripture, suggests obedience as the primary lesson of the Old Testament. The metaphor of the "ear" when found in the New Testament is commonly discovered in a setting of some Old Testament passage. Another illustration is wanted, correspondent to the greater fulness of a fresh revelation; and this illustration, common indeed to both covenants, is eyesight. (*B. Whitefoord.*) **Look, ye blind.**—*Eyesight:*—Intelligence and candour, receptiveness and perseverance, faith, hope and charity—such are some amongst the many lessons inculcated through and in the possession of sight. (*Ibid.*) *The open eye:*—The spiritual eye is not the victim of accident or senility, although its clearer powers of vision may often be marred by sin and hampered by indolence. The spiritual eye is an open eye, full of meaning and purpose, cleansed by the tears of penitence, lighted up by faith and love. The eye is open; but not of that pitiful kind that is recognised as vacant. It is bright with significance, clear in its aim, strenuous and persevering in its direction. It has certain characteristic ranges of vision, and these, so Scripture and experience alike teach, are threefold. I. IT LOOKS INWARD. It contemplates the soul. The eye first marks the worst within, an evil so general, so potent, that the main feeling is one of despair. It may now see the best that lies also within. For here, in the human heart, it perceives the work of the Holy Spirit. II. IT LOOKS OUTWARD. It looks upon the world—1. Of nature. 2. Of humanity. III. IT LOOKS UPWARD—Godward. Nor is the upward look of the

soul to God merely a passing act of worship (Psa. xxv. 15), but the very foretaste of His favour and aid. It is only the heart which is pure of earthly aims and hopes that shall at last reach the perfect vision of God. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 19. **Who is blind, but My Servant?**—*The Lord's Servant blind and deaf:*—I. CHRIST'S BLINDNESS. How should it be said of the Servant and Messenger of the Lord that He was blind as none other? How should it be said of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, whose look struck like a sword? Are not all things naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do? Yes. 1. But as the older expositors have pointed out, He was in a sense blind. They dwelt on the fact that His was the blindness that has no sense of difficulties. It is told of an officer attacking an almost impregnable fort that he was in great peril, and was recalled by his chief. To disobey the recall was death if only he saw it. He was blind in one eye, and when told of the recall he turned the blind eye on the signal, and asked that the battle should continue. This is the blindness of Christ and His faithful. "Who art thou, O great mountain?" Christ indeed lifted His eyes to the hills, but not to these lower hills that block the way and close us in. He lifted His eyes to the everlasting mountains towering far above them, on whose summit the final feast of triumph is to be spread. Beyond the obstacles and thwartings that marked His earthly course He had a vision of the patience of God. He was blind to difficulty, even as His apostle was. None of these things moved Him. A king about to engage an army five times as large as his own, prayed to God that He would take away from him the sense of numbers. The sense of numbers, in the earthly manner, Christ never possessed. On that side He was blind. 2. But I speak specially of His blindness to much in life that we consider it legitimate to see. He was blind to the allurement of our ordinary ambitions. The desire for money never seemed to touch Him. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," said He, and He kept His own precept. There is something suggestive in His request, "Show Me a penny." Evidently He did not possess one, and when He died He left nothing behind Him but the garment for which they threw dice beneath the tree. Nor had He anything of the modern feeling, which is not all a sham, that those who can open new channels of commerce and industry, who can promote the peaceable intercourse of the world, are serving humanity. He was blind also, so far as we can tell, to that region which is the scene of the chief triumphs and apostasies of the heart—the rich and volcanic and often wasted region of passion. I think that Dora Greenwell's remark is true, that the passion of love which forms the staple of imaginative literature is absolutely unknown to the New Testament. Then, let us think of the immense encroachment on human thought and interest that the subject of recreation has made. There is a legitimate place for recreation, but it did not enter into the Lord's thought. His one way of resting was to go into a desert place, or to ascend a mountain and pray. Once more, the sphere of art and culture He seems to have left alone. He, the poet of the universe, was not interested in poetry. He glanced at the Divine glory of the lily, and said that it surpassed even the glory of Solomon. But of the treasures and marvels of human art and imagination He had nothing to say, and apparently nothing to think. II. CHRIST'S DEAFNESS. But who said, "The Lord God hath opened Mine ears, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair"? It was He who heard so well the lightest whisper of God. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within My heart." What response ever came so quickly as our Lord's, "Lo, I come"? To be obedient means to listen, and He was a listener unto death. But how deaf He was sometimes; how deaf when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness; how deaf to His friends when they sought to alter His course; how deaf to Peter when he said, "This shall not be unto Thee"; how deaf when they tried to make Him a King by force; how deaf in the judgment-hall when they asked Him, "Whence art Thou? Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee?" The incarnate Lord stood with locked lips before Pilate, and answered only with a boding, fateful silence to questions such as these. And how supremely deaf when they called to Him, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross." But in the same way He was deaf, not only to counsels of evil, but to much that seemed legitimate. Here, also, it appears as if many pleasant voices that spoke to Him might have been heeded without sin, and to His happiness. His life might have been richer, easier, more solaced, but He made sharp choices and stern renunciations and swift decisions, and so the

fulness of life was not for Him, and the allurement and appeal were vain. Remember, He was never deaf and never blind when a soul sought Him. (*W. Robertson Nicoll, LL.D*) *Faculty should be used*:—Christianity makes no account of somnambulists in the daytime. Christianity expects us to use our faculties. The Church is to be the most sagacious of all institutions. The Christian is to be the most statesmanlike of all men. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. **The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake.**—*The broken law magnified*:—I. THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS PARTY HERE SPOKEN OF. "The Lord," or, as in the original, "Jehovah," the righteous Judge, the offended Lord and Lawgiver, to whose wrath all mankind are liable, through the breach of the first covenant. II. SOMETHING ASSERTED CONCERNING HIM, which may arrest the attention of all mankind, and fill their hearts with joy, and their mouths with praises; that is, that He "is well pleased." III. THE CAUSE AND GROUND OF THIS SURPRISING DECLARATION. It is "for His righteousness' sake"; not for the sake of any atonement, or satisfaction, that the sinner could make, for no man can by any means redeem his own or his brother's soul, nor give unto God a ransom for it. The redemption of the soul is precious, and ceaseth for ever as to him; but it is "for His righteousness' sake," who finished transgression, and made an end of sin. IV. THE REASON WHY THE LORD JEHOVAH SUSTAINS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SURETY IN THE ROOM OF THE SINNER, or why He is so well pleased for His righteousness' sake. He not only fulfilled the law, both in its precept and penalty, but He magnifies it, and makes it honourable; He adds a new lustre unto the law, through the dignity of His person who obeys it. (*E. Erskine.*) *The law magnified and made honourable*:—Doctrine: That Christ, as our glorious Surety, having magnified the law and made it honourable, the Lord Jehovah declares Himself to be well pleased for His righteousness' sake. I shall—I. SUGGEST A FEW THINGS CONCERNING THE LAW, AND HOW IT WAS DISPARAGED BY THE SIN OF MAN. 1. The law here principally intended is the moral law. 2. The moral law is nothing else but a transcript of the original holiness of God's nature. 3. The law being a copy or emanation of God's holiness, it must be dearer to Him than heaven and earth, or the whole frame of nature. 4. This law was given to our first parents under the form of a covenant; a promise of life being made to them, upon condition of their yielding a perfect obedience; and a threatening of death added, in case of disobedience. 5. Man being left to the freedom of his own will, through the flattering hisses of the old serpent, "did break the law of God," and so forfeited his title to life by virtue of that covenant; and brought himself, and all his posterity, under the penalty of death temporal, spiritual, and eternal. 6. The law being violated by sin, the honour of the law, and the authority of God, the great Lawgiver, are, as it were, laid in the dust, and trampled under foot, by the rebellious sinner. 7. The law being violated, and the Lawgiver affronted, the salvation of sinners by the law becomes utterly impossible, unless the honour of the law, and of the great Lawgiver, be repaired and restored somehow or other. II. SPEAK OF THE GLORIOUS PERSON WHO UNDERTAKES THE REPARATION OF IT AS OUR SURETY. 1. He is His Father's Servant (ver. 1). 2. His Father's Elect (ver. 1; Psa. lxxxix. 19). 3. His Father's Darling or Delight (ver. 1). 4. He is qualified by His Father for the work and service of redemption, by the anointing of the eternal Spirit (ver. 1). 5. He is one whose commission is very extensive; for we are told that He shall "bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." 6. He was to be a meek and lowly Saviour (ver. 2). 7. He was to be very tender and compassionate towards His poor people, particularly the weaklings of His flock (ver. 3). 8. He would be victorious and successful in His work (vers. 3, 4). 9. He would bear His Father's commission, and be sustained in His work by the right hand of His power (ver. 6). 10. He is the free gift of God unto a lost world. "And give thee for a covenant of the people" (ver. 6). 11. He would be the light of the world, and particularly a light to the poor Gentiles, who had so long sat in the regions and shadow of death (vers. 6, 7). 12. He would loose the devil's prisoners (ver. 7). III. INQUIRE WHAT MAY BE IMPORTED IN THE EXPRESSION OF HIS MAGNIFYING THE LAW, AND MAKING IT HONOURABLE. It supposes—1. That the law is broken, and thereby the greatest indignity done to it, and to Him who gave it. 2. That God, the great Lawgiver, stands upon reparation. 3. That man, who has broken the law, is utterly incapable to repair its honour, or to satisfy justice. 4. That God, the great Lawgiver, admits of the substitution of a Surety in the room of the sinner. 5. That Christ, as our Surety, actually put His neck under the yoke of the Divine law. 6. That the holy

law is no loser by Christ's substitution in our room; it has all that it demanded in order to its satisfaction. 7. That the holy law, instead of being a loser, gains an additional honour and glory by the righteousness of the Surety. IV. How He MAGNIFIES THE LAW, AND WHAT WAY HE TAKES TO MAKE IT HONOURABLE. The moral law comes under a twofold consideration: it may be considered as a covenant, and as a rule of life. 1. As a covenant, He magnifies it, and makes it honourable; and this He did by fulfilling all its demands. 2. Christ magnifies the law as a rule of life, and this He doth several ways. (1) By writing a fair copy of obedience to it, in His own example, for the imitation of all His followers. (2) By explaining it in its utmost extent, for "it is exceeding broad." (3) By establishing the obligation of it as a rule of obedience unto all His followers (Matt. v. 17; Rom. iii. 31). (4) By writing it upon the heart of all His followers, by the finger of His eternal Spirit (Jer. xxxi. 33). (5) By enforcing obedience to the law, among all His followers, by stronger motives than the law itself, abstractly considered, could afford. "The love of Christ constraineth us." (6) By actuating them in their obedience to the law by His own Spirit (Ezek. xxxvi. 27). V. GIVE THE REASONS OF THE DOCTRINE. Why is it that Christ doth magnify the law, and make it honourable? 1. From the regard He had to His Father's honour and authority, affronted in the violation of the law. 2. Out of love that He bore to our salvation, which could not be accomplished without the penalty of the law had been endured, and the precept of it obeyed. 3. Because He was ordained of God from eternity for His work and service; He was set up for it by the decree and ordination of heaven, and He did always these things that pleased His Father. 4. Because He had given His engagement in the council of peace. 5. He magnified the law as a covenant, that "we might be freed from it," in its covenant form and curse (Gal. iv. 4; Rom. vii. 4). 6. He magnified the law, and made it honourable, as a covenant, that we may obey it as a rule, and serve the Lord without fear of the curse and condemnation, "in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives." 7. To procure and confirm His own right of government as Mediator (Rom. xiv. 9). 8. That He might still the enemy and the avenger, and outshoot the devil in his own bow. VI. MAKE SOME APPLICATION. 1. See hence the excellency of the law of God, and the sacred regard that God bears unto it. 2. See hence the evil of sin, and why Christ came to finish transgression, and make an end of it. 3. See hence the dreadful situation of every sinner that is out of Christ, destitute of His righteousness. 4. See hence the wonderful love of God to lost sinners, in sending His own Son to magnify the law, after we had broken it; and at the same time it discovers the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He be supreme Judge, King, and Lawgiver, yet was willing to be made "under the law," and to obey it as a subject, that we might be delivered from law-vengeance, and have the righteousness of it fulfilled in us through Him. 5. See hence the ignorance and error of those who are prejudiced against the doctrine of Justification by faith, as if it were prejudicial to the holy law, or did any way derogate from its honour and authority. 6. See hence the error of those who assert that a justified believer is still liable to the curse or penal sanction of the law. 7. See the error and folly of those who go about to "establish their own righteousness" as the ground of their justification and acceptance, and "refuse to submit unto the righteousness of God." 8. This doctrine lets us see the error of those who, though they will not absolutely reject the righteousness of Christ, yet will adventure to mingle something of their own with it. 9. See the error of those who deny Christ's active obedience to the law to be any part of our justifying righteousness. 10. See hence how little reason even believers, who are justified before God, have to be proud of what they are come to. (*Ibid.*) **He will magnify the law, and make it honourable.**—*The law magnified in man's redemption:*—1. With respect to "law." It is a word used in Scripture in two ways; and matters very important are said about it, both as it is a universal thing, and as it is a particular thing. (1) By law as it is a universal thing, I mean the moral law, which cannot but exist wherever there is an intelligent creature upon earth. We cannot conceive of any creature existing anywhere having intelligence and moral feeling, of whom it is not the duty to love God with all the heart, and to love other beings as himself; and in that one thing we have the elements and rudiments of all possible morals. The law is more than advice—it has authority, and therefore has sanctions associated with it. We cannot conceive of any moral creatures who are not under it,—either in the perfection of their obedience and enjoying the blessedness which waits upon it, or as the victims of it and having administered to them its penalty, or (if there

be such a thing) in an intermediate state, in which they are convicted as transgressors, and yet have the opportunity of escaping the penalty. And this last is altogether supernatural; the other two are what we call natural. (2) What I mean by law as a limited thing is the ceremonial institutions which were given to a particular part of mankind and for a particular time. These have not their basis in the nature of things. They rest simply upon the Divine authority. As such they have an importance affixed to them in the reasonings and representations of Divine truth. 2. To "magnify the law and make it honourable" cannot mean that Messiah was to produce any change in it,—that what He did was to perfect the law itself. As to the moral law, there it is, necessarily resulting from the Divine perfections and government, a glorious and sublime thing, as incapable of improvement as the perfections of God; as changeless and permanent as God. So with respect to the ceremonial law, Christ did not in fact do anything to it in the way of enlarging it. 3. Another idea might be dwelt upon: that we cannot suppose that this means that there was to be any change effected in the conceptions of God about the law,—that the work of Christ was intended to affect the Divine mind in relation to the perceptions that it had of law. There, in the Divine intellect, lay the law in all its perfections and splendour; and we cannot conceive that the Divine mind needed any change in its conceptions of law, or that the law could be magnified and made more glorious in its estimation. We cannot conceive that God could have a more distinct perception with respect to it at one time than at another. And so with respect to the ceremonial law. It was a thing that resulted from the Divine mind, and in the Divine mind there were reasons for every appointment which He made. 4. So that we are led, by these simple and natural steps, to this idea: that this "magnifying the law and making it honourable" must signify the manner in which created minds were to be affected by it. Something (whatever it might be) was to be done by which there should be a certain impression with respect to law produced upon the minds of the intelligent universe. Something might be done that should (so to speak) give body and substance and visibility to God's own conceptions about His law. These might be made manifest to the universe. God's creatures might come to understand how He looked at it—the reverence and respect (if we may so speak) that He had for it. And that is what I think it means. That is what I think was done. And for this there was a necessity. And the Scripture teaches this in the plainest way, and puts it before us again and again. 5. If sin had never entered into the universe, God's law would always have been a sublime thing in the estimation of that universe. And if, when sin was admitted into the universe, permitted to enter, the penalties and sanctions of the law were carried out fully and literally, then law would always have been magnified; it would then also have been always a great and glorious thing. But if there is to be the fact, that there are violaters of the law, those that on just principles are exposed to the penalty, and yet there is to be, along with that, another fact—that they escape, that they are treated as if they were actually righteous and enter into the full enjoyment of the results of perfect obedience, then law so far seems to go for nothing. Therefore there was this necessity. It is required that something shall be done the moral effect of which upon the minds of God's rational creatures, who are all under His government and are all ruled by Him, shall be equivalent to the impression which would have been produced by the literal carrying out of the principles of law itself. And that is just the thing which the work of Christ does. And by the effecting of that thing it is that this prophetic declaration is realised. 6. The conclusion of the matter, then, is—the manner in which this is done. (1) We might dilate upon the manner in which the scope of Christ's teaching always maintained the authority of the law. (2) We might speak with respect to His own personal character. (3) But all these are but preliminary and preparatory to that one great act which I deem to be the consummation of Messiah's work; in which the law was honoured and magnified by His propitiatory sacrifice; in which, in a certain sense, He stood forth bearing the penalty of the moral law, and in another sense manifesting the substance and casting a glory upon the ceremonial. "It became" God thus to act. As "the children were partakers of flesh and blood," the Son of God took part of the same; that being manifested in our nature, and having thus a body prepared for Him, He might present Himself as the Lamb of God, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing," and that He might accomplish the great redemption act, which consisted in substitution, in the sacrifice upon the Cross for the sins of the world. There was a substitution in two senses; a

substitution of person, and a substitution of suffering. (4) The law is "magnified and made honourable" by Christ, inasmuch as His people are redeemed unto obedience. The Gospel as it is revealed here is a thing distinct from law, yet is not contrary to it, but consistent with it, illustrative of it, sustaining it, beautifying it, magnifying it. (*T. Binney.*)

Vers. 23-25. **Who among you will give ear to this?**—*National calamities:*—I. THE TRUE CAUSE OF NATIONAL CALAMITIES IS HERE POINTED OUT—SIN. The public distresses of the men of Judah and Israel did not proceed from fate or fortune, but from the Supreme Lord of the universe, who, as the just punishment of their atrocious wickedness, delivered them into the hands of them who spoiled and deprived them of their possessions. Their most powerful enemies could not have treated them in the manner here described had not He who rules in the kingdoms of men given them as a prey on account of their aggravated and multiplied transgressions. Though the various events, prosperous and adverse, that happen to nations and individuals are brought about by the intervention of means and instruments, the hand of the Almighty ought never to be overlooked, but humbly acknowledged. "Is there any evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Afflictions are necessary to the government of the world in its present state; they check the progress of wickedness, and show the dreadful consequences of incurring the wrath of the Almighty. II. THE JUST CONSEQUENCE OF TRANSGRESSION IS HERE DESCRIBED. "Therefore, because they would not walk in all His ways," &c. The deplorable state of the Jewish nation at the time this prophecy was delivered, and in succeeding periods, is here graphically described. An awful instance of the Divine judgments! III. THE ONLY METHOD TO ESCAPE DIVINE JUDGMENT IS HERE SUGGESTED. The prophet directs his discourse to the hypocritical and disobedient, who were averse to admit light into their minds, to admit conviction of their sin and danger. They were neither affected by the calamities which they felt, nor feared those with which they were threatened, though the storm was gathering thick around them. Of such people the Jewish nation were mostly composed at the time of the prophecy; and the prophet inquires, "Who among you will give ear to this, and hearken for the time to come?" (*T. Lewis.*)

Ver. 25. **It hath set him on fire round about.**—*Playing with fire:*—Because of their unfaithfulness, God gave up His people to divers judgments, and yet the prophet has to deplore that Israel failed to recognise the hand of God in their tribulation; they would not understand and repent; although they were burned, yet they laid it not to heart. Consider—I. THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF SIN. "It hath set him on fire round about." It was the purpose of God that Israel should dwell in safety in a rich and pleasant land. But the chosen people sinned against God, so He gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to the robbers. Sometimes the plague wasted the land, sometimes the great army of locusts and caterpillars, at other times the land was devastated by fire and sword. In the text we behold invading armies overrunning the country, leaving it a smoking ruin. So sin has spoiled the world. Our nation, that might be so entirely rich and happy, is plagued with miseries; houses which might be paradises are hells; hearts which might be watered gardens are full of blackness. And there is nothing arbitrary in this retribution (chap. i. 31). The idolater is as tow, and his work is the spark which ignites the blaze of destruction. Oh, hesitate! you cannot break the law but it is as fire among the dry stubble, bringing with it an inevitable train of disasters and miseries. II. THE INFATUATION OF SINNERS. "Yet he knew it not." "Yet he laid it not to heart." The proverb says, "The burnt child dreads the fire." This is equally true of men in their business life. Let a man speculate in some concern or other that turns out badly, people say, "Ah! he has burnt his fingers." Now, when a man has done that, beware how you approach him with your rosy prospectuses. He will show you his blisters, and send you away with scant courtesy. As the Orientals say, "He who has suffered from a firebrand is afraid of a firefly." A victim is afraid of anything that bears the most distant likeness to that from which he suffered. This is rational. But men are not thus cautious in regard to the moral life. There they blind themselves, harden themselves, and when God's judgments are let loose upon them they will not see, when they are burned they will not lay it to heart. What a striking illustration of this we have in Pharaoh! The history

of Israel is an illustration, on a larger scale, of the same blindness and insensibility. How many times did their idolatry bring them into trouble! And yet they would not hear, they would not see, until wrath came upon them to the uttermost in the captivity of Babylon, in their overthrow by the Romans. How often do we ourselves fail to take to heart God's sharp yet gracious warnings! How is it that, whilst we dread the fire which burns the skin, we do not fear the fire which scars the soul? 1. The fire which burns sears. The action of sin destroys sensibility, so do neglected judgments (Jer. vi. 15). Let us lay to heart the first sense of shame, the first warning, the first rebuke! When a choice ornament is unhappily slightly fractured there is great and sincere distress; but the next accident is taken lightly, and only provokes the merry rejoinder, "Oh, it was cracked!" When a thing is stained or fractured, a spot or crack more or less after that seems of no great consequence. 2. The fire which burns seduces. If men once begin to lack sincerity, to disregard the still, small whisper of conscience, to trifle with the fine health of the pure and faithful soul, sin, despite all its implied agony, soon acquires an indescribable fascination—we suffer through it, and yet we cling to it. Illustration, the moth and the flame. So men are fascinated by the flame which consumes them. In the whole mystery of iniquity is nothing more mysterious than the way in which sin seems to master the reason of men, and to allure and charm them to ruin. So Israel was fascinated by idolatry; dreadfully plagued as they were for their lapses, they could not resist the glamour. So it is with men once committed to the hypnotic power of evil—they linger on the verge of death. 3. The fire which burns spares. Strange reason this, but it is a reason. There was an element of mercy in the judgments of Israel, and this very mercy was misconstrued and turned into lasciviousness (chap. i. 5, 7). Children playing with fire are sometimes only slightly injured, and then they make light of it, and repeat their trifling; and perhaps in the end they pay very dearly indeed. So it was with the Jews. They lost a bit of territory; they were compelled to pay tribute; some of them fell by the sword, or were carried into captivity; they were afflicted in measure, and they presumed. So it is still (Eccles. viii. 11). The law of retribution is ever working in human life; ever and anon it drops blazing warnings at our feet; and be sure the day of the Lord will come, when He will arise and judge the earth in righteousness, when wrath to the uttermost will come upon the obstinately disobedient. God's "sparing mercies" appeal to you to sin no more. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

CHAPTER XLIII.

VERS. 1-4. **But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob.** —*The true relation of Israel to Jehovah:*—The main subject of this chapter is the true relation of Israel to Jehovah, and its application in the way both of warning and encouragement. The doctrine taught is that their segregation from the rest of men, as a peculiar people, was an act of sovereignty, independent of all merit in themselves, and not even intended for their benefit exclusively, but for the accomplishment of God's gracious purposes respecting men in general. The inferences drawn from the fact are, that Israel would certainly escape the dangers which environed him, however imminent; and, on the other hand, that he must suffer for his unfaithfulness to God. In illustration of these truths the prophet introduces several historical allusions and specific prophecies, the most striking of the former having respect to the exodus from Egypt, and of the latter to the fall of Babylon. It is important to the just interpretation of the chapter that these parts of it should be seen in their true light and proportion as incidental illustrations, not as the main subject of the prophecy, which, as already stated, is the general relation between God and His ancient people, and His mode of dealing with them, not at one time, but at all times. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *The right of the Creator:*—1. In reviewing Providence, men do not go far enough back. The Lord Himself always takes a great sweep of time. Here is an instance in point. "But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, . . . and He that formed thee." No argument is built upon what happened an hour ago. Thus God will have us go back to creation day, to formation time, and take in all the childhood, all the youthhood, all the manhood, all the education

and strife and discipline, all the attrition and all the harmony, all the week-days and all the Sabbath-days: and He would bid us watch the mystery of time, until it comes out in blossoming and fruitfulness and benediction. We should have no pain if we had the right line of review and pursued it, and comprehended it, in its continuity and entirety. There are many creations. God is always creating life, and always forming it. There is an individual existence; there is a national organisation; there are birthdays of empires and birthdays of reform. 2. The Church must recognise its period of creation and formation. Jacob was not always a people; Israel was not always a significant name, a symbol in language; and individuals are gathered together into societies, and they are charged with the administration of the kingdom of Christ, and as such they must go back and remember their Creator, and adore their Maker, and serve their Saviour, and renew their inspiration where it was originated. 3. Right relations to God on the part of man should be realised. This appeal rises into climax, into convincing and triumphant words. I have "created thee"; that is the basal line—"formed thee," given thee shape and relation; "redeemed thee," paid for thee; "called thee by thy name," like a friend or child: "thou art Mine." Yet all this is in the Old Testament! Do we not fly from the Old Testament into the New, that we may have some sight of the tenderness of God? There is no need for such flight. There are tenderer words about God in the Old Testament than there are in the New. 4. This relation carries everything else along with it. After this there can be nothing but detail. "When thou passest," &c. (ver. 2). (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Guarantees*:—Absolute ownership. He who speaks is our Creator. He claims our attention also because He knows us. Fear is the apprehension of danger, both natural and moral. With regard to natural fear, some are more timid than others. But this is no index to the moral state of the heart. Nerves which are strong do not constitute faith; nerves which are weak do not indicate distrust in God. To remove the distrust which Israel felt, three guarantees are offered—I. REDEMPTION. "For I have redeemed thee." From whence came the idea of redemption? (Lev. xxv. 25–34.) This is the figure used in the text and elsewhere to show that God has taken away the moral disabilities under which we had fallen through sin. The principle is not without analogy. When the golden grain is enslaved in the earth, the ray of light, the drop of water, and the warm breeze come to redeem their brother. 1. The right to redeem was vested in the next of kin, hence the necessity for the incarnation of the Son of God. The transaction was confined to the family of the brother who had waxen "poor." No portion of the inheritance must ultimately go out of the family, for even if no one of the next of kin was able to redeem it, in the year of Jubilee a full restoration was made. Not only the inheritance must have remained in the family, but the redemption of it was restricted to the family, that it might ever appear of value to the members of the family as a sacred trust from God. This is the very estimate of human life which the Incarnation conveys: to redeem that life the redeemer must be one of the family. But the necessity appears, because the family of man must be impressed with the value of the inheritance which God hath given. The life of Jesus brings home to us the facts that human life is infinitely valuable, and that God has His hold upon it, although mortgaged to another. "All souls are Mine." "I know that my Redeemer liveth." 2. To free the possession the ransom must be paid. The sovereignty of the gift did not free the inheritance from encumbrances contracted by the possessor. Justice demanded the redemption price. In the interest of rectitude and the influence of the moral law, Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity," &c. As to the nature of the ransom, St. Peter says, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ." II. CALLED. "And called thee by thy name." The reference here is either to a legal form of calling out the name of the mortgagor, with the declaration that henceforth his possession was free; or to the trumpet of the Jubilee, which was a direct call to every debtor to resume his liberty. 1. Personal salvation. When we are accosted by name the whole being is involved, with every interest concerned. God calls the sinner to repentance. 2. Personal realisation. The brother who had waxen poor knew he was free, because his name had been called that he might be assured of his freedom. The deed was handed over to him re-conveying the property into his name. Faith leads to the realising of forgiveness and peace. III. REIN-

STATED. "Thou art Mine." The idea is that by grace man is brought back to the peace and service of God. 1. The claim is universal. Wherever the new heart is, God claims it for His own. 2. The claim is absolute. We are no longer our own, but, having been bought with a price, we glorify God in body and mind. 3. We are now on trial, but there will be a final recognition. "They shall be Mine," &c. (*T. Davies, M.A.*) *The Divine responsibility*:—1. Responsibility is not a word that can be limited to man. It must belong to those higher orders of created intelligence known to us as angels of various degrees. It must belong to the Eternal One Himself. It must be that He holds Himself responsible for the creation and its consequences. If responsibility belongs to the creature made in the image of God, it is inherited responsibility; it comes down from Him who made him. 2. Let us approach the subject cautiously. God's revelation of Himself is intended to be a light to the mind and a joy to the heart. Everyone who knows anything of Scripture knows how gradual has been the revelation of God to the human race. Not till we reach the time of David do we get the word father as applied to Deity, and then only in a figurative sort of way. Isaiah prophesies that one of the signs of the Christian dispensation shall be that the name of God as revealed in Christ shall be "the Everlasting Father." Men had known Deity as the Self-Existent God—the source of life. They had thought of Him as the God of providence, the Great Provider, who had them in His hands, and would care for them, and that is about the utmost practical view attained to in the Old Testament. In that wonderful book of Job, the epitomised life of the human race, we have the thought of an unrealised Redeemer,—but "My Father and your Father, My God and your God" is new Testament language, and post-resurrection speech at that. 3. This speech leads us to the thought of the Divine responsibility. It is not our invention but God's revelation that, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. We have a right, then, to say that at least the same measure of responsibility which belongs to a father for the nourishment, education, and development of his child belongs to the great Eternal Father for us all. We are not responsible for the laws which work in our own constitutions, for we did not create those laws. We are not responsible for anything which is out of our own power. I am not responsible for the original tendency to sinfulness which was in my nature when born into this world. Nor am I responsible for being born; nor for being born where I was born; nor for having just those parents which were mine; nor for being just so high and just so heavy; nor for having the temperament and disposition with which I was born. 4. I suppose that in the generations behind us there have lived people who verily persuaded themselves that they were responsible for the sin of Adam, that they were doomed because an ancestor of generations ago was a wilful sinner. Every man inherits tendencies from past generations. When the first of men wilfully disobeyed God, he started in himself a tendency which, if not resisted, would become a habit of wrong-doing—and that habit would be propagated into the next generation, and into the next, and so on. And that is what is meant by original sin—the tendency created by generations past to wrong—stamping its impress upon mind and heart, yea, upon the physical organism. It is so in the animal world. In the past, dogs have been trained to fold sheep, and the instruction has become a habit, and the habit has created a tendency in the next generation to do the same thing, and has become fixed—a second nature, as we say. And this law runs through all creation, even into the vegetable world. Now, He who made man is responsible for the original law by which tendencies to good and evil can be propagated from sire to son. The law is not evil; it is good. But good laws are often used for bad purposes. From a reservoir of pure water pipes are laid to every house in the city. Those pipes were laid for the conveyance of pure, wholesome water for the benefit of a large population. That was the original design and intention. But suppose that city should be besieged by a barbarian army—suppose the army should surround the reservoir and poison the waters, the very pipes which were laid for the conveyance of life would be conduits for the conveyance of death. But that was not their original design. And so our guilt does not extend to Deity. He is responsible for the beneficent law, not for the sin which has been transmitted along it. The very idea of intelligence involves freedom. Either there must be freedom, or there can be no intelligence and no morality. 5. We cannot conceive of an omniscient God, without admitting that He must have foreseen that the creature He made would abuse His liberty. Does the Divine

responsibility extend to making such provision as would prevent it? Clearly not. We cannot conceive how it could be made, and yet leave man a free moral agent, not a machine. The Divine responsibility extends to the providing a means whereby not simply to develop an innocent man, but to save a guilty man from the spiritual consequences of his sin. From all the consequences he cannot be saved; from the fatal consequences he can. That God did anticipate the fall from innocence of His creature, and provide for meeting man in a fallen condition, is evident from one single expression, "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world." Redemption was no afterthought. For our own convenience, it may be necessary at times to speak of justice, and at other times of mercy. But justice and mercy in God are never represented as in antagonism. They ever go hand-in-hand, like light and heat in the sunbeams. When God opened the eyes of the great apostle he saw this truth, that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," or, as it is more correctly, "superabounded," abounded over and above. In this dispensation of things a lost man has not simply to reject God as a Creator, but God as a Redeemer—God in Christ—the God who has done all and everything possible to be done to nullify the fatal results of sin. 6. You remember the complimentary word uttered respecting Abraham: "I know him that he will command his children"; and in every father there is lodged the right to command—the duty to command. That weak tenderness which permits disobedience to go unrebuked and unpunished, is not Divine tenderness. It is the frailty of human irresoluteness. There is nothing of that in God. (*R. Thomas, D.D.*) *Divine consolation*:—The vision of Isaiah contains a representation of the present and future state of Israel and Judah. And because some of his expressions might be interpreted as if all the twelve tribes should be utterly cast away, he frequently intersperses such consolations as this, to assure the people that if they were duly corrected and reformed by their captivity, God would bring them out of it, and raise them up again to be His Church and people. I. To confirm them in the belief of such a restoration, He puts them in mind of SEVERAL ARGUMENTS AND REASONS to expect it. 1. He tells them that upon their repentance God had promised them such a restoration. 2. Isaiah calls upon the people to consider that this promise of salvation is made to them by that God "who created Jacob and formed Israel." This, indeed, is a common topic of consolation to every pious man, that He who created him will have mercy on him, and is able, in all circumstances, to make good His promises, and preserve the work of His own hands. But it was very proper for this people, above all others, to make such inferences, because they had been in a peculiar manner created and formed of God. 3. They might conclude this from former redemptions which God had wrought for them. "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee." 4. A fourth ground of Israel's hope for God's future mercies, were the gracious appellations which He had bestowed upon them. "I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." He had changed their father Jacob's name to Israel. He had named them His "holy nation," His "peculiar people." 5. A further argument to Israel to trust in God, were the deliverances which He had vouchsafed to some of them. "When thou goest (or hast gone) through the waters, they have not overflowed thee; and through the fire, it hath not kindled upon thee." II. The words are certainly a common topic of CONSOLATION TO ALL THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF GOD. So that, to find our own blessing in them, and to understand them as the voice of our own merciful Father, we have nothing else to do but to approve ourselves His obedient children; for He is no respecter of persons. 1. As God promised His people a restoration from their captivity, upon their true repentance and return to their duty, so will He rescue us from the slavery of sin and Satan, if we do in good earnest feel the oppression and misery of it, and would much rather be employed in doing God's will, and keeping His commandments. 2. Was it an argument to Israel to trust in God, because He had created them and formed them in so special a manner as is before represented? The like consideration is equally comfortable to every member of the Church of Christ. For in Him we are born again. 3. All the redemptions which God vouchsafed to Israel are proofs to us of His infinite power and goodness, and figures of greater things which He will do for us. 4. If God's gracious appellations of Israel assured them of His special regard for them, no less ground of rejoicing have we in the like assurance of His favour towards us. 5. In cases of extreme danger, particularly in perils of fire and water, God has shown Himself the same in the Christian as He was of old in the Jewish Church, a sufficient Helper to deliver out of such

troubles. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *The goodness of God to Israel*:—In the latter part of the preceding chapter we read of the sins, not of the obedience of Israel. After this, what might have been expected but that He would punish them still more severely, if not abandon them as incorrigible? In the text, however, He promises to magnify His mercy in doing them good. Consider—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE HERE SPOKEN OF. It may be inferred from the names given to them in the text. They are addressed by the convertible names of "Jacob," and "Israel." His name Jacob was changed because he had wrestled with God for His blessing till he succeeded in obtaining it. Hence, then, we may learn the character of His spiritual children—they wrestle with God in prayer for His blessing till they prevail. But this general description of them includes several particulars. Consider—1. What they do. They pray. And does not this at once distinguish them from thousands around them? 2. To whom are their prayers addressed? To the true God, who is also their own God—the God of Israel. This also separates them from an immense number of the human race; for how many, alas, are there in the world who are totally mistaken as to the proper object of worship! 3. They pray to Him alone. There are not a few in the world who unite the worship of Jehovah with that of their own idols. 4. But what does Israel pray for? For God's blessing. This implies that they feel their need of it, and, by consequence, that they differ essentially from all persons of a self-righteous and self-sufficient spirit. 5. How do they pray? In faith. They pray also fervently. They are not like many, cold, formal, and lifeless in prayer. They persevere, too, till they prevail. But were they always such characters? No; there was a time when they were as prayerless as others. Who, then, has made them to differ? God alone. II. WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR THEM IN TIME PAST; or what are the steps which He has taken to make them what they are. These steps are three—1. He has created them. "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob," &c. They are subjects of a creation to which all others are entire strangers. What renders this creation necessary is the corruption of our nature, which is total, since the Fall. It is a creation of good substituted for evil, a heart of flesh for a heart of stone, light for darkness, holiness for sin, faith for sense, life for death, happiness for misery. Every real Christian is the subject of it. It is effected by the operation of the Holy Ghost. To God, therefore, belongs the whole glory of it. 2. He has redeemed them. "Fear not; for I have redeemed thee." 3. He has called them by their names. "I have called thee by thy name." And what does this imply? (1) That they are made partakers of "the heavenly calling," "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (2) That God well knows His people. (3) We know that when a man of superior rank and dignity calls an inferior by his name, he is considered to treat him with uncommon marks of kindness and familiarity, and to confer upon him a peculiar honour. Such kindness and honour, then, does God bestow upon His people. He is not ashamed to be called their God, and to allow each of them, like Abraham, to be called the friend of God. 4. This, then, is what the Lord has done for Israel His people; and He therefore calls them His, saying, "Thou art Mine." Has He not the most indisputable title to their persons and services? III. WHAT HE PROMISES TO DO FOR THEM IN TIME TO COME. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," &c. 1. To pass through fire and water appears to have been a proverbial expression for passing through various kinds of dangers, trials, and afflictions. 2. But why does God suffer His people to be thus afflicted? Because they are children whom He loves. 3. And do their tribulations answer the ends which He has in view? Yes; there is not one of His afflicted ones who has not had cause to say, sooner or later, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." 4. We are not, however, to suppose that afflictions of themselves ever bear these blessed fruits. Unblest and unsanctified, they have rather a contrary tendency, and produce very different effects. And were it not for the presence of God with His people, in the water and the fire, they would be injured and destroyed by them. But they need not fear; for faithful is He that hath promised. 5. Need I remind you how this promise has been verified, or how the presence of God has been with His people in every age of the Church? (1) Look, first, at Israel after the flesh. See their afflictions in Egypt, and know their sorrows. Behold the bush burning with fire, and yet not consumed. God is in the midst of it. Follow them in their passage out of that house of bondage. God is with them in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night. Observe them again during their captivity

in Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the servants of the Most High God, walked in the midst of the fire, and had no hurt. They had a fourth in their company, whom even Nebuchadnezzar could not help saying was like the Son of God. (2) Look, next, into New Testament times, and even to later ages, and you will find additional evidence of the blessed truth before us. (*D. Rees.*) *The exhortation and promises of God to the afflicted:*—I. THE AFFLICTIONS TO WHICH THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE LIABLE. 1. The text intimates that they may be great. "Waters"; "rivers"; calamities which seem as deep and overwhelming as sweeping torrents, and as likely to destroy them. 2. Their troubles may be diversified. They may be in "the waters" to-day and may have deliverance, but to-morrow they may be called on to walk through "the fire" and "the flame"; to endure trials which are unexpected and strange, different in their nature from any they have yet experienced, and far more severe and bitter. 3. The text implies also that these afflictions are certain. It speaks of them as things of course. II. HOW SEASONABLE AND ENCOURAGING IS THE EXHORTATION. 1. There is a fear of afflictions which is a natural, and by no means a sinful, feeling; a fear which leads us to avoid them, if the will of God will allow us to avoid them, and if not, to receive them with much thoughtfulness and prayer; to be aware of the dangers with which they are invariably accompanied, and of our utter inability in ourselves to escape or overcome them. 2. But there is a fear of another kind. It springs from unbelief, and is the cause of murmuring, despondency, and wretchedness. It is a fear which tempts us to choose sin rather than affliction; which prevents us from praising God under our trials, and from trusting to Him to bring us out of them. Such a fear is as dishonourable to God as it is disquieting to ourselves, and He who values nothing so highly as His own honour and our happiness commands us to lay it aside. It might have been supposed that such an exhortation from such a Being would have been sufficient of itself to dispel the fears of those to whom it is addressed; but a compassionate God does not leave it to its own unaided authority. III. He supports and strengthens it by TWO MOST GRACIOUS PROMISES. 1. He promises us His own presence with us in our trials. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." His people are the objects of His special attention. (1) We are not, however, to infer that the afflicted Christian is always aware of the companion with whom he is walking. He often imagines himself left alone in his trials. (2) Neither are we to suppose that all the afflicted servants of the Lord have the same manifestations of His presence. Some do not need them so much as others. They have not the same temptations to withstand, nor the same burdens to bear, nor the same duties to perform. They are surrounded with more outward comforts, and consequently they less need those which are inward. Some also do not desire or seek the light of their Father's countenance so earnestly as their brethren. They lean more on earthly friends and succours. He who is infinitely wise, always suits the nature and measure of His gracious manifestations to the necessities and, in one sense, to the characters of His people. He gives them what they need, and what they desire and seek. 2. There is the promise of preservation under all our calamities. What does preservation imply? It implies that our trials shall not injure us. Rivers are likely to overflow, and flames likely to burn, those who pass through them. Affliction is likely to injure, and would inevitably ruin us, if God were not near. It tempts us to rebel against the Divine providence and to distrust the Divine goodness; to be thankless, impatient, and repining. The mind, already weakened, perhaps, and bewildered by the pressure of adversity, is easily led to apprehend still greater troubles, and faints at the prospect. This, too, is the season when our great adversary is most to be dreaded. It is in the night that the wild beasts of the forest roar after their prey; and it is in the darkness of spiritual or temporal adversity that Satan directs against us his most violent assaults. The fact is that our spiritual interests are much more endangered by tribulation than our worldly prosperity. It is the soul which is most exposed, and which most needs preservation; and preservation is here promised to it. The Christian often enters the furnace cold-hearted, earthly-minded, and comfortless; he comes out of it peaceful, confiding, burning with love for his delivering God, and thirsting after the enjoyment of His presence. IV. The Lord vouchsafes to add to His precious promises several reasons or ARGUMENTS TO ASSURE US OF THEIR FULFILMENT. 1. The first is drawn from the relation in which He stands to us as our Creator. "Thus saith the Lord

that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel." This language refers to our spiritual as well as to our natural existence. Here, then, is a solid ground of confidence. The Father of our spirits must be well acquainted with their infirmities and weakness. "He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust." Neither will He ever forsake the work of His own hands. 2. The Almighty draws another argument to enforce His exhortation, from the property which He has in His people, and the manner in which He acquired it. "Fear not," He says, "for I have redeemed thee," &c. We are His by creation, but He has also made us His by redemption. And what a mighty price did He pay for us! Will He then abandon that which He so much values, which cost Him so dear? 3. There is yet another reason assigned why we should cast away fear in the hour of tribulation—the covenant God has formed with His people ensures the fulfilment of His promises. "I am the Lord thy God," He says, "the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour"; thus implying that He has entered into some engagement with His Israel; that He considers Himself bound to be with them in their troubles and distresses; that His own veracity, His own faithfulness, are at stake, and would be sacrificed if Israel were forsaken or injured. He thus connects His own honour with their safety. Lessons—1. How rich in consolation is the Word of God! 2. How essential to our happiness is a knowledge of our interest in the Divine promises!—to appropriate them to ourselves, and rejoice in them. 3. How full of confidence and praise ought they to be, who live in the enjoyment of the Divine presence in trouble! 4. How blind to their own interest are they who reject the Gospel of Christ! (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Love abounding, love complaining, love abiding* (with vers. 22–24; chap. xliv. 21–23):—(1) Notice that these three texts are very much alike in this respect—that they are each addressed to God's people under the names of Jacob and Israel. (2) These texts are like each other, again, from their overflowing with love. I do not know where the Lord's love is best seen, when He declares it and tells of what He has done and is doing for His people, or when He laments over their want of love in return, or when He promises to blot out their past sin, and invites them to return to Him and enjoy His restoring grace. I. We have in our first text, LOVE ABOUNDING. 1. Notice the time when that love is declared. The first verse begins, "But now, thus saith the Lord." When was that? It was the very time when He was angry with the nation by reason of their great sins (chap. xlii. 25). It was a time, then, of special sin, and of amazing hardness of heart. When a man begins to burn, he generally feels and cries out; he must be far gone in deadly apathy when he is touched with fire and yet lays it not to heart. It was a time of love with God, though a time of carelessness with His people. 2. The Lord shows His abounding love by the sweetness of His consolations. "But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not." "Fear not" is a little word measured by space and letters; but it is an abyss of consolation if we remember who it is that saith it, and what a wide sweep the comfort takes. Fear hath torment, and the Lord would cast it out. You that are the people of God may be smarting, and crying, and sighing. But, oh the love of God to you. He hears your cries, and His compassions are moved towards you! Nothing touches Him like the groans of His children. There is a wonderful intensity of affection in this passage, spoken, as it is, by the great God to His people while they are under the rod which they so richly deserve. 3. The fulness of God's love is to be seen in the way in which He dwells with evident satisfaction upon His past dealings with His people. When we love some favoured one, we like to think of all our love passages in years gone by; and the Lord so loves His people, that, even when they are under His chastening hand, He still delights to remember His former loving-kindnesses. We may forget the wonders of His grace, but He doth not forget. He "created," "redeemed," "called." He dwells upon His possession of His people. "Thou art Mine." 4. If you desire to see the overflowings of God's love in another form, notice in the next verse how He declares what He means to do. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," &c. His love casts its eye upon your future. He loves you too well to make your way to heaven free from adversity and tribulation, for these things work your lasting good. But He does promise you that the deepest waters shall not overflow you, and the fiercest torrents shall not drown you, for this one all-sufficient reason, that He will be with you. 5. The overflowings of Divine love are seen in the Lord's avowing Himself still to be His people's God: "I am Jehovah

thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." 6. Though one would think He might have come to a close here, the Lord adds His valuation of His people: this was so high that He says, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." Pharaoh and his firstborn were nobodies as compared with Jacob's seed. Further on in history, after Isaiah's day, the Lord moved Cyrus to set Israel free from Babylon, and then gave to the son of Cyrus a rich return for liberating the Jews; for He made Him conqueror of Egypt and of Ethiopia and of Seba. God will give more than the whole world to save His Church, seeing He gave His only begotten Son. 7. Then the Lord adds another note of great love. He says that He has thought so much of His people that He regarded them as honourable. "Since thou wast precious in My sight," &c. He publishes His love, not only by His deeds, but by express words. What a wealth of grace is here! 8. Such is the Lord's love, that even in the time when they were not acting as they should, but grieving Him, He stands to His love of them, and sets the same value on them as before: "Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." As if He said, "What I have done I will do again. My love is unalterable." II. Our second text is in the minor key, it is LOVE LAMENTING. "But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob" (ver. 22). Observe the contrast; for it runs all through, and may be seen in every sentence: I have called thee by thy name; but thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob. I have called thee Mine; but thou hast been weary of Me. I have redeemed thee with a matchless price; but thou hast bought Me no sweet cane with money. 1. Israel rendered little worship to God. May not the Lord of infinite mercy justly say to some of us, "But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob"? 2. There has been little fellowship; for the Lord goes on to say, "Thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel." Are we tired of our God? If not, how is it that we do not walk with Him from day to day? 3. We are moved by this passage to confess how little of spirituality has been found in the worship which we have rendered. "Thou hast not honoured Me with thy sacrifices." When we have come to worship, in public and in private, we have not honoured the Lord by being intense therein. The heart has been cold, the mind wandering. 4. Again, the Lord mentions that His people have brought Him little sacrifice: "Thou hast not brought Me the small cattle," &c. What small returns have we made! In the religion of Christ there is no taxation; everything is of love. 5. Once more, it is said that we have been very slack in our consideration of our God. The Lord says, "I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense; but thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities." The Lord is thoughtful of us, but we are not thoughtful towards Him. If the Lord did not love us very much He would not care so much about our love towards Himself. It is the plaint of love. The Lord does not need our sweet canes nor our money. But when He chides us for withholding our love-tokens, it is because He values our love, and is grieved when it grows cold. III. Our third text exhibits LOVE ABIDING. 1. Notice, in chap. xliv. 21, how the Lord still calls His people by the same name: "Remember these, O Jacob and Israel." Still are the names of His elect like music in the ears of God. One would have feared that He would have dropped the "Israel," that honourable name, which came of prevailing prayer, since they had not called upon Him. Why call him a prevailing prince who had grown weary of his God? But no, He harps upon the double title: He loves to think of His beloved as what they were, and what His grace made them. O heir of heaven, God loves you still! 2. Notice how the Lord claims His servants: "Thou art My servant: I have formed thee; thou art My servant." He has not discharged us, though He has had cause enough for so doing. This should bind us to Him. This should quicken our pace in His service. 3. Then notice how the Lord assures us in the next line: "O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of Me." God cannot forget His chosen. You that have Bibles with margins will find that it is also written there, "O Israel, forget not Me." The Lord longs to be remembered by us. Did not our loving Lord institute the Sacred Supper to prevent our forgetting Him? 4. Notice with delight the triumph of love, how still He pardons: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud," &c. 5. See how our text closes with the Lord's own precept to be glad: "Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it," &c. (xliv. 23). Out of all dejection arise! There is more cause for gladness than for sorrow. What you have done should cause distress of heart; but what

the Lord has done is cause for rapture. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Four contrasts* (with vers. 22-25):—There are many lights in which we can see sin; and our perception of sin very much depends upon the light in which we look at it. Sin is very terrible by the blaze of Sinai. It is an awful thing to see sin by the light of your dying day. More terrible still will it be to see it by the light of the judgment day. But of all the lights that ever fall upon sin, that which makes it "like itself appear" is that which falls upon it when it is set in the light of God's countenance. To see sin by the light of God's love, to read its awful character by the light of the Cross, is the way to see sin. I am going to speak mainly concerning God's own people, and I want to set their sins in the light of God's love to them. My object will be to set before you the contrast between God's action towards His people and His people's usual action towards Him. I. The first contrast lies in THE CALL. 1. "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name" (ver. 1). (1) God called us out of nothing. "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob" (ver. 1). Our creation is entirely due to God. An ungodly man can hardly bless God for having made him, for his end may be terrible. Blessed be God for our being, because it is followed by our well-being! Blessed be God for our first birth, because we have also experienced a second birth. (2) Our Lord has done more than make us, for He has educated us; He has continued the fashioning of us. "He that formed thee, O Israel." Israel is the "formed" Jacob; by God's grace, Jacob grows into Israel. Let us think of all the sweet experiences of God's forming and fashioning touch that we have had. Sometimes, it has been a rough stroke that was necessary for the moulding of our clay; only by affliction could we be made to assume the shape and pattern that the Lord had determined for us. At other times, it has been the touch of very soft fingers. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." (3) Think what wonderful dealings He has had, next, in consoling us, for the Lord goes on to say, "Fear not." Oh, how often He has cheered us up when our spirit was sinking! (4) That is not all, for the Lord has also called us, and conversed with us, in the matter of redemption. "I have redeemed thee." (5) The Lord has given a special nomination. "I have called thee by thy name." (6) Then comes this blessed appropriation: "Thou art Mine." This is the way that God talks to us. 2. Turn to the other side of the question, the neglected call on our part. "Thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob" (ver. 22). That may not mean that there has been literally no calling upon God on thy side, but it does mean that there has been too little of it. Let us put this matter to the test. (1) What about our prayers? There is much less prayer than there ought to be. (2) True as this is of our prayers, it is still more true of our praises. (3) There are many, with whom God has dealt well, who do not venture to call upon Him for special help in His service. They keep plodding along the old roads, and mostly in the old ruts; but they do not dare to invoke the aid of the Lord for some novel form of service, some fresh enterprise upon which they can strike out for God. (4) Sometimes in our trouble, we do not call upon God as we should. II. Let us consider another contrast which is equally striking—that is, upon the matter of THE CONVERSE between the Lord and His people. 1. Notice, first, God's side of it. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," &c. (ver. 2). Notice how God is with His people in strange places. Wherever they are, He will not leave them; He will go right through the waters with them. God also keeps close to His people in dangerous places, fatal places as they seem. 2. Now listen to your side of this matter of converse with God. "But thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel" (ver. 22). (1) Has it not been so with regard to private prayer? (2) With your reading of the Scriptures? (3) Hearing the Word? (4) Are there not some also whom God loves who get weary of their work? III. Notice the contrast in THE SACRIFICE. 1. "I gave Egypt for thy ransom," &c. (ver. 3). (1) Here is God giving up everybody else for the sake of His people. Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba were great nations, but God did not choose the greatest. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called," &c. (2) We may see another meaning in these words, for God has given for us His choicest gift. Christ is infinitely more precious than Egypt, and Ethiopia, and Seba, though they were lands of great abundance of wealth. 2. Now look at the other side. "Thou hast not brought Me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings" (ver. 23). I wonder how little some people really do give to God! I believe, in some cases, not as much as it costs them for the blacking of their boots. Then the Lord adds, "Thou hast bought Me

no sweet cane with money." Not even the smallest offering has been given to the Most High by some who profess to have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. How little is given by the most generous of us! IV. I close with one more contrast, which refers to THE HONOUR given by God, and the honour given to God. 1. God gives great honour to those whom He saves (ver. 4). I have known persons who, before their conversion, were unclean in their lives, and when they have been converted, they have joined a Christian Church, and in the society of God's people they have become honourable. They have been taken into the fellowship of the saints just as if there had never been a fault in their lives; nobody has mentioned the past to them, it has been forgotten. This is the highest honour that God can put upon us, that He fixes His love upon us. "Thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." 2. Have you honoured God? He says, "Neither hast thou honoured Me with thy sacrifices." Have you honoured God by your lives? By your confidence in Him? By your patience? By defending His truth when it has been assailed? By speaking to poor sinners about Him? Are you trying every day to honour Him? (*Ibid.*) "*Fear not*":—I. A CHARGE GIVEN. "Fear not." A godly fear the believer may have; but the cowardice of the world, which is loud to boast, and slow to act, and quick to doubt, he must never know. It becomes neither the dignity of his calling, nor the faithfulness of his God. II. A REASON ASSIGNED. "Thou art Mine." These words were spoken to Israel after the flesh, and to them they still remain a covenant of peace, sure and steadfast for ever; yet as the relations named—Creator, Redeemer, Saviour—are not peculiar to them, but are enjoyed in the same degree by every believing heart, we may take to ourselves a share in this animating promise. The certainty of the believer's hope does not depend on our holding God, but on God's holding us; not on our faithfulness to Him, but on His faithfulness to us. III. A PROTECTION PROMISED. This does not consist in any absence of trial and danger; the expressions rather imply their presence, many in number and various in kind. The protection promised consists in the constant presence with the soul of its unseen but Almighty Saviour. (*E. Garbett.*) **I have called thee by thy name.**—*Named and claimed*:—I. THE PERSON. "I—thee—thou—Mine." How this sentence tingles with personality! If one person can call another person, those two persons are alike. Those two persons have a common life interest. Personality in God is substantially similar to personality in man. II. THE NAME. Would it be an untrue fancy to suppose that we each have a name before God? When you look at your little sleeping child to-night, you will, perhaps, not only think of the name that everybody knows him by, but you will murmur over him some little special name that you have given him—you hardly know how, but that gives to you the very sense of the essence of the true life sleeping there. Remember that something just like that is in the heart of your God's feeling for you. Science generalises, love particularises. Then, with this loving name, comes possession. There is a strange, yearning intensity in that language, "Thou art Mine." The mystery and rapture of life are in that strange sense of possession which comes through love, as though the loved one had become a part of ourselves to be dissevered from us nevermore. "Thou art Mine," says our God—Mine to carry, to nurture, to protect—My very own, never to part from Me for evermore. III. THE CALL OF THE NAME. It would be very much to know that God even thought of us by our name in this personal and special way; but the text asserts that this power of God finds expression; that life is filled not only with a thought of us on the part of God, but with an expression of that thought; so that there is something vocalised, something articulate in life, which comes to us, if we can really understand that it is God calling us by this name we have. 1. The very first awakening feeling in childhood is a personal call. When you first really prayed as a little child and thought what you were doing, what a sense of individuality there was. You were yourself then, and nobody else. It was God speaking to you, and calling you by your name. 2. Then another period which comes, usually a little later, when God's call is addressed to us, is in our first assumption of responsibility. I think some of the most solitary times a man ever has are when he has just assumed a serious responsibility. Now, in that solitude, if a man listens, he can hear his God calling to him, speaking his name right then and there. How tenderly, how warmly, how encouragingly! And the reason is, because God loves the thing that that responsibility will give you. He loves the thing that will make for you, and that is character; that is manhood. 3. Then,

again, in a moment of danger, a man may hear God calling his name; because danger, like duty, particularises. Supposing we see a man in danger; we ask, Who is he? What is his name? And if the man does not realise the peril he is in, you call to him by the name that will cut through the air, and strike on his ear, and arouse his individual attention. Suppose moral danger comes and God sees the danger coming, and He calls out to you by that name He knows you by. If you could hear that call, would it not cause you to repel the evil? as though the Voice said, "I remember you; you are Mine. Your name is known to Me. I am your heavenly Friend, and I call on you now to do your duty, to repel the evil." 4. He speaks our name when we are in trouble. 5. There are certain other experiences of life darker than duty or danger or sorrow. We name them by that strong, common monosyllable, sin. These moral experiences that cut into the soul within us—sin, the sting and stab of remorse, repentance, reformation—all are experiences of an arena in which God calls a man by his name. (*A. J. Lyman, D.D.*) *God's claim on the soul*:—What a drama, what a tragedy, life is! The world goes by, and, pointing to you, exclaims: "That man is mine. He has been forty years in my service. He has sold his soul to me. He is mine." "Not so," replies the heavenly Voice; "He is Mine. I knew him as a child. I have never lost sight of him." Pleasure comes by, and claims you and says: "He is mine, that young man." Dissipation comes by, and points to you with fascinating smile, and says: "That young man is mine. Let his mother give him up. Let the angels forget him. He has taken my cup in his hand; he has drunk of my poison. He is mine." "No," the heavenly Voice answers: "Not yet; not yet. I know him, and love him. I suffered to save him, and he is Mine. Mine by right of love, and Mine by right of pain." That is the drama, that is the tragedy, that is going on! (*Ibid.*) *Israel called by name*:—To call by name includes the ideas of specific designation, public announcement, and solemn consecration to a certain work. (*J. A. Alexander.*) "*Thou art Mine*":—Three little words, three little syllables; a child's motto; words that might be printed by a little hand and sent as a message of love; words that might be engraved on a signet ring: yet words the whole meaning of which the firmament has not space enough to hold the entire development. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. **When thou passest through the waters.**—*Through water and fire*:—I. Notice the frank and matter-of-course way in which your AFFLICTIONS AND TRIALS are mentioned. "The waters," "the rivers," "the fire," "the flame"; it takes it for granted that you will meet with some or all of them before you have finished your course, and they are mentioned in a way, too, that will not suffer you to think lightly of them. "Waters," many of them, and may be deep; "rivers," rushing calamities that threaten to carry you away; "fire and flame!" hard words these, and I gather that your tribulations, Jacob, are great, various, and sure. II. But the words, "When thou passest,"—"And when thou walkest," clearly intimate that "JACOB" IS TRAVELLING, MOVING FROM ONE POINT TO ANOTHER. We may be quite sure that the "waters," "rivers," "fire," "flame" we read of here have reference only to such of them as are met with on Jacob's proper track. If these perilous possibilities do not confront him on the way of duty; and if he makes a voluntary circumbendibus, to serve only his own pleasure, so that he confronts them; then, such waters and such fires are very likely to destroy him. Lot goes and settles down in Sodom; he had no more business there than has flour in a soot-bag; and the fire burnt him. The waters overflowed Jonah to some purpose; but that was because he went where he liked, and not where he ought. III. Not only shall Jacob be safe in the flood, and brought through the fire; not only shall both flood and fire become vanquished perils living only in the victor's memory, but THE PASSING THROUGH THEM SHALL DO GOOD TO JACOB! He shall be a nobler soul for being tossed by waves; he shall be a purer being for being tried by fire, and like the finely tempered steel which was first in the red-hot furnace, and was then plunged into the ice-cold cistern, and so became the keen, invincible blade: so the trial, afflictions, testings of the Christian do mould and temper and shape and brighten Jacob's character, and ennoble after the Christly pattern his moral manhood, which is the glory of his immortal soul! Note two things to be remembered in the day of the flood and fire. 1. Thy God has promised to be ever **at thy side. 2. This gracious God, who controls the waters and restrains the fires and conducts His people through them both, reveals Himself here as "the Lord**

that created thee, O Jacob; and He that formed thee, O Israel." He made thee, O Jacob: then He knows thee, knows thy frame; remembereth that thou art dust.—will not put upon thee more than thou canst bear, neither will He forsake the work of His hands. He raised us from the ruins of the fall, made us temples for Himself to dwell in. Then He will never suffer the structures He has erected at so much care and cost to be thrown down by violence, swept away by turbulent waters, or devoured by the ruthless flame. "Thou art mine!" He says. It is the language of complacency and delight. Thou art mine! My property! My charge! My joy! My jewel! And I will guard My own! Surely with such a text as this to fall back upon, O thou redeemed one, thou wilt not doubt or fear. (*J. J. Wray.*) *Divine convoy*:—I. THE PATHWAY THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD TREAD. Through waters, rivers, fires, and flames. "It is through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom." 1. If I look at the temporalities first, the wilderness through which we pass is full of troubles. Thorns and thistles has it brought forth ever since the curse was pronounced upon it; and you can scarcely look into a circle of your acquaintance without finding sicknesses, sorrows, losses, cares, broils, contentions, all the fruits of sin, constantly presented to your view. Is not this, then, a tribulated path? 2. Mark, among the tribulations, the rigour of a fiery law. 3. In this unceasing warfare "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." 4. Look at the grand adversary of souls, and his fiery temptations. That is another fire to pass through—Satan's suggestions. II. THE UPHOLDING POWER. "I will be with thee." Good company at all events. Was He not with all the worthies recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures, in their sharp conflicts, giving them all the victory? There are two views that may be taken of this precious promise. There is such a thing as God being with His people, and they not knowing it; and there is such a thing as their sensible enjoyment of it. There are two things to be considered. The immutable faithfulness of God has bound Him never to desert the objects of His love. But there have been many instances in which people have been groping in the dark; it has been a long while before they could find Him; and in many instances they have been ready to say, "My prayer is shut out"; and led to exclaim, "Hath God in anger shut up His tender mercies? Will His compassion fail?" III. THE TERMINUS. Heavenly rest—not a wave of trouble shall roll across this peaceful breast. (*J. Irons.*) *God's presence in crisis moments*:—It is surprising to note how the facts of this people's history have impressed themselves upon the language and thought of Christendom. I. THAT SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IS THE SAME IN ALL AGES. These words were written by the prophet of the Exile, who could speak of himself and his comrades as passing through the waters. He shows in this way that he realises that the exiles are one in experience with their ancestors who passed through the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan. Though their circumstances were different, the variation in outward detail was insignificant. The same parts of their nature were tested, and the same virtues were disciplined. Thus this prophet becomes the link between us, who are the disciples of Christ, and the Israelites who crossed the Jordan. II. THAT IN EVERY LIFE THERE ARE A FEW BRIEF BUT INTENSE TRIALS. There was the long and weary strain of desert life to be constantly borne. The passage of the sea and the river came but twice, and then lasted but a few hours, though the agony for the time was intense. They entered the sea in a night of awful storm, because the terror of their enemies was upon them. They entered the river in broad daylight in utter trust of God, knowing that only thus could the enjoyment of Canaan's goodly land be theirs. One was a struggle of fear, the other the yielding of all to God in simple faith. In the Christian life peace only comes after this second struggle. III. THAT LIFE BEFORE AND AFTER SUCH A CRISIS IS WHOLLY DIFFERENT. The Red Sea was the boundary line between bondage and freedom; the Jordan between wandering and rest, between hope and possession. It seems as though such struggles were the birth-throes of a new life. To pass on to a higher plane such struggle must be encountered. It was such a trial as God called upon Job to pass through. IV. THAT ONE SUCH CRISIS IS DEATH. In the life of Christ it would appear that the temptation connected with His baptism was His Red Sea, just as St. Paul tells us that the sea was Israel's baptism: "They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." We know that this temptation was one of the crises of our Saviour's life. Then the devil leaveth Him for a season, not to return with like power until he meets Him again at Gethsemane. This was Christ's Jordan. Not until this was passed was His sorrow vanquished or His labour "finished." When Christian reached this

river he was dazed and despondent, and began to look this way and that to see if he could not escape the river. Truly, death is the last and not the least enemy. V. THAT HUMAN FRIENDSHIP CAN AVAIL BUT LITTLE HERE. Friends may say, "I am with you" in sympathy; but they can render no help. Viewing the struggle, they may long to share it, but here they must leave their friends in the hands of God. VI. THAT GOD IS WITH US IN ALL SUCH CRISIS MOMENTS. Hopeful's comforting words did Christian little good. But he heard a voice say, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." Indeed, that is His name, Immanuel, God with us. And Christ has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end." If God has brought us through the sea, if He has commenced the good work within us, He will bring us through the Jordan, and thus complete what He has begun. In virtue of such a precious promise we need have no fear. (*R. C. Ford, M.A.*) *The floods and the flames:*—I. CONTEMPLATE THE SCENES THROUGH WHICH THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE CALLED TO PASS. No metaphor is more frequent in the Bible than that by which sudden calamities are represented by a deluge of waters (Psa. xlii. 7, lxix. 1, 2). 1. All must pass through—(1) The waters of temptation (James i. 12). (2) The waters of affliction, in circumstances, person, mind, family. (3) The river of death. "How wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?" 2. We are all familiar with affliction under the image of fire (Psa. lxvi. 12; 1 Cor. iii. 13; Isa. xlviii. 10; 1 Pet. iv. 12). It is the tendency of fire to—(1) Consume (Mal. iv. 1). Affliction, like a fire, will tend to consume our corruptions, whilst we ourselves remain uninjured. (2) Melt. All metals can be melted, and receive whatever stamp the artificer may impress. (3) Try. Place any substance in the fire, and its nature and properties are made manifest. Thus Abraham was tried; Job (xxiii. 10); Israel (Deut. viii. 2); Hezekiah. (4) Purify and refine (Isa. i. 25; Mal. iii. 2, 3). II. CONSIDER THE PROMISES MADE TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD WHEN PASSING THROUGH THESE SCENES. 1. The Divine presence. We naturally look for sympathy in the day of trouble (Job vi. 14). Sometimes friends who are with us in sunshine forsake us in storm (Job xix. 21; Acts xxviii. 15, with 2 Tim. iv. 16). But God will never forsake us. 2. Divine protection. "The rivers shall not overflow," &c. (Josh. i. 9; Acts xxiii. 11; Deut. xxxiii. 25). 3. Divine deliverance. We are not always to be fording rivers, struggling with floods, or walking through fires. We are to leave them all behind. The rest of Canaan compensated for all the toils of the wilderness (Rom. viii. 18). (*Clergyman's Magazine.*) *The godly in trouble:*—1. The godly have the best company in the worst places in which their lot is cast. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." 2. The godly have special help in their times of deepest trouble. "And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." 3. The godly are the subjects of miracles of mercy in seasons of greatest distress. "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's people not exempt from trouble:*—If God has a favoured people whom He has chosen, upon whom His distinguishing grace has lighted to make them great and honourable, you would suppose that the verse would run thus: "Thou shalt not go through the waters, for I will be with thee to keep thee out of them; neither shalt thou pass through the rivers, for I have bridged them on thy behalf. Thou shalt never go through the fire, and therefore thou shalt not be burned; neither shall there be any fear that the flame shall kindle upon thee, for it shall not come near thee." There is no such word of promise; it would be contrary to the whole tenor of the covenant, which ever speaks of a rod, and of the chosen passing under it. (*Ibid.*) *Light on the billow's crest:*—There is a story of a shipwreck which tells how the crew and passengers had to leave the broken vessel and take to the boats. The sea was rough, and great care in rowing and steering was necessary, in order to guard the heavily laden boats, not from the ordinary waves, which they rode over easily, but from the great cross seas. Night was approaching, and the hearts of all sank as they asked what they should do in the darkness when they would no longer be able to see these terrible waves. To their great joy, however, when it grew dark, they discovered that they were in phosphorescent waters, and that each dangerous wave rolled up crested with light which made it as clearly visible as if it were midday. So it is that life's dreaded experiences when we meet them carry in themselves the light which takes away the peril and the terror. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*) *Comfort found in God:*—During the sixteen weeks in which Sir Bartle Frere was dying, though he was nearly always in great pain, not one murmur escaped him. Just at the end he said, "I have looked down into the great abyss, but God has never

left me through it all." "Name that Name when I am in pain," he once said to his wife; "it calls me back." (*Quiver.*) *A heartening presence:*—An exceedingly nervous man was once sentenced to twenty-four hours' imprisonment in the dungeon of an old prison. Full of fear he sank to the floor. His brain throbbed as with fever, and mocking voices seemed to sound. He felt terror would drive him mad. Suddenly, overhead, he heard the prison chaplain's voice calling his name. "Are you there?" he gasped. "Yes, and I am going to stay till you come out." "God bless you," he said; "I do not mind it at all now, with you there." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*) *Triumphant dying:*—In her last days Mrs. Booth, of the Salvation Army, sent this message to her friends,—it is a triumphant death-song: "The waters are rising, but so am I. I am not going under, but over. Do not be concerned about your dying. Only go on living well, and the dying will be all right." **When thou walkest through the fire.**—*Fire!*—Walking through the fire here is put for the severest form of trouble. You have, in the commencement of the verse, trouble described as passing through the water. This represents the overwhelming influence of trial, in which the soul is sometimes so covered that it becomes like a man sinking in the waves. "When thou goest through the rivers,"—those mountain torrents which with terrific force are often sufficient to carry a man away. This expresses the force of trouble, the power with which it sometimes lifts a man from the foothold of his stability, and carries him before it. "When thou passest through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." But going through the fire expresses not so much the overwhelming character and the upsetting power of trouble as the actual consuming and destructive power of trouble and temptation. The metaphor is more vivid, not to say more terrific, than that which is employed in the first sentence, and yet, vivid and awful though it be, it is certainly not too strong a figure to be used as the emblem of the temptations and afflictions through which the Church and people of God have been called to pass. I. THIS TERRIBLE PATHWAY. The sacramental host of God's elect has never had an easy road along which to journey. I see the fields on fire, the prairie is in a blaze, the very heavens are like a furnace, and the clouds seem rather to be made of fire than water. Across that prairie lies the pathway to heaven, beneath that blazing sky the whole Church of God must make its perpetual journey. It started at the first in fire, and its very glory at the last shall take place in the midst of the fiery passing away of all things. When first there was a Church of God on earth, in the person of Abel, it was persecuted. Since that day, what tongue can tell the sufferings of the people of God! It hath fared well with the Church when she hath been persecuted, and her pathway hath been through fire. Her feet are shod with iron and brass. She ought not to tread on paths strewn with flowers; it is her proper place to suffer. II. There is AN AWFUL DANGER. The promise of the text is based on a prophecy that follows it. The chapter tells us how God taught His people by terrible things in the past, and how He hath terrible lessons to teach them in the future. The Church has had very painful experience that persecution is a fire which does burn. How many ministers of Christ, when the day of tribulation came, forsook their flocks and fled. Again: I see iniquity raging on every side. Its flames are fanned by every wind of fashion. And fresh victims are being constantly drawn in. It spreads to every class. Not the palace nor the hovel is safe. We may give the alarm to you, young man, who are in the midst of ribald companions. I may cry "fire!" to you who are compelled to live in a house where you are perpetually tempted to evil. I may cry "fire!" to you who are marked each day, and have to bear the sneer of the ungodly,—"fire!" to you who are losing your property and suffering in the flesh, for many have perished thereby. We ought not to look upon our dangers with contempt; they are dangers, they are trials. We ought to look upon our temptations as fires. III. Here is A DOUBLE INSURANCE. It strikes me that in the second clause we have the higher gradation of a climax. "Thou shalt not be burned," to the destruction of thy life, nor even scorched to give thee the most superficial injury, for "the flames shall not kindle upon thee." Just as when the three holy children came out of the fiery furnace it is said, "Upon their bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed; neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them"; so the text seems to me to teach that the Christian Church under all its trials has not been consumed; but more than that—it has not lost anything by its trials. Upon the entire Church, at the last, there shall not be even the smell of fire. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Fire harmful and harmless:*—When Jehovah was angry the fire

burned Israel (chap. xlii. 25), but now with Jehovah on its side it is invulnerable in the severest trials. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **For I am the Lord thy God.**—*Jehovah's valuation of His people*:—I. THE LORD'S DECLARATION OF HIS OWN NAME. "I am Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." He gives His name thus to distinguish Himself from false gods. He also sets forth His name at large, for the comfort of His people. There is something in every name of God which may breed faith in our souls. I think He also does it to excite our wonder and gratitude. Let us devoutly think of each of these names separately. 1. "Jehovah, thy God." Jehovah, the glorious I AM, signifies self-existence. He borrows nothing from others; indeed, all live by His permit and power. He is as complete without His creatures as with them. Jehovah, again, is a name of immutability. "I AM THAT I AM" was His name to Moses. Furthermore, Jehovah means sovereignty. "Jehovah reigneth, let the people tremble." 2. The Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." What a New Testament combination this is—"The Holy One, thy Saviour"! It reminds us of the words—"Just, and the justifier of him that believeth." Here we have one so holy as to be separate from sinners and yet the Saviour of sinners. Since "the Holy One of Israel" is our Saviour, we are confident that He will save us from all sin. The glorious Lord, who here styles Himself "Jehovah thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour," the Creator of all things, and their Preserver, is come very near to you. In the next verse He saith, "Since thou wast precious in My sight thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." Mark, "I have loved thee." It is not enough that He thinks kindly, and deals tenderly; but He loves! Remember also that this Holy Lord is working upon you still, that you may reflect His glory. "I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him" (ver. 7). He has begun our new creation, He is carrying it on, and He is completing it. II. THE LORD'S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE. Whatever we may think of the Israel of God, the Lord thinks more of it than words can express. "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." When the Lord chose a nation to be the depository of His sacred oracles, He might have selected Egypt if He had willed to do so. Egypt was in the known world the oldest nation. Egypt contained the wisest and most civilised people of early times. Its very ruins are the wonder of the ages. Its records show an extraordinary progress in literature, architecture, and the arts and sciences. Egypt was also the most powerful of empires in the olden times. Before the banners of Assyria and Babylon and Medo-Persia came to the front, the dragon of Egypt was a mighty ensign. Yet the Lord did not choose the sons of Ham, but passed by Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba. The Lord chose the seed of Abraham, and the family of Jacob: He multiplied them, and instructed them, and made them to be His own peculiar people. In the course of history the claims of various countries came into collision with those of Israel, and Egypt proudly oppressed Israel. What did God do? Did He hesitate as to which of the two peoples should be preserved? No; the Lord brought out Israel, and turned His artillery upon Egypt. In the days of King Asa, the Ethiopians came up against Judah to the number of a million of men; but "they were destroyed before the Lord, and before His host": thus was Ethiopia given for Israel. Cambyses conquered Egypt, and destroyed many of its cities, and never since has there been a native prince sitting upon the throne of Pharaoh. God gave to the King of Persia, Egypt and the neighbouring cities as the ransom price of His people. Thus the Lord did of old on the behalf of His literal Israel, and what does this fact say to us? It means this—God's chosen are immeasurably precious in His sight. They are the centre of God's design. God's intent was to produce a race that should be honourable in His sight, and well-beloved of His soul. This design would be costly, even to Jehovah Himself. To carry out this purpose, men, having fallen, must be redeemed by blood. To carry out His Divine resolve He spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all. But even then men could not be saved unless the Holy Ghost should condescend to come and live in their bodies. Henceforth everything shall be sacrificed for us. God will give all that He has to save His beloved ones. He will make the whole o nature and providence subservient to the complete salvation of His chosen. Kings shall be born and buried; empires shall rise and fall; republics and systems shall come and go; and all shall be the scaffold for the building of the house of God, which is His Church. It is God's grandest, highest purpose to gather together in one the whole company of His redeemed in Christ Jesus their Lord, and to make

them like their Head. III. THE OUTCOME OF THIS. 1. If it be so, that the glorious God has really and of a truth loved us, His people, and valued us at a mighty price, then see how secure His people are! 2. Note, next, the honour which God puts upon them. God has put us poor sinners among His honourables. I know one who, in her unconverted state, had fallen into sad sin, and the remembrance thereof was painful; but the Lord removed the shame by laying home to her soul these gracious words, "Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable." 3. The certainty of the Lord's gathering together all His people. "I will bring thy seed," &c. (vers. 5–7). If God has determined to glorify Himself by us and in us, let us be in accord with Him. What love we ought to bear to God! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **I gave Egypt for thy ransom.**—*God's redemption of Israel:*—An amplification of the phrase, "I have redeemed thee" (ver. 1). (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Egypt, Ethiopia, Seba:*—"I give Egypt as thy ransom." The meaning appears to be that Cyrus will be compensated for the emancipation of Israel by the conquest of these African nations which did not belong to the Babylonian Empire. As a matter of fact, the conquest of Egypt was effected by Cambyses, the son and successor of Cyrus, although it is said to have been contemplated by Cyrus himself (Herod. i. 153), and it is actually (though wrongly) attributed to him by Xenophon. (*Prof J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Seba* (Gen. x. 7; Psa. lxxii. 10; chap. xlv. 14) was, according to Josephus, Meroë, the northern province of Ethiopia, lying between the Blue and the White Nile. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 4. **Since thou wast precious in My sight.**—*Precious, honourable, loved:*—"Because thou art precious in My sight, art honourable, and I love thee"—three co-ordinate clauses. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Precious!*—I. PRECIOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT IS MAN. This is a new view of life—not man's natural feeling. Precious as to the farmer land is which has the possibility of development with digging and draining, and so on,—precious as satisfying not the mere craving for usefulness, but the love of a great heart. II. WHEN ABLE TO RECOGNISE THIS PRECIOUSNESS IN GOD'S SIGHT WE BECOME HONOURABLE. Before we could recognise it we must be grafted into Christ by a true and living faith. This faith, then, makes us honourable. The honour of a Christian is in—1. Righteous living. 2. Zeal for the Christian cause. The honour of Christ was to have "the heathen for His heritage." Entering into this, the honour of Christians is to win souls; and their "crown of joy" in seeing many turning from following idols to the living God. 3. Having a conscience void of offence towards God and man. III. THE SEAL OF GOD'S LOVE IS THE GREATEST COMFORT TO THE CHRISTIAN HEART. IV. "I WILL GIVE MEN FOR THEE," &c. Nation after nation went down into the darkness before the conquering sword of Israel. God's pity, great as it is, spared not! So we have seen men who have lived; and when that tender, all-forgiving time came—when death laid his icy fingers upon his prey, conscience would not allow us to settle with the thought that in the great future all was well with them. If we cannot enter into God's inscrutable purposes in this respect we may at least feel that these pass into the arms of death "for us,"—*i.e.*, in the sense of being warnings to us. (*H. Rose Rae.*) *Precious, honourable, beloved:*—I. Believer, the first wonderful adjective of the text is applicable to thee; thou art "PRECIOUS." Notice how that preciousness is enhanced beyond the superlative degree by the next words, "precious in My sight." There are mock jewels now made which are so exactly like rubies, emeralds, and diamonds that even those who are connoisseurs of precious stones are deceived, and yet these imitations are not precious. They are not precious in the sight of the lapidary, who is able to put them to severer tests, for with him these mimicries are soon proved to be of little value. The degree of preciousness depends much upon the person who forms the judgment; and what estimate can be so accurate as that of God the infallible? What judgment can be so severely exacting as that of God the infinitely holy? This preciousness cannot arise from anything essentially and intrinsically precious in us by nature, for we confess freely that we are even as others in our natural estate. The quarry out of which we were hewn was no quarry of precious things, and the pit out of which we have been digged was no pit in which rare stones were glittering: we were taken from common clay, and out of the ordinary ruin of mankind; yet God saith we are precious, and the fact of our former degradation and fallen estate cannot gainsay the Divine declaration. How is this? It springs out of four considerations—1. We are precious in the sight of God because of the memories which cluster round each one of us. You are to God most precious, as the token and memorial of the death of the Well-beloved. 2. Things become precious sometimes

on account of the workmanship exercised upon them. Many an article has been in itself intrinsically of small account, but so much art has been exercised upon it, so much real work thrown into it, that the value has been increased indefinitely. Now, the Christian is precious to God on account of the workmanship that has been spent upon him. In divers ways the Great Worker has wrought mightily in us, and continued perseveringly to pursue His purpose. 3. Certain articles are precious because of their peculiar fashion. This was the case with the Portland vase, which to any common observer seemed to be of very small value, but because of the extreme beauty of the design, the greatest potter of the age was ready to pay his thousands to possess it. We are precious in God's sight, too, because of our fashion and form. We are to be made like unto Christ. 4. Things are precious often because of their relationship. The most precious thing a mother hath is her dear babe. Precious, therefore, in the sight of the Lord are His saints, because they are born in His household, by regeneration made to be His sons and daughters. II. Every child of God is "HONOURABLE." Every Christian is, in God's sight, right honourable and excellent because the Lord in His discriminating grace has made him precious. 1. Every Christian is honourably born. 2. The Christian, moreover, is honourable in rank. God has been pleased to take us from the dunghill to set us among princes. 3. Right honourable in their service are the saints. I know of no service that can be more distinguished than the doing of good. Methinks the very angels before the throne might envy us poor men who are permitted to talk of Christ, even though it be to little children. 4. Christians are honourable also in privilege. It was accounted an eminent honour when a nobleman had the right to go in to his king whenever he willed to proffer a request. Approach to the royal throne was always, among Orientals, considered to be the highest token of regard. You are especially honoured, O ye saints, for ye are "a people near unto Him." 5. And every child of God who is what he should be becomes through grace honourable by his achievements, and this is in some respects the highest form of honour, to be honoured for what you have been enabled to do, to wear a coat of arms which you have fairly won in battle, and hatchments that are not merely attributed to you by the heraldic pencil, but which are due to you because of your victorious feats of arms. To conquer sin, this is no small achievement; to keep down through a long life the corruptions of the flesh, to contend against the world and the devil, these are no deeds of carpet knights. And what an achievement it will be when Satan shall be bruised beneath our feet, as he shall be shortly. III. The last of these notable words is "BELOVED." "I have loved thee." God hath loved thee eternally. He has loved thee actively and effectually, given His Only-Begotten for thee—an unspeakable gift; given thee everything in Him—a boundless dower of love. He has loved thee pre-eminently, better than the angels, for unto which of them has He ever said, "Thou wast honourable, and I have loved thee"? He has loved thee unchangeably. He has loved thee immeasurably. These three things being put together, I want you, practically, as they are your own by faith, to make use of them in other senses. "Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." 1. My Saviour, dost thou say that? Why, those words Thou dost put into my mouth to give back to Thee. Thou also art precious in my sight. Is He not so—precious beyond compare? Therefore is He honourable in our esteem. Will you not honour Him? Shall it not be the continual strife of your soul to get Him renown? "Thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." You have loved Him, but, oh, how little! Look not back, then, except with penitence, but henceforth say: "Lord, Thou hast been honourable, I will love Thee. Forgive the past, kindle in my soul a fresh flame of grace." 2. When you have so used those words turn them in another direction. Apply them next to every child of God. Let us never think of the children of God in any other way than as honouring them. Some of them are very poor, many of them illiterate, some of them not altogether in temper, action, or creed what we might desire them to be; but if they be bought with the blood of Christ they are honourable. The Lord declares them so, and let us not treat them dishonourably. 3. You might use these words in reference to unconverted men and women. There is a certain sense in which they are applicable to all of woman born, for they possess immortal souls. If that be the case, how honourable all men become as objects of our zeal! "Honour all men." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The value and rank of the believer.*—One of the worst mistakes we could make would be to judge our condition before God by our outward circumstances. Know ye not that the ungodly have their portion in this life? As for the people of God, they are often in great trials. I. THE LORD

COUNTS HIS PEOPLE TO BE PRECIOUS. A child of God is often far other than precious in the sight of others. "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" Child of God! thou art precious in God's sight, and that is infinitely more than being precious to princes. You live in a little room alone, and few know you, and those who do know you do not think much of you; but the Lord says, "Thou art precious in My sight." How can this be? Read the first verse. "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel." 1. It is clear that we are precious to God because we are His creation. The first creation was marred upon the wheel by sin; it became a thing without honour, and came under the curse. But he that believes in Jesus has been created anew by the work of the Holy Ghost. God has in a very special sense created him. 2. He has gone beyond mere creation: having first created the clay, He has formed it. We are not half made or ill made in regeneration; we are formed as well as created. The Lord who has given us spiritual existence is daily giving us fashion and completeness. 3. But what next does He say? "I have redeemed thee." We have been bought with precious blood. 4. Another blessing of grace is mentioned in the chapter, and that is that God has called us. "I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." He called us, and we answered the call. 5. We have been ever since kept by His rich grace and preserved, and this also has endeared us to the Lord. Do you not think that if you are precious in Christ's sight, then everything that has to do with Him ought to be precious to you? Remember what Augustine said: he declared that he loved every man that had "*aliquid Christi*"—any thing of Christ—about him. Think once more. If you are precious in God's sight, do not despise yourself so as to fall into the follies and vanities which please other men. Nobility has its obligations. II. Being precious, He adds another epithet. "Since thou wast precious in My sight, THOU HAST BEEN HONOURABLE." How many of God's people were the reverse of honourable before they knew the Lord! Many a dishonourable thing they thought, and said, and did, and it is the dishonourable life that makes the dishonourable man. Let a poor child of God tell out how he believes that he is honourable. 1. We are honourable by birth. Some are proud because they have been born of fathers who have been made baronets, or elevated to the peerage in years gone by; thus by birth they are honourable. Descended from the King of kings, each saint has a lineage before which the pedigrees of princes grow stale and mean. 2. Next, we become honourable by our possessions. Men pay honour to those who are immensely rich. "All things are yours." What an estate is that which belongs to every heir of heaven, for we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"; and thus we become indeed honourable. 3. And the child of God becomes honourable in rank. A child of God is a prince of the Divine line. 4. We then become ennobled by our relationship. Jesus is "the first-born among many brethren"; and we as the younger brethren are all honourable. 5. We are honourable by calling, for He "hath made us kings and priests unto our God"; and these among men are the most noteworthy of all callings. 6. By Divine grace we have become honourable by character, for the Lord has sanctified His people. 7. Theirs is an honourable life; they live for an honourable purpose; they are quickened by an honourable spirit; they are wending their way through an honourable destiny on earth to glory and honour and immortality and life eternal. The lesson to be learned from it is, do not let any child of God be bashful, shamefaced, and cowardly in the presence of men of the world. III. "Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable, AND I HAVE LOVED THEE." The Lord has not only told you of His love in the secret of your soul, but He has publicly acted love to you. If God loves us so, shall we not love Him? (*Ibid.*) *The child of God should live a dignified life*:—Lions will not be found stealing little bits of meat like cats, or feeding on carrion like dogs. It is not for eagles to hawk for flies; and it is not for children of God to stoop below the glorious level of their new birth. (*Ibid.*) *A great date*:—Date your birthdays from your regeneration; bury the old nature, and live in the new. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Therefore will I give men for thee.**—*Peoples sacrificed for the Jews*:—"Mankind for thee, and peoples for thy life." All the world for this little people? It is intelligible only because this little people are to be for all the world. "Ye are My witnesses that I am God." "I will also give thee for a light to nations, to be My salvation to the ends of the earth." (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **I will bring thy seed from the east.**—*Obligations of Christians to labour for the conversion of the Jews*:—This prophecy looks far beyond the deliver-

ance of the Jews from their former captivity. It evidently points to that great and glorious deliverance which still awaits them. A deliverance that will eclipse and infinitely outshine their former deliverances from Egypt and from Babylon. Apply the passage to the recall and conversion of the Jews. I. OUR OBLIGATIONS, AS CHRISTIANS, TO ENGAGE IN THIS WORK. 1. Gratitude for the inestimable benefits which we have derived from them (Rom. iii. 1, 2, ix. 4, 5). 2. As a reparation of the cruel wrongs and injuries which we have inflicted upon them. Every Christian country is deep in this guilt, and every Christian country requires a national expiation of it. 3. From an ardent desire to promote the glory of God. II. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PROCEED AND PERSEVERE IN IT. To some, the attempt to convert the Jews may appear visionary; to others, inexpedient; but they who are acquainted with their Bibles must know that it is not hopeless. We are encouraged to attempt this work—1. From the testimony of prophecy. 2. From the very great attention which has already been excited among the Jews. 3. From the present signs of the times. III. THE GLORIOUS CONSEQUENCES THAT WILL RESULT FROM THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS. 1. To the world. It will be the commencement of a new and blessed era to all nations. 2. To the Church of God. The conversion of the Jews shall be the means of bringing in the whole fulness of the Gentiles. (1) To God's covenant with Abraham and with his seed you owe all that you are, and all that you hope to be. (2) When Christ sent forth His apostles to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, He particularly charged them to "begin at Jerusalem." (*Earl Gibbee, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **I will say to the north, Give up.** — *A double challenge* :—My intention is rather to utilise than to expound the text. I. The first counsel is—GIVE UP. 1. With some of you it is imperative that you give up your prejudices. So have you mis-estimated true religion, that you have been accustomed to denounce it as cant, and to declaim the professors of it as hypocrites. Give up this blind bias, and give the Gospel a fair hearing. Should it turn out to be an imposture, you will at least be the better able to expose its fictions, after having studied its facts; but should it happen to be genuine and true, how ill will it be for you if you continue to despise it! 2. Give up in like manner your self-righteousness. 3. Give up your sins. You cannot be saved from their consequence if you cling to their company. 4. Give up delays. 5. I might well say to some, give up quibbling. You have never yet come to the point with your own conscience. You have always been so deft at finding out knots and raising questions. What is the good of it? If you are never saved till you get every problem solved, you will never be saved at all. If a vessel were breaking in pieces on yonder shore, and the rocket apparatus had fired a rope into the middle of the vessel, would you not think the crew to be insane if they said to one another, "We do not understand how it is that the rocket apparatus manages this"? Oh, but they just twist the rope round the mast, get a holdfast, and begin to swing themselves ashore. 6. Give up, you troubled ones; give up despondency; give up the thought that there is no hope; give up the suspicion that Jesus cannot forgive. II. KEEP NOT BACK. 1. Keep not back from attending the means of grace. 2. When you do attend the house of the Lord, keep not back from a simple obedience of the Gospel. 3. When you have looked to Christ, keep not back from the mercy-seat. You will begin to pray, perhaps, and find yourself stammering and trembling, but keep not back. Your old sins will half choke you in the recollection of them, but keep not back. If anybody saw you trying to pray they would say, "What you, you old wretch, you trying to pray!" Oh! but keep not back. 'Tis mercy calls you; come and pray. 4. When you have really trusted in Christ, and have learned to pray, then keep not back from coming forward and making a profession of your faith in Jesus. Be prompt, if you would be precise in serving the Lord. "I made haste," said David, "and delayed not to keep Thy commandments." 5. To those who are saved, and have avowed their conversion, let me say, Keep not back from the Lord's service. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Bring My sons from far.**—*The Church encouraged and exhorted* :—These words were spoken with the view of encouraging the Church: "Fear not; for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east," &c. The Lord loves His Church, and He loves to see her full of courage and confidence. He intends that His cause and kingdom shall prosper in the world. God has leisure. I. THE LORD HAS CHILDREN FAR AWAY. "Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth." 1. Some are far away in the matter of locality. They are not dwelling where the

Gospel is preached; some of them are where roads have not as yet been made, and the commerce of civilisation has not come. 2. He also has many sons and daughters who are far off in a worse sense than this; they are far off as to character, as opposed to God as darkness is to light. 3. There are some who are far off in another sense; it is not so much character that puts them far off from God, as their not being in the way of hearing the Gospel. The kingdom of God has come nigh to most of you. But there are great numbers of persons, even in our own land, who are not in the way of hearing the Gospel. It happens, sometimes, that the more unlikely ones are the first to be converted. 4. The Lord Jesus Christ saves by His grace some who are far off in their own apprehension. It is not really true that they have been more sinful than others, but they think they have. So you see that the Lord has children who are far off from Him in several senses. What does a father or a mother do when the son is a long way off? Why, they like to hear all they can about him; especially, they love to hear from him,—to get a letter or a message from their boy himself. Well, now, our Heavenly Father watches over all His poor wandering children. II. THE LORD IS BRINGING HOME SOME OF THESE FAR-OFF ONES. In our text He gives this command, "Bring My sons from far." To whom is this command spoken? I think we shall be right if we say that it is spoken much in the same way in which the Lord said, "Let there be light," "and there was light." His fiat did the deed. So God says, "Bring My sons from far," and therefore we may be sure that they will be brought to Him. 1. Providence obeys this command. Everything that happens in the mysterious movements of Providence is operating for the bringing in of His chosen. The world is all scaffolding; the Church of Christ is the true building. The like is true on a small scale. All manner of afflictions that come to men are sent to touch their conscience, and to bring them back to God. 2. This seems to me to be a charge given to all God's people, as well as to providence, "'Bring My sons from far.' You know Me; you love Me; so, look after My wandering children." 3. But this command would be of no force unless my text were a fiat. In consistency with this command, the Holy Spirit goes forth, in ways known to Himself, and He brings God's sons from far, and His daughters from the ends of the earth. III. THIS IS SAID FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD'S CHURCH. 1. This command has a very intimate connection with Christ's Church. Our text says, "Bring My sons and My daughters"; but the 5th verse says, "I will bring thy seed." Then, saved souls are the seed of the Church as well as the sons and daughters of God. God puts a wonderful honour upon human instrumentality. 2. The Church of Christ has a further interest in these far-off sons and daughters from the fact that not only are they her seed, but they are coming home to her. They will help to strengthen the true Church of God. 3. These far-off ones, who are being brought home, will greatly help us when they do come. Read the 7th verse: "Even every one that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory." That is the kind of converts that we want, those who are created for God's glory. "But," say some of the older friends, "these young converts are so imprudent." Bless them! The Lord increase their imprudence, for that is one of the grandest things in the world when it is sanctified. It was most imprudent, on the part of the Apostle Paul, to go into those cities where he was stoned, and dragged out, and left for dead. It was most imprudent of him to lose all his reputation and his standing among men simply that he might preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. "But, sir," say the objectors, "these young people, who are coming into the Church, do not know much." For the matter of that, we do not know much either, so we cannot keep them out on that ground. "But they have zeal without knowledge." Yes, and it is quite possible to have knowledge without zeal. Both of those things are bad when alone; but if you have the knowledge, and they bring the zeal, you have only to trade with them a little in the way of barter to your mutual benefit. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 7. **I have created him for My glory.**—*The glory of God the end of man's creation and redemption:*—What am I? For what purpose was I created? Am I answering the great end of my existence?—are questions which should be frequently proposed by every rational being. I. THE GREAT END OF JEHOVAH IN THE CREATION OF MAN WAS THE MANIFESTATION OF HIS OWN GLORY. By the glory of God we understand the display of His Divine perfections. II. IN THE SCHEME OF HUMAN REDEMPTION THE GLORY OF GOD IS AGAIN STRIKINGLY

MANIFESTED. The glory of God appears—1. In their redemption. 2. In the application of its blessings by the Holy Ghost—in the spiritual renovation of man. 3. In the endeared relation into which those who have been thus redeemed and sanctified are admitted. They are made the "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty"; and their disposition and character correspond with their distinguished privileges. III. THE GLORY OF GOD IS THE GREAT END WHICH ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE TO SEEK TO PROMOTE. 1. By an increased acquaintance with the Divine perfections, as they are manifested in the work of creation and redemption, and as they are revealed in the Sacred Scriptures, and in the person and character of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2. By a cordial reception of all that God has revealed and promised. 3. By cheerful obedience to His commands. 4. By active efforts in the service of God, and by an entire consecration of all we have to Him. (*Essex Remembrancer.*)

Ver. 10. **Ye are My witnesses.**—*What is a witness?*—One who testifies—who gives evidence, unfolds, clears up, makes plain, and helps men to right decisions in cases of disputed claims, or where personal integrity is assailed. There are cases on record where such men have been thanked in complimentary terms by the judge, for the clear, firm, straightforward way in which they have given evidence; and it has been seen that but for that witness's knowledge of the facts of the case, and the fearless manner in which he told the whole truth, as far as he knew, and nothing but the truth, there would have been a miscarriage of justice. And so, on the other hand, record is supplied of the false swearing of witnesses, whereby the innocent have been condemned and the guilty have triumphed. Nay more, where the witness has been full of nervous fear, confusion, and hesitancy, and has given his evidence in such a feeble, limping, contradictory manner that his whole testimony has been discredited, and he has vitally injured the cause he professed to serve, so that his friends sincerely wished he had been at the Antipodes at the time instead of in the witness-box. A good witness is of immense value and importance. The term "witness" is a strong one, one of the strongest, and throbs with life and energy. Standing out for the truth; avowing, declaring firmly; unawed by fear, unmoved by flattery; inflexible to all blandishments; above all price; whom money cannot buy, and sophistry cannot disturb; who will tell the truth at any cost—these are some of the qualities of a good witness. (*J. Higgins.*) *Witnesses:*—The term "witnesses" is very large and full, and covers the entire ground of evidences. All things in heaven and earth are full of voices bearing witness for the living God. The whole universe, human history, governments, philosophy, science, art, and institutions, are witnessing for God. But God selects and addresses one class in the text. "Ye," men of Israel, "are My witnesses." These words suggest the high honour, as well as the great responsibility, of a Christian profession. I. FOR WHOM DO YOU WITNESS? God. 1. A primary qualification of a true witness is, an intelligent faith in God. You are called upon to give evidence on behalf of another, but you know little of him, only by repute and inference, and your knowledge of the case in dispute is mainly circumstantial; then, you cannot give your evidence in that clear, ready, candid, and telling manner that a friend can who knows the man personally and closely, and who has the highest regard for his integrity and uprightness, and who is well acquainted also with the whole case down to its very minutiæ, and who has a clear, settled conviction that justice and right, to the fullest extent, are on the side of his friend. Such a man speaks from knowledge, as well as conviction; he testifies what he knows, and speaks what he has seen; and when the case is heard you feel that your witnessing, compared with his, is but as the drops to the ocean. So it is with the man who has only an intellectual, as compared with the man who has a practical knowledge of God; the latter can testify from personal acquaintance as well as unbounded faith. 2. Not only is faith needed to make you a successful witness, but your courage will be tested in this daily testifying. You are placed in a world whose temper and principles are hostile to sacred things, and while you witness for God, your whole life will be a constant testifying against the world's customs, and an open conflict with what it accounts its best possessions; and if you will be a faithful and true witness you will often find yourself going right in the teeth of its tastes, affections, and lusts, and you will discover that the days of idolatry and martyrdom are not yet past, and that if you will faithfully give your evidence for the pure and true, you will need a hero's courage and a martyr's faith. You shall have your hours of rest and sweet communings that you may grow strong to do and suffer the Father's will, but the law of the kingdom is that you must

gather in order that you may scatter. The very things of which you are witnesses will show you what you may expect from men, and what they will demand from you in courage and faith. For what do you witness? God—His nature and claims; the Bible—its inspiration and authenticity; Christ—His atoning sacrifice for sin, &c. Will such testimonies as these win you thanks and praise from your fellows, or will they scatter roses along your path? 3. See the dignity of this witnessing. "My witnesses, saith the Lord." (1) You are God's witnesses by Divine choice and appointment. (2) By solemn obligation. Obligation is placed upon us by the very name we bear to go out and invite others to the feast. Having found the pearl of great price, shall we hoard it up and not tell others where a like precious gem may be found without impairing our own riches? "Freely ye have received, freely give." (3) By pledge and covenant. Have we not engaged to be His followers and to do His bidding? II. THE MANNER OF THIS WITNESSING. How do men witness for God? 1. By the living voice. 2. By the eloquence of a holy life. This I take to be the most powerful testimony, and touches the greatest number of agents. 3. By active service in His cause; and by His cause I mean all and everything that in any way touches the true interests of the great human family. Then, how wide the field of labour and service, and how loud the call to the strong, the hardy, the daring. Witness for God, young men, by deeds of noble chivalry; emulate your sires. Witness for God, ye strong men in Israel, who stand to-day in the meridian of life, by faithfully devoting all the energy and force and fire of your being to His blessed service. Witness for God, ye fathers and mothers, as you sit in the pensive shades of evening, by recounting His faithfulness to you throughout your day; the recital will inspire higher hopes of nobler conquests in the younger soldiers of the Cross. 4. By patient resignation when called to suffer for the truth. The prophets, the apostles, the reformers, the Huguenots, the Covenanters, the men of the *Mayflower*, and some in our own country have stood bravely, and endured their sufferings nobly when the fierce tide of persecution set in against them. (*Ibid.*) *Witnesses for Christ*:—I. TO BE WITNESS FOR CHRIST IS A SPECIAL DUTY OF ALL CHRISTIANS. 1. That is an unwarranted limitation which practically relegates oral witness-bearing to the ministry. The text was spoken to all Israel (ver. 2). 2. Christ and the Word of God claim the testimony of His people, humble and great; and the duty has been recognised and performed. (1) The case of the apostles (Acts i. 8, 22). The apostles' acceptance and discharge of this duty (Acts ii. 32, iii. 15, iv. 20, 33). In after years, when writing their epistles, they were still claiming to be witnesses (1 Pet. v. 1; 1 John i. 2). (2) The case of Paul. He was ordained to be a witness (Acts xxii. 15). He, therefore, made such witness-bearing the work of his life (Acts xxvi. 22). (3) The case of John the Baptist (John i. 7, 15, 32, v. 33). This witness-bearing is the duty, not only of the great, but also of the humble. (4) The woman of Samaria (John iv. 39). (5) The case of the fierce demoniac (Mark v. 19). (6) The command to every one (Rev. xxii. 17). 3. A query. Have you been witnessing for the Lord? II. EFFECTIVE WITNESS-BEARING. 1. It is essential for a witness to have some definite knowledge or experience, and to tell it. (1) Previous, therefore, to testifying for Christ, there must be an experimental knowledge of His salvation. (2) A witness must not only have an experience; he must tell it. He must tell it with the purpose of convincing others by his testimony. This is not a difficult duty which can be performed only by the learned or the great or the wealthy, but one within the ability of every Christian, even the humblest. (Acts iv. 13.) How easy it is to tell the things which have happened to us! How do men seem to delight in telling their experiences! Shall he alone, who is commanded to tell what "great things the Lord hath done for him," say "I can't," or "I won't," or "I am ashamed"? 2. The value of such testimony to a fact. (1) Naturally great and conclusive—more convincing than an argument, and the only way to reach many minds. (2) Yet altogether dependent upon the character of the witness. In the courts the question is, Is the witness of a truthful character? Much more must the value of a Christian's testimony depend upon his possessing a consistent, Christian character. 3. The help afforded by the Holy Ghost for effective witness-bearing. (1) He gives courage and boldness in testifying. (2) He gives power and effectiveness. (3) He gives corroborating testimony (John xv. 26, 27). III. THE HUMILITY AND THE HONOUR OF A WITNESS-BEARER FOR THE LORD. 1. How humble an appointment must this have seemed to the disciples who, full of anticipations of the establishment by Christ of an earthly kingdom transcending in its glory the kingdom of Solomon, were questioning which "should be greatest." Not to be a governor, or a judge, or treasurer, but simply a witness!

Is this a position too humble for you? Do you look down upon it? 2. Yet what glory and honour belong to it! Into what company does it introduce us! Of Christ, the faithful and true witness; of the Holy Spirit, who shall testify of Christ; of the apostles, who were witnesses; and the martyrs. And in eternity shall those who confess Him here be confessed of Him. Those who suffer with Him for their testimony shall also reign with Him in His glory. (*W. P. Swartz.*) *God's witnesses*:—I. SOME OF THE QUESTIONS UPON WHICH CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO GIVE EVIDENCE IN FAVOUR OF THEIR GOD. These questions are the most weighty which can be discussed. 1. One of the first is this, Is there such a thing now-a-days as a distinct interposition of God on behalf of man, in answer to believing prayer? The world ridicules the idea. Suppose I call Mr. George Müller, of Bristol. He would say, "Look at those three orphan houses, containing no less than one thousand one hundred and fifty orphan children, who are entirely supported by funds sent to me in answer to prayer. Look," says he, "at this fact, that when the water was dried up in Bristol, and the waterworks were not able to serve sufficient to the people, I, with my more than a thousand children dependent upon me, never asked any man for a drop of water, but went on my knees before God, and a farmer, who was neither directly nor indirectly asked by me, called at my door the next hour and offered to bring us water; and when he ceased because his supplies were dried up, instead of telling anybody, I went to my God and told Him all about it, and another friend offered to let me fetch water from his brook." Müller is no solitary specimen; we can each of us tell of like events in our own history. 2. There is a question, also, as to the ultimate results of present affliction. The world holds as a theory, that if there be a God, He is very often exceedingly unkind; that He is severe to the best of men, and that some men are the victims of a cruel fate; that they are greatly to be pitied, because they have to suffer much without compensating profit. Now, the Christian holds, first of all, that the woes of sinners are punishments, and are very different from the chastening sorrows of believers. Of these last he believes that all things work together for good to them that love God. What is your testimony with regard to this as a matter of experience? How have you found it? I must speak for myself, and say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." All of you, who have sounded the deeps of soul-trouble, and have enjoyed the presence of Jesus, can distinctly testify the same. 3. A third point very much in dispute is as to the joyfulness of a true believer's life. The world's theory is, that we are a very miserable set of people who take to religion from the necessity of a naturally melancholy disposition. What is your testimony, Christian? Well, we can say if we be melancholy, joyous people must be very joyful indeed. I saw a Baptist minister this week who was "passing rich on forty pounds a year"; owing no man anything. I told him I hoped he would not die with the secret, for I should like to learn the art of keeping house on forty pounds a year. But he said to me, when I smiled at his salary, "You see before you the happiest man out of heaven"; and I know I did too, for his face showed that he meant what he said. True godliness is our natural element now that we have a new nature given us by the Spirit of God. 4. Another point in dispute refers to the moral tendencies of Christianity. There is a growing belief that the preaching of the doctrine of free grace has a tendency to make men think little of sin, and that especially the free invitations of the Gospel to the very vilest of sinners, and the declaration that whoso believeth in Jesus shall be saved, has a tendency to make men indulge in the worst of crimes. Our testimony is, and we speak positively here, that there can be nothing which exerts so sanctifying an influence upon the heart of man, as the doctrine of the love of God in Christ Jesus. And if ye seek proofs, look around. When do you hate sin most? At the foot of the Cross. When do you love holiness best? Is it not when you feel that God has blotted out your sins like a cloud? No truth can so subdue the human mind as the majesty of infinite love. 5. Again, it has been whispered—nay, it has been boasted—that the Christian religion has reached its prime, and though it had an influence upon the world at one time, it is now going down, and we want something a little more juvenile and vigorous to stir the world and produce noble deeds. Now is the time for true believers to vindicate the manliness and force of their faith. It is not true that Christianity has lost its power; and we must make this clear as noonday. The Gospel can nourish heroes as of old; it could furnish martyrs to-morrow, if martyrs were required to garnish Smithfield. There are still a host of facts to prove that the gospel has not lost its power over the minds of men. 6. It is our

daily business to be witnesses for God on another question, as to whether or no faith in the blood of Jesus Christ really can give calm and peace to the mind. Our hallowed peace must be proof of that. 7. The last testimony we shall probably bear will answer the question, whether Christ can help a man to die well or not. We will prove that when the time comes; but how many there have been among us whose names we venerate, who have died rejoicing in the love of Jesus. II. SOME SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE MODE OF WITNESSING. 1. You must witness if you be a Christian. You may try to shirk it if you will, but you must witness, for you are *sub pœna*: that is to say, you will suffer for it if you do not. 2. Every witness is required to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Speak the truth, but let your life be true as well as your words. Live so that you need not be afraid to have the shutters taken down, that men may look right through your actions. Tell out for God all the truth as it is in Jesus, and let your life proclaim the whole teaching of truth. Let it be nothing but the truth. I am afraid many Christians tell a great deal which is not true; their life is contrary to their words; and though they speak truth with their lips, they speak falsehoods with their hands. Suppose, for instance, I draw a miserable face, and say, "God's people are a blessed people," nobody believes me; and if I say, "Yes, religion has a sanctifying influence upon its professors and possessors," and put my hand into my neighbour's pocket in any sort of way, who will believe my testmony? I may have spoken the truth, but I am also speaking something that is not the truth, and I am thus rendering my witness of very small effect. 3. When the witness is before the court, his direct evidence is always the best. Many professing Christians only give witness of what they have read in books; they have no vital, experimental acquaintance with the things of God. Second-hand Christianity is one of the worst things in the world. 4. A witness must take care not to damage his own case. How many professed witnesses for God make very telling witnesses the other way. 5. Every witness must expect to be cross-examined. "He that is first in his own cause," says Solomon, "seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him." You know how a counsel takes a man and turns him inside out, and though he was one colour before, he looks quite another directly afterwards. Now you, as God's witnesses, will be cross-examined. Watch, therefore, carefully watch. Temptation will be put in your way: the devil will cross-examine you. You say you love God; he will set carnal joys before you, and see whether you cannot be decoyed from your love to God. You said, you trusted in your heavenly Father; Providence will cross-examine you. A trial will dash upon you. How now? Can you trust Him? You said, religion was a joyous thing; a crushing misfortune will befall you. How now? Can you rejoice when the fig-tree does not blossom, and the flocks are cut off, and the cattle are dead? By this species of examination true men will be made manifest, but the deceiver will be detected. What cross-examinations did the martyrs go through! What fiery questions had they to answer! III. THERE IS ANOTHER WITNESS BESIDE YOU. "Ye are My witnesses, and My Servant whom I have chosen." Who is that? Why, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Witnesses for God are not solitary. When they seem alone, there is One with them whom Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fiery furnace with the three holy children. "The fourth is like unto the Son of God." "Fear not," Christ may well say to all His faithful witnesses, "I am with you, the faithful and true Witness." Let us remark, concerning Christ's life, that He witnessed the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Would you see God's truth? Observe how Jesus Christ, in all His actions, with a sacred simplicity, with a transparent sincerity, writes His heart out in His every act. What testimony you have to God's holiness in the life of Christ! In Him was no sin. What witness-bearing, too, there is in the life of Christ to Divine justice! Above all, read Christ's witness to God's love. The entire circumference of Divine excellence is contained in the life of Christ. You are to be witnesses for Christ, and Christ is to be a witness with you. If you want to know how to discharge your duty, look at Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The church a testimony for God to the world*:—I. IT HAS EVER BEEN A REPOSITORY OF THE SACRED DOCUMENTS—the sacred records of the existence of prophecies long before the events to which they relate, of which they can bring satisfactory evidence. II. CHRISTIANS BY HABITUALLY MEETING TOGETHER FOR DIVINE WORSHIP, FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH AND THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, are perpetually presenting a witness for God. III. THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN IS A "LIVING EPISTLE." (*T. Binney, D.D.*) *The Christian's silent testimony for God*:—The individual believer, by mingling with the world day by day

—without ever speaking a word about religion, it may be—by what he is, and by what he does, is bearing witness for God. By the holiness that marks the man's life, others may learn something of the holiness of the God whom he serves; by his integrity, by his high appreciation of the great principles of eternal justice, he may learn something of the justice of God; by the benevolence of the man, by the mode and kind of that benevolence, by his yearning anxiety over the souls of men and the moral misery of the species, by the devotion of his abilities to the removal of these, by his benevolent attachment to those great institutions which are intended to diffuse the knowledge of God's Word, men may learn something of that God who would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth; by his superiority to worldly motives and things, and mere sensual gratifications, by his living above the world, by enjoying a blessedness and placidity which worldly men can never penetrate, they may learn something of the spirituality of God, and the blessedness which God can communicate to those whom He makes His own. (*Ibid.*) "*Ye are My witnesses!*"—The special function of witness-bearing is not confined to the Jewish people; but, by the express words of the Lord, it is shared by the Church. The Church and the Holy Spirit together bear joint witness to the death, resurrection, and eternal life of the Divine man. This is also the function of the individual believer: not to argue and dispute, not to demonstrate and prove, not to perform the part of the advocate; but to live in direct contact with things which the Holy Ghost reveals to the pure and childlike nature. And then to come forth attesting that these things are so. Just as mathematical axioms have no need to be argued, but simply to be stated, and the statement is sufficient to establish them, because of the affinity between them and the construction of the human mind; so it is sufficient to bear witness to truth, amid systems of falsehood and error. And directly it is uttered, there is an assent in the conscience illumined by the Holy Spirit, which rises up and declares it to be the very truth of God. There are three points on which the Christian soul is called to give witness. I. LET US WITNESS TO A LOVE THAT NEVER TIRES. At the close of the previous chapter we have a terrible picture of Israel as a people robbed and spoiled, snared in holes, and hid in prison-houses; upon whom God was pouring the fury of His anger. Then most unexpectedly God turns to them, and says, "Fear not! thou art Mine; thou hast been precious in My sight, and honourable and beloved." 1. "Thou art Mine." Our deepest emotions express themselves in the simplest words. 2. "Precious." Preciousness is due to hardships undergone, purchase money and time expended, or pains of workmanship; and each of these three conditions has been marvellously exemplified in the dealings of thy God. 3. "Honourable." Demean thyself as one whom God delights to honour. It ill becomes princes of the blood-royal to lie in the gutter. 4. "Beloved." In the darkest hours of life, when thy feet have almost gone from under thee, and no sun, or moon, or stars appear, never doubt that God's love is not less tenacious than that which suggested the epitaph on Kingsley's tomb, "We love; we have loved; we will love." To know all this, and to bear witness to it; to attest it in the teeth of adverse circumstances, of bitter taunts, and of utter desolation; to persist in the affirmation amid the cross-questioning of a cynical age; never to falter, never to listen to the suggestion of doubt; never to allow the expression of the face to suggest that God is hard in His dealings—this is the mission of the believer. II. LET US WITNESS TO A PURPOSE THAT NEVER FALTERS. God does not say, "Think of what was done yesterday"; He goes back on the purposes of eternity; the deeds of Bethlehem and Calvary; the everlasting covenant; the whole trend of His dealings with us. Is it likely that a purpose reaching back into the blue azure of the past will be lightly dropped? It is our duty to bear witness to the far-reach of a purpose that moves in a slowly-ascending spiral to its end. III. LET US WITNESS TO A DELIVERANCE THAT NEVER DISAPPOINTS. We might have expected the verse would run, "Thou shalt never pass through the waters, or through the river; thou shalt never have to walk through the fire!" But so far from this, it seems taken as a matter of course that there will be the waters and the fire; the overflowing floods of sorrow; the biting flame of sarcasm and hate. God's people are not saved from trial, but in it. We must bear our testimony to this also, that we may clear the character of God from the aspersions of the ungodly. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Witnesses to God:*—The most High has many witnesses to Himself. His works. "That Thy name is great, Thy wondrous works declare." Especially the heavens. They "declare the glory of God." His providential care of men. "He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good," &c. The moral nature of men. "Their conscience also bearing witness," &c. But His people

are God's conscious, voluntary, grateful, affectionate, and effective witnesses. I. THE SUBSTANCE AND MATTER OF OUR WITNESS. To what are we to testify? 1. To man's spiritual nature and destiny. Witness abounds to man's bodily wants, in the arrangements for their supply; to his social nature, in the institutions of civilised life; to his intellectual being, in books, schools, and colleges; to his artistic faculties, in picture-galleries, museums, &c.; and alas! to his evil nature and habits, in the courts of law, the police and military forces, &c. It is the office of the Church in this world to testify that man has a nature capable of knowing, loving, and serving his heavenly Father. 2. To God's being and character. 3. To the Gospel of Christ. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me," said the Lord Jesus to His disciples, before His ascension. To Christ's person, character, and doctrine, His people are bound to testify. They whom the Lord first commissioned, "with great power gave witness to the resurrection of Christ." It is the privilege of Christians to tell of the provision made in Jesus for the restoration of men to the Divine favour and image. II. THE MODE OF OUR WITNESS. How are God's people to bear the witness required? 1. By speech. 2. By the silent testimony of the life. An unworldly and self-denying life, a gentle and compassionate spirit;—these are effective methods of witnessing to a selfish and sinful world. III. THE CHARACTER OF OUR WITNESS. 1. Christians are competent witnesses, having a personal and experimental knowledge of that to which they testify. 2. They are truthful witnesses. Their power lies in their testifying to facts, not to fables, fictions, fancies. 3. They are consistent witnesses; there is no swerving from their evidence; and there is an instructive harmony between their testimony and the principles of their life. 4. They are bold and fearless witnesses. Religion is sometimes unfashionable or unpopular. IV. THE SPHERE OF OUR WITNESS. To whom is this testimony to be borne? 1. Christians are called to be witnesses to one another; for mutual edification. 2. To nominal, but erring and lukewarm disciples, who need the powerful witness of a living Church. 3. To the unbelieving world. Here is the vast sphere of the Church's labour. Practical lessons—1. Consider the high honour of the Christian's calling. 2. Remember the responsibility attaching to this office. "Freely ye have received, freely give." 3. Let hearers of the Word receive and act upon the witness that is borne. What heavier condemnation can there be than that of those to whom it must be said,—"Ye receive not our witness!" (*J. Radford Thomson, M.A.*)

God's witnesses (with Acts v. 32, "We are witnesses"):—I. THE WITNESS BORNE BY THE JEWS IS ONE OF THE MOST MARVELLOUS OF MIRACLES. 1. They stood out in the presence of the whole world; selected, chosen, taught, disciplined, separate. 2. They were the recipients of the traditions of God. To them was entrusted the sacred law, the symbolical representation of God's attributes, purposes, and goodness. 3. They were the mediums of prophecy. Through them the Divine Will was heard speaking in accents of warning, mercy, and love. II. THE GENTILE CHURCH WAS APPOINTED TO DEVELOP, CARRY ON, AND COMPLETE THE WORK BEGUN BY THE JEWS. The work entrusted to them is of infinite importance. 1. The Church is God's candlestick in the midst of our evil and dark world. It bestows the radiance of everlasting light on all around. 2. The Church is God's sun, that warms the dead and cold hearts of men into life. National life would freeze into eternal death were it not for this agency. 3. The Church is the salt of the earth, keeping it from moral putrefaction. Society would rot without this antiseptic influence. (*Homilist.*)

Anthropomorphism:—Granting that there is a Divine Being of whom we can at best know exceedingly little, we have nothing to draw upon for our conceptions of Him but the best and highest of the phenomena of the universe within reach of our observation; and we have no language in which to express our conceptions but that which is more or less anthropomorphic. And it is not only necessary to do this in order to satisfy our natural aspirations, but it is eminently becoming so to do. For it accords best with the demands of reason, and also with our instincts of piety and reverence. Anthropomorphic conceptions of God are not therefore necessarily false because they are anthropomorphic; nor are they necessarily false because they are very inadequate. They may be true as far as they go, and may be trusted provisionally till more light and wider experience enable us to relinquish them for truer conceptions. It is very important to this argument to keep continually before our minds the fact of man's superiority and supremacy over the whole portion of the universe within human ken. With all its grandeur and glory and benignant power, we put the sun lower in the scale of being than the poor, frail man who owes his life and all its blessings to its heat and light. And why is this, if not because we have found no trace in the sun of consciousness or intellect; still

less of affection and moral sense? 1. Man's superiority over other animals is admitted to consist chiefly in the comparatively enormous preponderance of his reasoning faculties—which have at length given rise to articulate language, to literature and to abstract reasoning, to say nothing of the infinite variety and number of skilful inventions. 2. Man is also distinguished from the lower animals by the possession of a moral sense, which means not a mere category of things which he may, and of things which he may not, do, but a sense that he is bound to do what is believed to be right and because it is right, even though he may not personally benefit by it. 3. Man is distinguished by the capacity for an altogether nobler affection than that usually manifested by the other animals. It is true, they share with us the possession of sexual and parental and sometimes of social love, and under the influence of domestication are capable of the purest and most devoted friendships, both for man and for their fellow-creatures; but man is capable of the highest known form and degree of love, and has manifested heroic devotion for his fellow-man such as no animals have ever shown. 4. Man is by nature religious, and though he himself is the noblest being on earth, yet he persists in believing in some One infinitely higher than himself, to whom, in some yet undefinable way, he and all creatures owe their being, on whose bounty all things depend, whose will it is the main duty of life to discover and obey, and who is conscious of our heart's reverence and love. That man pictures to himself a God proves one of two things; either that he is, in this particular, inferior or superior to the other animals. If there be a God, corresponding however imperfectly with man's ideal, then it is a mark of superiority to have imagined one; but if there be no God, it is a mark of inferiority to have made such a frightful departure from the truth, to have committed such a blunder. So long as external nature was regarded as superior, it was natural and rational for man to conceive of the forms or forces of nature as deities. But when the superiority of man dawned upon the human mind, by reason of its own progress in knowledge and goodness, then the symbols of deity were no longer to be drawn from the outer world, but from man himself, his reason, his conscience, and his heart. Why? Because these were the highest forms of existence known to him. So it must be Anthropomorphism or Atheism. Make what provision he will mentally, make what concessions to his own conscious infirmity, make what margin of error for inevitable ignorance, his God must be like himself. So far like as to think, and to know and to be capable of communion and affection with those who seek His face. Only let us beware of rushing into the opposite error of supposing that the most perfect man that ever lived is good enough or great enough to be a perfect representation of God, who is as far above the "brightest and best of the sons of the morning" as the heavens are higher than the earth. There are grave difficulties in the moral government of the world; in fact, if this world be the end of existence for many living creatures, men included, there would be much to shock our moral sense and lead us to impute either imbecility or criminal injustice to the Author and Governor of the world. Now, we have two means of surmounting these difficulties, but only through Anthropomorphism. (1) There is the conscience which believers in God regard as having a Divine authority—not to lay down specific rules for conduct, but to give supreme sanction to the claims of duty when perceived. We naturally attribute conscience, or a reverence for the right, to the Author and Lord of our consciences; and this is absolutely essential to our conception of God. This is one help to us in facing the moral difficulties of the world. It gives us time. It enables us to say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (2) The other help is that man in his best estate perceives the superiority of goodness over happiness, knows also by experience how many of the noblest blessings come to us disguised as pain and trouble and even sin; moreover, he knows full well that he would never, if he could help it, inflict any pain or injury upon any creature but for its own ultimate good, while he would put himself to the greatest pain in inflicting it upon others if he saw no other way of securing that final good. Now, piety and reverence enable us to project this goodness of heart into the ideal world, and to attribute to God the same inflexible devotion to the well-being of His creatures, and to be assured that God has resources of which we know nothing, whereby the inequalities and injustice of the present order will one day be fully justified by the end achieved. And when confronted by the reproach of Anthropomorphism, our only reply can be, "Do you think God can possibly be below the highest moral standard of His creatures?" "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways and His

thoughts than our thoughts." (*C. Voysey, M.A.*) *Witnesses for God:*—"Ye," men of Judah, people of Israel, "are My witnesses"—witnesses that I am, and witnesses of what I am. The nations round about you worship idols. All the world hath corrupted itself, and gone astray, and worships and serves the creatures more than the Creator. For more than a thousand years ye have been My witnesses. Such is the force and import of our text. But God has other witnesses likewise. "The invisible things of Him, even His eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen, being revealed by the things which He hath made." We call on you, young Englishmen and Englishwomen, for your own souls' sake, for your country's sake, and for the world's sake, to become witnesses for God. In order to which these three things are necessary—I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. If you would know Him you must study the Book in which He is revealed. II. STRONG FAITH IN GOD AND IN HIS CHRIST. Moses could not have witnessed for God as he did, nor could Paul, nor Peter, without such faith. The morals and practices and spirit of our age render a deep and abiding faith essential to a stable and successful witnessing for God. Now, such faith you cannot have by merely wishing to have it, or by sighing after it. It is born of light, and nursed in light. To be of the highest, truest, strongest order, it must be both of the intellect and of the heart. III. A WHOLE-HEARTED DECISION FOR GOD. "Be a whole man in everything," said Joseph John Gurney to his son,—"a whole man in the playground and a whole man in the schoolroom." We must be whole men in our witnessing for God, not two-minded but one-minded, the conscience not divided from the will, and the will not divided from the conscience; the lips not divided from the heart, nor the heart from the lips, nor the hands from either. Vacillation and half-heartedness will make our testimony of none effect. There need be no roughness or ruggedness of character in order to all this; Jesus was very gentle. The Christian, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, cannot be hid. (*J. Kennedy, D.D.*) *Witnesses for God:*—I. TO HIS TRUTH. They know His truth; they have felt His truth; they maintain His truth against all opposition. His Word is truth, as Jesus Himself declared; and all God's people, in all ages, are witnesses to His truth. It is a remarkable fact, but it cannot be denied, that wherever the truth of Scripture hath taken hold of a man's heart, in whatever part of the world he may live, he entertains concerning the Scripture the very same opinion that his brother or sister does in another part of the world. We all set to our seal, as we read this Book, that God is certainly true. II. TO THE POWER OF HIS GRACE. You, as witnesses, say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul." III. TO THE EXERCISE OF HIS GRACIOUS PROVIDENCE. (*W. Curling, M.A.*) *God's witnesses summoned to testify to the world:*—There is one important respect in which all objects in the universe, from the atom to the archangel, unite—all are "witnesses" for God. The visible reveals the Invisible. I. THE CHURCH OF GOD IS SPECIALLY DESIGNED TO BE HIS WITNESS TO THE WORLD. The Jewish Church was designed for this; a local stationary witness. Look at its geographical position; it was central. Judæa was situated at the top of the Mediterranean, and, like the sun in the centre of the solar system, it was always in the sight of the nations. Zion, like the Pharos of the world, was always flinging its light over the gross darkness of heathenism. When the fulness of time was come the Christian Church was set up for the purpose of Christ its Founder. Jehovah said, "I have given him for a witness to the people." He was the image of the invisible God. He selected men—His disciples—for the same purpose to be witnesses for God. II. THE CHURCH IN EVERY AGE HAS PROSPERED OR DECLINED IN PROPORTION AS IT HAS FULFILLED THIS MISSION. 1. The period of its first and greatest activity was the season of its greatest prosperity. The banners of the Cross floated over the altars of idolatry, and caused it to triumph in every place. 2. The cessation of its activity was the cessation of its prosperity. Witness the dark ages under the influence of a corrupt Christianity, a Christianity heathenised by Rome. 3. Every return of the Church to its missionary activity has been Divinely blessed. III. ITS MOTIVES AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY FOR FULFILLING ITS MISSION ARE GREATER NOW THAN EVER. The first witnesses for Christ required no higher motive for duty than the command of the risen Lord. He gave the command, and they went forth. But whilst there is the same necessity for witnessing now as then, the wants of the world are more urgent. The map of the world in the days of the disciples was only as a map of a province compared to that which lies open to us. Look at it. What a fearful expanse of darkness around, and that darkness how dense! What hideous enormities does it conceal! By a very slight effort of the imagination

we can cause the hosts of evil to pass before us. First come the Jews out of all nations under heaven, each one with a "veil over his heart," and stained with the blood of the Just One. Next, nominal Christians by myriads. Then comes the crescent of imposture, followed by Turkey and Persia. This reminds us of another inducement, the testimony of the Gospel is Divinely adapted to them. Each member of the Church should feel a solemn impression that he is a witness for God. In connection with this there should be a heart-unity between all witnesses, and a spirit of self-sacrificing liberality. (*J. Harris, D.D.*) *The witness of consistency:*—"Early in this year," says a Canon of our Church, a recent traveller in India, "I stood by the side of one of our missionaries while he preached to a crowd of natives in one of the largest cities in our Indian Empire. I shall never forget the rapt attention with which he was listened to up to a certain point. But all at once the eyes that had been so keenly fixed upon him were withdrawn, and the men exchanged scornful smiles and murmurs, and shook their heads in doubt, and I inquired the cause of this sudden change of demeanour, and was told that the preacher had been describing the visible fruits of conversion to God. He had described the Christian as temperate, chaste, forgiving and forbearing, pure in heart and in life. But this was too much for his hearers. They saw Christians day by day, and their observations gave the lie to it, and they turned away from the preaching of the Word." A native of high character and education in another city said to the same clergyman, "Let Christians only practise one-tenth of what they profess and India would soon be converted. What we want from you is not more Christianity, but more Christians." (*Church of England Pulpit.*) *Practical witnessing for God:*—William Ewart Gladstone, while at Eton, attended a dinner at which an indecent toast was proposed. When all the others rose to drink it he turned his glass upside-down, and remained seated, burying his face in his hands. Keith Falconer kept hung on the wall of his room at Harrow a roll of texts which told every one quietly, yet distinctly, on whose side he was. (*Sunday School Chronicle.*) *God's witnesses often inconsistent:*—The world not only does not believe us, but does not believe that we ourselves believe what we say. I remember a very striking circumstance which a neighbouring minister mentioned to me in proof of this. There was in the town in which he preached a determined and avowed infidel, believing in neither Christianity nor God. He saw this man one Sunday evening in the place of worship. He was preaching on some of the great verities of the faith, and the duties resulting therefrom. As he was the next morning passing the door of the man, he was standing at it. He said: "I saw you at worship last night, and was rather surprised to see you there, because you don't believe what I was saying." "No," says he; "nor you either." "Indeed!" "No. Why, if I were to believe the things you affirm to be true, which you set forth, and which are written in your books, I should not know how to contain myself; I should feel their importance so much that I should exhibit them wherever I went; I should not know how to hold in the enthusiasm which they would excite. But I don't believe them, nor do you, or you would be very different people from what you are." (*T. Binney.*) *The value of personal testimony:*—Many years ago now, before the Australian goldfields were opened, a party of experts were sent up the country to explore the district and report on the probability of gold being found there. They made their survey, sent in their report, gave it as their opinion that gold would be found, that there were "auriferous strata," &c., but somehow or other no one was greatly interested. Nobody disputed their conclusions, and nobody acted on them. But some time after, one market day, some shepherd lads came down to Melbourne from the bush with some lumps of yellow ore in their pockets. "Why," said those to whom they showed it, "that's gold! Where did you get it?" "Oh!" said they, "we got it up country; there's plenty of it up our way." Next morning there was a stampede—everyone that could raise a cart was off to the diggings. Now, my brother, you may not be able to preach, but does your life show that you have got the nuggets? (*E. W. Moore.*)

Ver. 11. **I, even I, am the Lord.**—*Royal proclamation:*—I. THE OBJECT OF OUR WORSHIP. The heavenly majesty asserted by Himself. "I am the Lord." A self-existent Being, contrasted with idols—dwelling in His own eternity, independent, everlastingly immutable, the eternal Jehovah. Mark how this glorious self-existent Being is subject to none, exists in Himself, the source of all being, and subject to no other beings. Shall we, for a moment, trifle in the presence of such a being? If I look a little further at this glorious self-existing Being, as revealed

in His Word, I find Him manifesting Himself as sanctity itself inherent. Therefore, again and again, He says to Israel of old, "I will be sanctified before all people"; and again, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." Moreover, this glorious self-existent Being, this source of all being, and subject to none either in heaven or in earth, has made Himself known in the attribute of holiness by solemn oath. "I have sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David." Moreover, if we pause to think of His glorious attributes, all of them are expressly supernatural, transcendently glorious, and Divine. Advance a step farther, to notice the veneration and adoration to be given to this glorious Being in His Trinity of Persons. The glorious self-existent Being is sovereign over all worlds. II. THE EXCLUSIVE CLAIM TO THE PREROGATIVE OF BEING A SAVIOUR. "Besides Me there is no Saviour." Some men make a Saviour of their priest. Some of their alms and their doings. Some will make a part Saviour of Christ, and a part saviour of their own doings and repentings and believings, and they lose both, and must be despised as neutralists. But "Beside Me," the Eternal God the Lord, "there is no Saviour." It was the Father's purpose of love that ordained salvation. Then, Christ, as a Saviour, received salvation to centre entirely in Himself. This salvation is by the Holy Ghost. Mark the unity of all the Divine Persons in this salvation, which is exclusive. There is no other Saviour, consequently no salvation but in our covenant God. (*J. Irons.*)

Ver. 13. **I will work, and who shall let it?**—*Salvation through judgment*:—The words (ver. 13) intimate that the salvation foretold comes in the way of judgment. Jehovah will effectually intervene; and when He does this, who can turn it back, so that it shall not be done? (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *A great work*:—I. THE WORKER AND THE WORK TO BE DONE. The worker is God Himself. He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." And the work which He hath purposed with regard to the salvation of His people is to gather together in one the children of God which are scattered abroad. There are, however, subordinate workers whom God employs for this purpose—ministers of the Gospel, whose chief work lies in the endeavour to win souls to Christ, who are called labourers together with God—workers together with Him; and it is theirs to preach the Word, the substance of which Word is Christ—to invite sinners to Christ by showing His excellency and dignity as the Son of God, His tenderness and sympathy as the Son of man—by showing to sinners the perfection of His redeeming work. But as ministers are fellow-workers together with God by virtue of their office, so may private Christians be. II. THE FIELD OF WORK. God's field of labour is everywhere. His object is to gather His people together who are still lying in darkness and sin. For this glorious end He employs various means. His means are directed particularly to individuals. III. THE CENTRE IN WHOM THE WORK IS COMPLETE. This, in one word, is Christ. It is the simple knowledge of a dependence upon Christ's person by which God works out His purpose of salvation. But I should not be preaching to you the whole counsel of God if I omitted to put before you also the side of your responsibility. (*J. W. Reeve, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. **Behold, I will do a new thing.**—*The future better than the past*:—How dear to the heart of the Israelites was the remembrance of the nation's deliverance from Egypt and their journey to the Land of Promise! To those great events the religious teachers of the people continually turned for illustrations and proofs of God's greatness and power and goodness and love. From this well used and familiar store of imagery the figurative expressions of the text are derived. Dropping the figures out of sight for a moment, we may say this is a gracious promise of suitable help and supply, even under circumstances most difficult and precarious. It is intended as an encouragement to repentance and to renewed consecration to God. It is the old message that God will give to all who look to Him everything that is requisite for spiritual progress and success. In presence of every untried enterprise; on the threshold of every unknown experience; in the hearing of every Divine call, this promise floats as a banner before the soldier's eye, and rings as the sound of a trumpet rings upon the soldier's heart. (*T. Stephenson.*) "*A new thing*":—1. This messenger of God proclaims, and he may be regarded as in this respect representing all God's messengers of grace to the world, "Look not on the former things"—listen not now, in these moments of penitence and prayer, to those threatening voices which tell of an inexorable law of repetition, of the relentless working out of a foregone conclusion and appointed

destiny—old things may pass away, all things may become new. "Behold, I will do a new thing!" 2. This "new thing," in the instance before us, is compared with the opening of a path in the wilderness, and the supply of rivers of waters in the desert. The pathless wilderness of the future is before us—no foot has trodden it,—it is beset by unknown difficulties and unseen perils; but even their God will make a way, a road upon which His people shall travel in security and with unerring certainty to their appointed destination. And although the heat of the sun may beat fiercely down upon that path, drying up every particle of moisture and consuming all pleasant vegetation, so that it may seem most unlikely that life can be sustained in the journey across such an arid waste, God can and will provide all that is needed; and rivers of water, an abundant and continuous supply, shall be found there. Preparation and guidance! These are the ideas involved in the promise to make a path. Difficulty, peril, privation! These are the thoughts which associate themselves with the desert and the wilderness. (*Ibid.*) *The new thing*:—This doing a new thing is the very achievement which many voices of high authority are assuring us, just now, is impossible with God. The power that carries on the universe, they tell us, never does a "new thing." What seems to us the new is only the old revealing itself in an unexpected way. Continuity is the law that governs all things. It is the language of those whose symbol of deity is an interrogation mark, or the sign for an unknown quantity, or a fetter, as they may happen to prefer. It is a phase of thought by no means modern, although sometimes imagined to be such. It never found more telling expression anywhere than at the lips of one who flourished a thousand years before Christ, more or less, and who put it thus: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new?" I suggest that we take up the ancient challenge. I will mention some of the ways in which Christ may be said to have broken in upon the monotony and uniformity of human life and thought with something new. He brought us—I. A NEW LIKENESS OF GOD. II. THE TRUTH ABOUT THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. III. A NEW HOPE. (*W. R. Huntington, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. **The beast of the field shall honour Me.**—*Hope respecting the profanest persons*:—I have sometimes laid hold of this text, and have been comforted by it concerning the conversion of the very worst of men. Some people say, "What is the good of going among blasphemers and profane persons with the Word of God?" Well, if the beast of the field, and the dragons, and the owls shall honour Him, we need never think of leaving any of the sons of men to perish. It is not what they are, but what God is, that should give us confidence concerning them. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver 21. **This people have I formed for Myself.**—*The altering of God's purpose.*—It is the burden of the Book of Deuteronomy that God chose the seed of Abraham to be a peculiar nation unto Himself above all peoples on the face of the earth. Those two words "people" and "inheritance" are perpetually linked together in the Bible. Jehovah's design is clearly declared in the significant passage—"They shall show forth My praise." By a long process of careful training it was His intention so to form the people that their history should turn men's thoughts to the glory and beauty of His own nature, and elicit perpetual adoration and praise. On three separate occasions they thwarted Jehovah. They came nigh unto cursing instead of praising. They gave men false conceptions of His character. And on three separate occasions they had to learn the temporary suspension and postponement of His purpose. 1. In the wilderness they murmured against Him, and were sent back to wander in the waste for forty years. 2. After nineteen kings had ruled from David's throne, they were exiled to Babylon for seventy years. 3. Since the rejection of the Beloved Son, they have been driven into all the world to be a by-word and a proverb. For years God's purpose has been under arrest. It shall, no doubt, be ultimately fulfilled. This change of purpose on the part of God has been the opening of the door for us; and the words which were originally addressed to Israel are now applicable to ourselves. By the lips of the apostles Paul and Peter we are told that Jesus gave Himself for us, to redeem us and to purify us unto Himself, a people for His own possession; so that we are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that we may show forth the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His

marvellous light. We are what we are, that we may show forth God's praises; but if we fail to realise His ideal, for us, too, there will be the inevitable postponement of His purpose. I. THE PURPOSE OF GOD. "That they should show forth My praise." We may promote God's praise by suffering, as much as by active service. In every life there are three regions. That of the light, where duty is clearly defined; that of the dark, where wrong is no less clearly marked; and a great borderland of twilight, where there is no certainty, where dividing lines are not distinct, and where each man must be fully persuaded for himself. It is here, however, that the temper of the soul is tested. II. THE POSSIBLE THWARTING OF HIS PURPOSE. "Ye shall know the revoking of My promise" (Numb. xiv. 34, R.V., marg.). There is nothing more terrible in the history of a soul than to frustrate the Divine ideal in its creation and redemption, and to prevent God deriving from us that for which He saved us. 1. Prayerlessness (ver. 22). Nothing is a surer gauge of our spiritual state than our prayers. 2. Neglect of little things (ver. 23). The people were probably careful of the larger matters of Jewish ritual, but neglectful of the smaller details. None of us goes wrong at first in the breach of the great obligations of the law. 3. Lack of sweetness. "Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane" (ver. 24). It is possible to do right things from a hard sense of legalism, in which the sweetness and lovableness of true religion are painfully wanting. Many are the instances of this change of purpose. David substituted for Saul; Solomon for Adonijah; the Church for the Hebrew people; Western for Eastern Christianity; the Moravians and Lollards for the established Churches of their time. III. THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSE THROUGH OUR PAIN. God's purpose cannot be ultimately set aside. So with Israel, and with each of us. But the cost, how enormous! (*F. B. Meyer B.A.*) *The chief end of man*:—1. God, who made all the lower creatures for some special use, assuredly did not make man, and endow him with those noble powers, without a grand distinctive design or end worthy of Himself and them. 2. This end cannot possibly be anything bounded by his transitory life. 3. The end for which chiefly we were made must needs be that which the Scriptures tell of: "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise,"—even to know the ever-blessed God; to serve God; to honour, love God; to enjoy God; and to be everlastingly blessed in the knowledge, service, and enjoyment of Him. (1) This end is a very high and noble one. (2) A most reasonable and righteous end. (3) A necessary and indispensable end,—as it is the end which God actually made us for; it is altogether indispensable that we follow and fulfil it, unless we are to live in a terrible conflict with our Maker, and so inevitably perish. For if God made us to serve and honour Him, and we do it not, then, to put it at the very lowest, we are useless and unprofitable on God's earth; and we are accustomed to cast away from us things useless for the thing they were designed for. But then, most things of this world which are useless do not on that account require to be positively hurtful. But it is otherwise with us. If God made us to serve and honour Him, and we pay no regard to this end, then, necessarily, we dishonour God. If we serve not God, we must serve the devil. If we serve not the true God, we must serve false gods,—creatures of all kinds, to which we give the regard, affection, trust that are due to God, and so unavoidably fall under the sentence of the law of His moral government, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But this volume has not come to us only to tell the end or use we were made for, but to tell also how we may fulfil it—ay, how we now, after having failed to live for the end, may yet know and serve and love and everlastingly enjoy God. The whole Bible may, as to this vital matter, be summed up in one grand word—Christ. (*C. J. Brown, D.D.*) *The delight of God in forming a people for Himself*:—In the good work of forming a people for Himself, God has been engaged from the beginning. The subjects of it have been more numerous in some periods than in others; but in every age He has created a seed to serve Him. And in future times—when He who sits on the throne shall "make all things new"—this people shall abound in number, and "flourish like grass of the earth." And what a thought is this, that in us, if we be indeed new creatures, God delights. I. The first ground of the Divine satisfaction in this people which I mention arises from THE NATURE OF THE WORK PERFORMED, the character of the effect produced. The effect produced by the forming power of God is—a people on whose immortal spirits His image is impressed, the chief features of which are—knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,—a people enlightened and guided by heavenly truth, sanctified and regulated by Divine love,—a people assimilated to God in understanding and heart, in purpose, in action, in blessedness.

If a person be not the partaker of a Divine nature, the most amiable and eminent qualities which he may possess can ultimately contribute only to increase his capacities and his means of doing evil, and to render him pre-eminent in disgrace and in misery. II. In forming a people for Himself, God gives AN ILLUSTRIOUS DISPLAY OF HIS GLORY. In no work has He communicated so much of Himself, has He given so luminous and extensive a display of His glory, as in that which we are now contemplating, viewed in its manifold relations. Advert to His sovereignty and His power, both which the text obviously suggests. III. God delights in forming a people for Himself, because He thus GLORIFIES HIS SON. He bears testimony to the dignity of His person, to the worth of His sacrifice, to the efficacy of His mediation. IV. GOD FORMS A PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF, THAT THEY MAY SHOW FORTH HIS PRAISE; and for this reason also He delights in them. He creates them anew in Christ, not merely that He may display His perfections in the production of so excellent an effect, but that they may contemplate and adore the excellencies which He thus manifests; not merely that they may be a mirror to reflect the splendour of His glory to others, but that they themselves may utter abundantly its praises. They praise Him with their hearts. They praise Him with their lips, by formal acts of devotion; by the celebration of His ordinances; by the public confession of His name; by commending His service to others; by ordering their speech in His fear, and to the use of edifying. And they praise Him with their lives, by avoiding what He forbids, by doing what He requires, by submitting to what He inflicts; and thus do homage to His authority, wisdom, and love. V. God rejoiceth over this people, because HE DELIGHTS IN THEIR HAPPINESS. (*J. Stark.*) *Showing forth God's praise*:—It has been said that the word translated "praise" is from the same root as "Hallel" in "Hallelujah," and that it means, first, a clear and shining light; next, a sweet flute-like sound: from which we learn that the people of God are to reflect His glory until it shines from their lives, attracting others to it; and that they are to speak His praise in resonant and harmonious sounds that shall arrest and attract the listening ear. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 22. **But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob.**—*Insincerity in religion*:—It is a common observation that there is very little sincerity in the world. We are now concerned with insincerity of a deeper and more serious character,—insincerity in religion. I propose to offer some remarks which may serve to detect a mere formal profession of religion. The subject on which I shall chiefly remark is the habit and enjoyment of secret prayer. I. MANY HAVE CONTINUED FOR AWHILE IN HABITS OF SECRET PRAYER, AND YET ARE ONLY FORMAL PROFESSORS. II. MERE FORMAL PROFESSORS AFTER AWHILE LEAVE OFF PRAYER IN A GREAT DEGREE. III. It is evident that these formal worshippers are utterly deceived in thinking they are converted: THIS WEARINESS IN PRAYER SHOWS THE CHANGE WAS NOT REAL. How are we to distinguish the feelings of a mere formalist from the presence of God's renovating Spirit? 1. They have not the spirit of prayer. Theirs is not prayer suggested, inspired by God's Holy Spirit. 2. Mere professors, being deficient in secret prayer, soon fall back again into their former sins and worldliness. 3. It is utterly impossible for you to be saved so long as you live in neglect of prayer. (1) To neglect prayer is utterly inconsistent with the love of God, which is the element of true religion. (2) Contrary to the fear of God. This is expressed by the opponents of Job. "Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God." (3) Utterly at variance with that holiness without which no man shall see God. (4) Allowed negligence of prayer cannot be reconciled with the hope of dwelling with God for ever. We offer four motives for holy perseverance in prayer. 1. It is wholly necessary for your salvation. "If any man draw back, My soul hath no pleasure in him." 2. Take heed to yourselves, and be exceedingly watchful, that you may persevere in this duty, and maintain the spirit of vigorous piety. Let us never seek to shelter ourselves under mere doctrines, such as, true saints shall persevere. 3. To urge you to perseverance in the duty of secret prayer, think how much you need the help of the Spirit of God. 4. The fourth motive for perseverance in fervent prayer is, the great advantages that result from it. (*W. B. Mackenzie, B.A.*) *A fast sermon*:—There are two distinct charges—1. A neglect of prayer. 2. Growing weary of God. The point is this: people are at a dangerous pass when they begin to neglect prayer. Eliphaz layeth it as a heavy charge upon Job (chap. xv. 4): "Surely thou restrainest prayer before God." When conscience is clamorous, wants pressing, and yet men cannot find

the heart to go to God, it is a sad case. So the heathen are described to be the families that call not upon His name (Jer. x. 25); that is, that do not acknowledge and worship Him. "The workers of iniquity," of what religion soever they profess themselves to be, "they call not upon the Lord" (Psa. xiv. 4). The evil of this will appear if we consider—I. WHY THE DUTY WAS APPOINTED. 1. It is a notable part of God's worship, or a serious calling to mind His presence and attributes. To withdraw from prayer is to withdraw from God; and to be unwilling to pray is to be unwilling to draw nigh to God, or to have any serious thoughts of His being and attributes. 2. It is a profession of our dependence. 3. It is a duty wherein the mysteries of our most holy faith are reduced to practice. There are two great mysteries in the Christian religion—the doctrine of the Trinity, and the mediation of the Son of God. 4. One special end of prayer is to nourish communion and familiarity between God and us; for it is the converse of a loving soul with God, between whom there is a mutual complacency. 5. Prayer is required to preserve in us a sense of our duty, and to keep the heart in better frame. 6. To engage our affections to heavenly things. 7. To be a means of comfort and spiritual refreshing. The soul is disburdened of trouble by this kind of utterance. II. THE CAUSES WHY MEN NEGLECT IT. 1. Atheism is at the root. When men neglect prayer, either they believe there is no God or no providence. 2. Security. 3. Coldness in religion and weariness of God. 4. Want of peace breeds loathness and backwardness, as David hung off (Psa. xxxii. 3) till he had recovered his peace. 5. Want of spiritual strength. He that hath lame joints cannot delight in exercise which is a pleasure to them that are strong. (*T. Manton, D.D.*) **Thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel.**—*Weary of God*:—Marvellous words! We are not surprised to find God saying to us, "Thou hast wearied Me"; but it is astonishing that God, to His own people, should complain, "Thou hast been weary of Me." We are not astonished that the creature wearies of the creature, man of man, saint of saint. This is in the very nature of things; it arises from the limitation of the creature's powers and resources: no creature can be to another what every creature wants. God in Christ alone can slake the thirst and meet the hunger of our needy souls, and it is worse than useless for men to try to take the place of God in their ministrations and relations to each other. And that God should stoop to say this is also marvellous. Many of you would be too proud to make this acknowledgment if you were placed in a similar position with respect to your fellow-creatures; but here is God reasoning with those whose hearts have wandered from Him, and saying, with all the fidelity of a father, and the pleading tenderness of a mother, "Thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel." Many a parent may learn of God even in such matters as rebuke and chastisement. The power of rebuke is very intimately connected with the spirit in which it is administered; you may so rebuke a fault in a child as, by the very rebuking, to attach the child more strongly to yourself; or you may so rebuke as to increase the distance between your child and yourself, and at the same time to confirm him in his fault. Listen to God's rebukes, and be "followers of God, as dear children." The form in which this being weary of God showed itself was partly the restraint of prayer. "Thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel." It is very likely that the form of prayer was kept up; yet God says, "Thou hast not called upon Me." The day was when they had called upon God first, and upon God last. But now they restrained prayer, and they tried to carry their burdens by the independent strength (and their strength was weakness) of their own shoulders; or they tried to bear their sorrows with the sympathy and assistance which their fellow-creatures and their fellow-saints could administer. God noticed this conduct of His people, and He rebuked it. And not only in the restraint of prayer was this weariness manifested, but also in the neglect of sacrifice; in indifference towards the ordinances of God, and carelessness in the worship of God; in disregard to the will of God; and also in fretful discontent under the dispensations of God (Mal. i., ii.). The prophet here represents Israel as sent into captivity, and God as justifying His procedure on the ground of Israel's own spirit and conduct. It is a fault common to God's saints. I. THE NATURE OF THIS EVIL. We have already indicated it, but we may put it in another light. We may show it, for example, in contrast. "This people," God says, "have I formed for myself; they shall show forth My praise." He made us in His own image, that we might reflect Himself, and in the sight of which we might rejoice. And He made us in His own image, that we might reflect Him to each other and to other people; while, for the same object He redeems us. God, in redeeming us, forms us for Himself, that we should love

Him; that we should trust Him; that we should honour Him, and that we should try to please and glorify Him. And we realise the work which our blessed Saviour has wrought for us, and which the Spirit of God is now working within us, when we are able to say, "I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." Now, what is it to be weary of God? It is to desire to break the connection that exists between us and God. It is to be impatient of continued connection with Him; to be tired of calling upon Him; tired of thinking of Him; tired of trusting Him; tired of waiting for Him; tired of serving Him. I know not a better illustration than that which is supplied by the first part of the parable of the Prodigal Son. II. ITS MANIFESTATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT. 1. This weariness is first shown by formality in Divine worship. 2. It then shows itself in the outward neglect of Divine requirements. Declension begins in the heart, and shows itself first in formality, and then the steps between formality and the outward neglect of Divine requirements are not very many. 3. Then follows, not looking to God for aid and succour. The man depends more upon himself than he ought to depend, or he looks more to his fellow-creatures than he had been accustomed to look. III. WHAT IS THE OCCASION OF THE MANIFESTATION OF THIS WEARINESS? You will generally find one of the following things—disappointed hope, the endurance of affliction, or the prosperity of the wicked. IV. ITS CAUSES. You must be aware of the distinction between an occasion and a cause. God's dispensations towards Pharaoh, as we are told, hardened his heart. They were the occasions of this, but the cause was not in God; neither was the cause in the dispensation of God—the cause was in Pharaoh. Unless Pharaoh had possessed a hardened heart, those dispensations of Divine providence, instead of increasing this obduracy, would have produced a totally different state of soul. The same dispensations have done it, as in the case of Nineveh; when Nineveh was threatened, Nineveh repented. The cause is to be found either in the absence of love or in the feebleness of love. V. THE BITTER FRUITS of this weariness. God sees it; and He cannot see it without feeling it. God is angry, and He corrects; and He corrects so as to make the chastisement answer to the sin. The man has, to a certain extent, withdrawn from God, and God withdraws from the man. He deprives the man of whatever influences are still tending to promote his peace and joy and rest. And, of course, if the heart be alive, if it be a quickened heart, this state is one of great misery, until the soul is restored to God. Where there is not life, you find that the case gets worse and worse, and that very frequently men fall from this weariness into scepticism, and into atheism. VI. THE MEANS OF PREVENTION. Ejecting the first hard thoughts of God; not yielding for a moment to indolence in the service of God; comprehension (so far as we can comprehend) of the principles, and of the general plan of the Divine Government, so as not to be expecting here that which God has given us no reason to hope for here; following Christ implicitly in the conduct of the spirit towards God; and cherishing most sacredly the influences of the Holy Spirit. VII. When you have fallen into this evil state, WHAT IS THE CURE? 1. Full confession of the weariness. Be willing to speak of it as God speaks of it; to see it as God sees it; and to condemn it as God condemns it. Call it weariness of your merciful Father—weariness of your best and kindest friend. 2. Admission of the Divine goodness in the correction by which you are made sensible of your weariness. 3. Return to a careful observance of God's ordinances and precepts, the obtaining of pardon, and the assurance of forgiveness. While you are in doubt about pardon with reference to this sin, you will find yourselves keeping at a distance from God. This subject is suitable for self-examination. Are there any signs of this weariness of God in you? (*S. Martin.*) *Weary of God:*—To be weary of God is to be weary of His worship and service. It is as sad a character as can be given, either of persons or of a people, to say that they are weary of God. I. THE NATURE OF THE SIN. Weariness in the body noteth a deficiency of strength, no more mind to work; in the soul, a falling from God, and we have no mind to His service, which is either partial or total. 1. Partial. When the heart is more alienated from God than before, and all our respects to Him grow burdensome and grievous, and the heart begins to repine at everything we do for Him (Mal. i. 13; Amos viii. 5). 2. Total. When not only the power of religion is abated, but the very profession of it is cast off. II. IT IS INCIDENT SOMETIMES TO PERSONS CONSIDERED IN THEIR SINGLE CAPACITY; SOMETIMES TO A PEOPLE CONSIDERED IN THEIR COMMUNITY. 1. To persons considered apart, and in their single capacity. (1) Partly out of natural adverseness to God. (2) Partly because of the fickleness of man. 2. It is incident to a people considered in their community. (1) The Church of God

in general. (2) In every nation. Usually religion is changed in a nation upon two grounds—(*a*) Change of persons. When good old zealous men are gone the stage is shifted, and there cometh on a new scene of acts and actors; one generation passeth, and another cometh. (*b*) Change of interests. When it is for their own interest to own God, men think they can never bind themselves fast enough to Him; but when the posture of interest is changed, God is laid aside, they grow weary of God; they deal treacherously with the Lord, and walk willingly after the commandment (Hosea v. 7, 11). III. THE CAUSES WHY A PEOPLE GROW WEARY OF GOD. Besides those general causes, these may be added—1. Want of love to God. 2. We are too much led by sense; and if we have not present satisfaction, we soon grow weary of religion. 3. It argueth too much love of the world, which by long importunity prevaileth with us to forsake God, and grow dead and cold in religion (2 Tim. iv. 10). 4. It comes from indulgence to the ease of the flesh. As bodily weariness is most incident to the lazy, so is spiritual weariness to those who do not rouse up themselves. 5. Impatience of troubles, and the manifold discouragements we meet with in the way to heaven. IV. THE EFFECTS. 1. Boldness in sinning. 2. More coldness in duties of worship. Either it is omitted or performed perfunctorily, and in a careless, stupid manner. 3. Less care and study to please God. V. WHAT A SAD STATE OF SOUL IT IS appeareth—1. By the heinousness of the sin. (1) It is a horrible contempt of God, after trial, to fall off from God and return to our carnal pleasures and satisfactions again. (2) It is a very senseless and unreasonable sin. God never gave you cause or occasion to grow weary of Him. He challengeth Israel: "O My people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against Me" (Micah vi. 3). (3) There is much ingratitude in it. He hath given much cause to the contrary. 2. The terribleness of the judgment. (1) On nations. (2) On Churches (Rev. ii. 5). (3) For particular persons, it layeth them open to God's severe correction (Hosea v. 15). (4) For total defection. There is dreadful vengeance appointed for them that prefer the creature before God. (*T. Manton, D.D.*)

Vers. 23, 24. **Thou hast not brought Me the small cattle.**—*Failure in religious details:*—May we not ask whether some emphasis may not be laid upon the designation "the small cattle"? Do not many men fail in religious details? They are emphatic in their stupendous word-creed, but they do not bless some little child on the road to church, or bring some wandering soul to the Church home. We do certain great or conspicuous things, and we forget the small cattle, the little offerings and tributes. Every omission is noticed (ver. 24). Does God care for our sweet cane? Does He like to see us spending a trifle upon some cane stick that we may take it and offer it as if it were a flower? He hath no need of any service of the kind; yet it pleases Him that we should with some small piece of money buy sweet cane. Observe how He notes the omissions! This might be the very voice of Christ, who said to Simon the Pharisee, "I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet; but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment." What an eye is the eye of Omniscience! It notices every slip and flaw and omission. That would, indeed, be a miserable declaration to make if it stood alone; but it only leads to the fuller declaration that it notices every cup of cold water, every widow's gift, every child's service. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God and His people: a contrast:*—In one of those antithetical clauses, or "balances of words," so frequent in Isaiah, He thus contrasts His own and His people's doings (ver. 23): "I have not burdened thee in exacting oblations; I have not wearied thee in demanding incense." . . . "But thou hast burdened Me with thy sins; thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities" (ver. 24). (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. **Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane.**—*Divine reproach:*—I. THE GROUND ON WHICH ISRAEL IS REPROACHED. Sweet cane, or calamus, is an aromatic reed which was an exotic in Palestine, and is chiefly to be found in India. The demand for sweet cane was great, because it formed an ingredient of the incense in most countries where incense was used. It was one of the things which could not be obtained by barter. The charge is, "You do not neglect the offices of religion, but you perform them carelessly; you do not withhold your offerings,

but you do not offer of your best." Bad is the best that man has to offer to God; but less than our best God will not accept. II. WHEN DID THE KING ETERNAL, IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, SERVE? When was God, the Omnipotent, wearied with our iniquities? When did the Judge of the earth blot out our sins? We, enlightened by the Gospel, can give an answer which Israel of old could not. We answer, "When the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." He came to serve, and when we think of Him, the God-man, serving under the law, is it possible for us to ask, in the spirit of the slave, How little can I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?—what is the least that He demands, the minimum of duty? The great principle is this, that we never offer unto the Lord what costs us nothing, or what involves no thought or trouble. He will not accept the refuse at our hands. And this principle we are to carry out in all that relates to our moral conduct and religious life. It is applicable to our private devotions as well as to our public services. It is implied in our Lord's injunction, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," &c. (*W. F. Hook, D.D.*)

Ver. 25. **I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions.**—*Pardoning mercy made radiant:*—As in olden times jewellers were wont to set their most precious gems in casings of a very inferior nature—and that wisely, in order that the intrinsic lustre of the jewel might shine forth more brilliant from the contrast—so doth the Word of God delight to place the long-suffering mercy of our God in the settings of man's iniquity and ingratitude, in order that the most lustrous jewel in God's all-radiant diadem—even mercy—might glitter the more brilliantly from its immediate contact with the black foil spots of man's sin. (*F. F. Goold, M.A.*) *Forgiveness:*—I. THE RECIPIENTS OF MERCY. Look at the 22nd verse, and you will see—1. That they were prayerless people. 2. They were despisers of religion. "Thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel." 3. Thankless people. "Thou hast not brought Me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings." 4. A useless people. "Neither hast thou filled Me with the fat," &c. 5. There are some who may be termed sanctuary sinners—sinners in Zion, and these are the worst of sinners. 6. We have here men who had wearied God: "Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities." II. THE DEED OF MERCY. It is a deed of forgiveness. 1. A Divine forgiveness. "I, even I, am He." Divine pardon is the only forgiveness possible; for no one can remit sin but God only. 2. Surprising forgiveness; for the text speaks as if God Himself were surprised that such sins should be remitted: "I, even I"; it is so surprising that it is repeated in this way, lest any of us should doubt it. 3. A present forgiveness. 4. A complete forgiveness. The bond is destroyed, and He will not demand payment again. III. THE REASON FOR MERCY. Says one poor sinner, "Why should God forgive me? I am sure there is no reason why He should, for I have never done anything to deserve His mercy." Hear what God says, "I am not about to forgive you for your own sake, but for My own sake." "But, Lord, I shall not be thankful enough." "I am not about to pardon you because of your gratitude, but for My name's sake." "But, Lord, if I am taken into Thy Church, I can do very little for Thy cause in future years, for I have spent my best days in the devil's service; surely the impure dregs of my life cannot be sweet to Thee, O God." "I will not engage to forgive you for your sake, but for My own; I do not want you," says God; "I can do as well without you as with you. I forgive you, therefore, for My own sake." Is there no hope for a guilty sinner here? IV. THE PROMISE OF MERCY. "I will not remember thy sins." Is it possible for God to forget? Not as to the absolute fact of the committal of the deed, but there are senses in which the expression is entirely accurate. 1. He will not exact punishment for them when we come before His judgment bar at last. The Christian will have many accusers. The devil will come and say, "That man is a great sinner." Let all the demons of the pit clamour in God's ear, and let them vehemently shout out a list of our sins, we may stand boldly forth at that great day and sing, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" The judge does not remember it, and who then shall punish? 2. "I will not remember thy sins to suspect thee." There is a father, and he has had a wayward son, who went away that he might live a life of profligacy; but after a while he comes home again in a state of penitence. The father says, "I will forgive thee." But he says next day to his younger son, "There is business to be done at a distant town to-morrow, and here is the money for you to do it with." He does not trust the returned prodigal with it. "I have trusted him before with money,"

says the father to himself, "and he robbed me, and it makes me afraid to trust him again:" but our heavenly Father says, "I will not remember thy sins." He not only forgives the past, but trusts His people with precious talents. 3. He will not remember in His distribution of the recompense of the reward. The earthly parent will kindly pass over the faults of the prodigal; but you know, when that father comes to die, and is about to make his will, the lawyer sitting by his side, he says, "I shall give so much to William, who always behaved well, and my other son he shall have so-and-so, and my daughter, she shall have so much; but there is that prodigal, I spent a large sum upon him when he was young, but he wasted what he received, and though I have taken him again into favour, and for the present he is going on well, still I think I must make a little difference between him and the others; I think it would not be fair—though I have forgiven him—to treat him precisely as the rest." And so the lawyer puts him down for a few hundred pounds, while the others, perhaps, get their thousands. But God will not remember your sins like that; He gives all an inheritance. He will give heaven to the chief of sinners as well as the chief of saints. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Sin forgiven and forgotten:*—Free grace blots out our transgressions —I. FROM GOD'S BOOK. II. WITH GOD'S HAND. III. FOR GOD'S SAKE. IV. FROM GOD'S MEMORY. (*H. G. Guinness.*) *Evangelical religion:*—Because of texts like this, the early Church called Isaiah the Evangelical Prophet. What does "Evangelical" mean? A "good angel," a "good messenger," bringing good tidings of great joy. All who bring the good tidings from God to sinners are evangelical preachers. All the Bible prophets were evangelical, else they would not have been there. Moses himself was evangelical; even law in the Old Testament has evangelical issues, and Moses was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. I. THE NAME WHICH GOD GIVES HIMSELF. "I, even I, am He." You do not find this style save in the Bible. This was God's manner of speech. Baal could not say this, nor the gods of Egypt. God speaks to you as a man amongst men: "I have something to say to you." When He singles you out, that is often the beginning of personal religion. God speaks to you and me personally; there is none save Jesus Christ between God and myself. Whatever your name is, put it into this text, and lift up your soul in every sentence, making them petitions. Israel had grown weary of God, and had got broken and scattered. Are there not those who are weary of Sabbath services, and wish Monday had come to get back to business? They love entertainments and social gaieties; but tire of Sabbath preaching. Another of Israel's sins is found in the context. "Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane with money." Did God indeed care for sweet cane? If you go back to chapter iii. you will find a list of the ornaments and dresses, and what they spent their money upon. Read this and digest it. Bring your bank books and drink books and tobacco books; compare them with what you have contributed to the upholding of evangelical religion. Take your sins to God, and He will blot them out. II. "FOR MINE OWN SAKE." Not for thy sake; that rather takes a man down. It is all owing to grace. I quite agree to the terms. Pardon my preachings, my sermons, and take me in a pauper. How does that suit your views?—it suits me. In the New Testament we have it put for Jesus' sake; it is the same thing at bottom. III. "WILL NOT REMEMBER THY SINS." How God forgets, I cannot tell. Isaiah says our sins will never again come up to mind, but I cannot imagine how I can forget my own sins. Some men say they have forgiven you; your offence is dead. It's all past; but you see from the man's eyes that it isn't past, and other people know about it. Take some examples of Jesus' way of forgiveness. You might have said, had you not known, that the first to meet Him after His resurrection would have been the Virgin, or the women of substance who ministered unto Him. But it was the Magdalene that was the first to gaze on His resurrection form! This was just like Himself. And if Judas had not fallen utterly, and gone to his own place, might he not have been chosen to preach the great coronation sermon of Jesus? Peter, the next great sinner, was chosen. Look how Jesus did: He gets the best service out of sinners, such as I. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) *Forgiveness:*—There is one thing that God always does with sin. He removes it out of His presence. God cannot dwell with sin. When He casts away the guilty soul into an unapproachable distance, and when He pardons a penitent soul, He is doing the same thing in both cases—removing sin. I. THE AUTHOR OF FORGIVENESS. The expression, "I, even I," is not a very unfrequent one in Scripture; but wherever it occurs—whether in reference to justice or mercy—

it is the mark of the Almighty, at that moment taking to Himself, in some special degree, some sovereign prerogative. Here, the magnificent repetition of that Name, first given in the bush, was evidently intended to show one characteristic feature of God's love. He forgives like a sovereign. All His attributes are brought to bear upon our peace. II. THE NATURE OF FORGIVENESS. 1. As to time. The verb runs in the present tense—"blotteth out." 2. As to degree. You could not read—Satan could not read—a trace where God's obliterating hand has once passed. 3. As to continuance. The present swells out into the future. "Will not remember" III. THE REASON OF FORGIVENESS. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Forgiveness:*—In the foregoing verses we have a heavy accusation drawn up against the Jews. But no severity follows hereupon; but, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." The like parallel place we have concerning Ephraim (Isa. lvii. 17, 18). Here is the prerogative of free grace: to infer pardon where the guilty themselves can infer only their own execution. It is the guise of mercy, to make strange and abrupt inferences from sin to pardon. I. Here is THE PERSON that gives out the pardon, *i.e.*, God. God seems more to triumph in the glory of His pardoning grace and mercy than He doth in any other of His attributes. "I, even I, am He." Such a stately preface must needs usher in somewhat wherein God's honour is much advanced. II. As for THE PARDON itself; that is expressed in two things: "blotteth out"; "will not remember." 1. Blotting out implies—(1) That our transgressions are written down. Written they are in a twofold book—God's remembrance; our own conscience. (2) A legal discharge of the debt. A book that is once blotted and crossed stands void in law. "I will not remember thy sins." III. THE IMPULSIVE CAUSE, that moves God's hand, as it were, to blot out our transgressions. "For Mine own sake." 1. That is, because it is My pleasure. 2. Because of that great honour and glory that will accrue to My great name by it. (*E. Hopkins, D.D.*) *Remission of sin:*—1. Remission of sin is no act of ours, but an act of God's only. 2. Remission of sin makes sin to be as if it had never been committed. 3. Upon remission of sin God no longer accounts of us as sinners, but as just and righteous. 4. Pardoning grace can as easily triumph in the remitting of great and many sins as of few and small sins. (*Ibid.*) *The forgiveness of sins:*—That article in the Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," is too little thought of. Men flippantly declare that they believe in it when they are not conscious of any great sin of their own; but when his transgression is made apparent to a man, and his iniquity comes home to him, it is quite another matter. No stocks can hold a man so fast as his own guilty fears. With the desponding, I shall try to deal. I. THERE IS FORGIVENESS. 1. This appears in the treatment of sinners by God, inasmuch as He spares their forfeited lives. 2. Why did God institute the ceremonial law, if there were no ways of pardoning transgression? The evident design of the whole Mosaic economy was to reveal to man the existence of mercy in the heart of God, and the effectual operation of that mercy in washing away sin. 3. If there is no forgiveness of sin, why has the Lord given to sinful men exhortations to repent? 4. There must be pardons in the hand of God, or why the institution of religious worship among us to this day? 5. Why did Christ institute the Christian ministry, and send forth His servants to proclaim His Gospel? 6. Why are we taught in that blessed model of prayer which our Saviour has left us to say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"? It is evident that God means us to give a true absolution to all who have offended us. But then, He has linked with that forgiveness our prayer for mercy, teaching us to ask that He would forgive us as we forgive them. If, then, our forgiveness is real, so is His. 7. God has actually forgiven multitudes of sinners. II. THIS FORGIVENESS IS TANTAMOUNT TO FORGETTING SIN. He wishes us to know that His pardon is so true and deep that it amounts to an absolute oblivion, a total forgetting of all the wrong-doing of the pardoned ones. 1. To speak popularly, a man lays up a thing in his mind; but when sin is forgiven it is not laid up in God's mind. 2. In remembering, men also consider and meditate on things; but the Lord will not think over the sins of His people. 3. Sometimes you have almost forgotten a thing, but an event happens which recalls it so vividly that it seems as if it were perpetrated but yesterday. God will not recall the sin of the pardoned. 4. This not remembering means that God will never seek any further atonement. Under the old law there was remembrance of sins made every year on the day of atonement; but now the blessed One hath entered once for all within the veil,

and hath put away sin for ever by the sacrifice of Himself, so that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. 5. When it is said that God forgets our sins, it signifies that He will never punish us for them; next, that He will never upbraid us with them. 6. What does it mean but this—that He will not treat us any the less generously on account of our having been great sinners? Look how the Lord takes some of the biggest sinners, and uses them for His glory. III. FORGIVENESS IS TO BE HAD. How? Through the atoning blood. Come for it in God's appointed way. "Repent." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The forgiveness of sins*:—I. THE SPEAKER. Whose voice thus proclaims obliteration of transgressions? A silver trumpet thus introduces the word: "Thus saith the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." Jehovah speaks from His high throne. If other lips had thus addressed offenders, the word might have been empty, vain, and even worse: it might have relieved no doubts, healed no wounds, diffused no peace. Sin is terrible, because it is an offence against God. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" "To the Lord our God," and to the Lord our God alone, "belong mercies and forgivenesses." II. THE REPETITION. "I, even I, am He." The Person who forgives twice shows Himself. This reduplication cannot be without strong cause, for there are no superfluous words from Divine lips. It is at once apparent that our God, in the riches of His grace, desires thus to awaken attention, to rivet thought, to banish apprehension, to deepen confidence, to inscribe the truth deeper on the heart. Hence the timidity of doubt assumes the aspect of impiety: incredulity becomes insult. This important view is powerfully established by the context. The preceding verses exhibit Jehovah arrayed in robes of majesty. As Creator He claims service from the creatures of His hands; He demands the due revenue of adoration: "This people have I formed for Myself: they shall show forth My praise." The scene then changes; and He confronts them with appalling charges. In these, as in a mirror, the vileness of the human heart is seen. Worship is not rendered; prayer is withheld; communion is shunned. The charge is unanswerable. What can the issue be? Will patience cease to forbear? Will indignation blaze? The sentence follows. "I, even I, am He," &c. What exquisite pathos: what marvellous grace! How Godlike: how unlike the utterance of man! III. Thus the focal lustre of the word is reached—THE COMPLETENESS OF FORGIVENESS. God ordains forgiveness absolute, unrestricted, unfenced by boundaries, unconfined by barriers. "He blotteth out." It is true that the word has different shades of meaning, according to its context; but its main purport is neither vague nor obscure. It generally places sins in the most formidable light as recorded debts. It displays them as written in the pages of a book of reckoning, rigidly, exactly,—without extenuation; and then leads to the fact that they are completely erased,—expunged. Not merely crossed, for then they might be read again, and subsequent demand be made; but so eradicated that no trace can be discerned. But the vexing thought may intrude, that memory will continually recall his many and mighty sins. He tremulously may reason, If I cannot forget, will not God remember too? Amid all tokens of Divine love, will not my mind revert to former scenes, and be downcast? I shall see, or think I see, amid heaven's smiles, a reminder of my sinful course on earth. Let such thought be cast into oblivion's lowest depths. It is unscriptural: it is derogatory to the glorious Gospel of free grace. Mark how the word contradicts it: "I will not remember thy sins" (Jer. xxxi. 34). Let none say, How can this be? Let it not be objected, such mental process is contrary to all experience: it is alien to the properties of retentive thought. Let it be remembered that we are now dealing with God: His ways are not our ways. IV. THE MOVING CAUSE. Man reaps eternal benefit; but the spring from which the blessing flows is high in heaven. Man and man's deeds are universal provocation: in him there is no moving merit. If God did not originate forgiveness for the glory of His name, no sin could have been blotted out. But God's glory is His final end; therefore He blots out transgressions "for His own sake." Thus heaven shall re-echo with His praise, and eternity prolong the grateful hallelujah. (*H. Law, M.A.*) *Free pardon*:—The remarkable point is not merely that the absolution contained in the text is preceded and succeeded by verses of accusation, but that it breaks in upon the connection, and cleaves the sense right in the middle. The king's messenger of mercy rides through the ranks of the men-at-arms in hot haste, sounding his silver bugle as he clears his way; he cannot linger, his message is too precious to be

made to tarry. We may conclude that men know and prize Divine mercy most when they most feel the weight of their sins. I. THE NATURE OF THE PARDON WHICH IS HERE SO GRACIOUSLY ANNOUNCED. 1. It is a pardon from God Himself, from Him who is offended. This is the more delightful because we know that only He could forgive. Inasmuch as the pardon comes from God, He alone it is who knows the full extent of sin. 2. The reason why it is given. "For Mine own sake." The entire motive of God for forgiving sin lies within Himself. No man has his sins forgiven because they are little, for the smallest sin will ruin the soul, and every sin is great. Each sin has the essence of rebellion in it, and rebellion is a great evil before God. Again, no man's sin is forgiven on the ground that his repentance is meritorious. By God's grace, forgiven men are made to do better; but it is not the foresight of any betterness on their part which leads God to the forgiveness. That cannot be a motive, for if they do better their improvement is His work in them. The only motive which God has for pardoning sinners is one which lies within Himself: "for Mine own sake." And what is that motive? The Lord knows all His motive, and it is not for us to measure it; but is it not first, that He may indulge His mercy? Mercy is the last exercised, but the most pleasing to Himself, of all His attributes. He has this motive, too, which is within Himself, that He may glorify His Son, who is one with Himself. What a comfort this is; for if, when looking into my soul, I cannot see any reason why God should save me, I need not look there, since the motive lies yonder, in His own gracious bosom. 3. It is noteworthy in this glorious text how complete and universal the pardon is. The Lord makes a clean sweep of the whole dreadful heap of our sins. Our sins of omission are all gone. Those are the sins which ruin men. At the last great day the Judge will say, "I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat," &c. Those on the left hand were not condemned for what they did do, but for what they did not do. Then He mentions actual sins. "Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins"; but He blots them out, transgressions and sins, both forms of evil. This is the very joy and glory of Gospel absolution. The believer knows that his sins are not in the process of being pardoned, but are actually pardoned at this moment. The pardon is noteworthy on account of its being most effectual. It is described as blotting out. Blotting out is a very thorough way of settling a thing. If an account has been standing in the ledger a long time, and the pen is drawn through it, it remains no longer. And then mark the wonderful expression, "I will not remember thy sins." Can God forget? Forgetting with God cannot be an infirmity, as it is with us. We forget because our memory fails, but God forgets in the blessed sense that He remembers rather the merit of His Son than our sins. II. THE EFFECT OF THIS PARDON WHEREVER IT COMES WITH POWER TO THE SOUL. Timid persons have thought that the free pardon of sin would lead men to indulge in it. No doubt some are base enough to pervert it to that use, but there was never a soul that did really receive pardon from God who could find in that pardon any excuse for sin or any licence to continue longer in it; for all God's people argue thus: "Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" At first, mercy fills us with surprise; then, with holy regret. We feel, What, and is this the God I have been standing out against so long? It next creates in us fervent love. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Subdued by forgiveness*:—Many years ago in Russia a regiment of troops mutinied. They were at some distance from the capital, and were so furious that they murdered their officers, and resolved never to submit to discipline; but the emperor, who was an exceedingly wise and sagacious man, no sooner heard of it than, all alone and unattended, he went into the barracks when the men were drawn up, and addressing them sternly, he said to them, "Soldiers, you have committed such offences against the law that every one of you deserves to be put to death. There is no hope of any mercy for one of you unless you lay down your arms immediately, and surrender at discretion to me, your emperor." And they did it there and then, though the heads of their officers were lying at their feet. They threw down their arms and surrendered, and he said at once, "Men, I pardon you; you will be the bravest troops I ever had." And they were, too. That is just what God says to the sinner. (*Ibid.*) *The surprise of God's mercy*:—If you have a dog at the table, and you throw him a scrap of meat, he swallows it directly; but if you were to set the whole joint down on the floor before him, he would turn away. He would feel that you could not mean to give a fine joint of meat to a dog. He would not think of touching it; at least, few dogs would. And it seemed to me as if the Lord could not have meant

all the wonders of His love for such a dog as I was. I was ready to turn away from it through the greatness of it. But then I recollected that it would not do for God to be giving little mercy. He was too great a God to spend all His power in pardoning little sinners and granting little favours; and I came back to this—that if His grace was not too big for Him to give, I would not be such a fool as to refuse it because of its greatness. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 26. **Put Me in remembrance.**—"*Put Me in remembrance*":—I. TAKE SOME GENERAL NOTICE OF THE COMMAND HERE GIVEN. This command, "Put Me in remembrance," by no means supposes that God is unmindful of any promise, or ignorant of any case. 1. It is His pleasure to see a sinner reduced so low as to have nothing to rest upon, nothing to plead but the promise. 2. God will bring the sinner to such a frame as will render the blessing of pardon sweet when it comes. 3. The expression in the text evidences the strict connection which there is between the means and the end. It is grace which appears in the promises, and it is grace which convinces the soul of its need of those blessings that are contained in them. If you are led to see that these promises contain all your salvation and all your desire, and that all is dispensed freely, this will draw out the heart in prayer and supplication. Prayer opens a communication between God and the soul. "I will pardon"; "I will not remember thy sin"—that is the promise. "Put Me in remembrance" is the command. It is the privilege of a sin-burdened soul to remind God of His covenant engagements, to lay the promises of His grace before Him, to plead the merit of the Redeemer's sacrifice, to set the creature's misery and God's mercy in opposition to each other, to compare our poverty with that fulness of grace which the Gospel reveals. Instead of waiting for qualifications in order to obtain mercy, we are to rest the whole weight of our argument upon the grace which shines in the promise, and which will be greatly honoured in the actual pardon of our guilty souls. II. OBSERVE WHAT IT IS WHICH AN AWAKENED SOUL HATH TO REMIND GOD OF. 1. The soul reminds God of His grace, and argues from the freeness of it. 2. The firmness of His promises. 3. The concern of God's glory in the pardon and salvation of sinners. III. OPEN THE NATURE OF THE DECLARATION WHICH HE MAKES BEFORE THE THRONE OF MERCY. "Declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." Declaration in law is showing cause why judgment should not be executed. There must be a declaration of an adequate righteousness in order to our justification before God. Our guilt would sink us into the lowest depths of misery if God did not admit our plea through Jesus. We must also declare our hearty approbation of God's method of dispensing these His favours. Inferences—1. We see the reason why God will have the promises of His grace to be pleaded before the Throne; it is not to help His memory, but to exercise and encourage our faith. 2. How greatly are they to be pitied, who can remember any thing but that which it concerns them above all to attend to. 3. Have any of you pleaded the promises, cried for mercy and grace, and yet seemed to find no help? Be not discouraged, though the Lord wait, yet tarry for Him, He waiteth that He may be more abundantly gracious. 4. Consider what glories are reserved for that future world, when all the promises shall be completely fulfilled. (*J. King, B.A.*) *A great controversy*:—These words follow immediately on that beautiful declaration—"I, even I, am He," &c. We shall find that our text has great significance when taken in connection with this most gracious saying. 1. We cannot but remark on the apparent strangeness, that there should be any appeal to reason or argument, where the matter involved is undoubtedly the great doctrine of atonement. Though there is no express statement of this doctrine, no one acquainted with the appointed mode of salvation, which has been the same in every dispensation, will question that the work of the Mediator is tacitly understood whensoever there is a promise of the forgiveness of sin. If this be implied, how strange that God should no sooner have referred to the scheme of our redemption than He invites us to reason with Himself. Undoubtedly the scheme of our redemption is such as could never have been imagined, and such even as, when revealed, it rather becomes us reverently to receive than curiously to investigate. But, nevertheless, it is quite possible to err on the other side—to be as much afraid of allowing reason to intermeddle with the plan of redemption. There is all the difference between the being able to discover this plan and the being able, when discovered, to determine its excellence and fitness. 2. We should hold it to be as great a falsehood as could be alleged against the Gospel were it to be said, that it does not commend itself to man as exactly what he needs; so that, if he

receive it, he must receive it on the strength of external testimony, and not at all on his consciousness of its meeting his necessities. 3. The text, following on a promise that sin shall be blotted out, may be said to invite us to a debate, and to propose, as the topic of debate, the salvation of sinners through the atonement made by Christ. It is God Himself who offers to plead on the other side, if we take that of the strangeness of the Gospel, its inexplicable character as addressed to beings so circumstanced as ourselves. How shall the argument be carried on, or by whom shall the discussion be opened? We will not attempt to give the precise pleading on both sides, but rather sum up the facts and statements of the controversy. We suppose man aware of his lost condition by nature, and penetrated with such a sense of the attributes of God as forbids his expecting that sin may go unpunished under such a government as the Divine. And if a man in this state were made acquainted with the Gospel of Christ, he would want nothing but evidence of the truth of this Gospel; he would find an additional evidence in the exactness with which it met his ascertained wants. There is therefore nothing to shrink from in the challenge of the text. A forgiveness, based on a propitiation, and followed by sanctification, is what God propounds as His scheme of redemption; and such a scheme He invites us to discuss with Him in person. What, then, have you to say? You lie under condemnation: how can you be pardoned when you have punishment to endure? The scheme lays the punishment on another. You are of a depraved nature, inclined to evil, and therefore unfit for communion with your Maker: how can such as you enter the kingdom of heaven? The scheme provides for your thorough regeneration. If all the difficulties which reason can find in the way of redemption lie either in the necessities of man or the attributes of God, and if the scheme of redemption through Christ meet the first and yield the second, so that even reason herself can perceive that it satisfies every human want and compromises no Divine perfection, why should we not allow that, reason herself being judge, the Gospel is in every respect precisely such a communication as is suited to the case? 4. We have hitherto confined our attention to the fact that it is to an argument, or discussion, that we are invited by God, when He is about to lay before us, in a most simple but comprehensive form, His great scheme of delivering us through a propitiation for sin. But the concluding words of our text—"Declare thou, that thou mayest be justified"—seem to allow you, if you choose, to bring forward any excuse which you may have for not closing with the gracious proffer of salvation through Christ. We may, however, take another, and perhaps equally just view of the controversy which is indicated, though not laid open by our text. The verses which follow—"Thy first father hath sinned," &c., would seem to imply that the Jews murmured at God's dealings with them; for God is evidently vindicating Himself. Come all of you who think that you are in any way hardly dealt with by God, approach and plead your cause; it is the Almighty Himself who saith—"Declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." You need not therefore hesitate to utter plainly all you think, and to make statement of your grievances. You urge, it may be, that your lot is one of trial and affliction; that troubles are multiplied beyond your power of endurance, temptations beyond your power of resistance; that, born as you are with corrupt tendencies, placed in a scene where there is everything to incite you to sin, you are summoned to duties which are manifestly too arduous, and threatened in the event of failure with punishments which are as manifestly excessive and severe. Well, keep nothing back; be as minute as you will in exposing the harshness of God's dealings, whether individually with yourselves or generally with mankind; and then, having pleaded your own cause, listen to what the Almighty will say; it is He Himself who hath invited you into controversy, and therefore when you have urged all your grievances, be silent that God may be heard in reply. And I know what you expect to hear: you expect a defence as elaborate as the charge. But when you are hearkening for the copious apology and acute contradiction, lo, there is heard nothing but the beautiful promise—"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." If you have anything to say after such a promise, say it; make what you can of your case. So that the promise is to be taken as a sufficient answer to all that can be urged. But what has such a promise to do with the matter? How does it end the controversy? Do ye ask? Or rather, does not this simple but most gracious announcement of arrangements for the complete rescue of humankind from all their misery and all their guilt make you feel ashamed of having urged any complaint, and aware that in place of murmurs you ought to utter only praises!

5. We wish to impress upon you one great lesson—that it is your business to obey God's commands rather than to explain God's dealings. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)
A loving entreaty :—Understand my text, however paradoxical it may seem, as being a genuine invitation on the part of a gracious God to the most provoking of men. I. Our text appears as A HUMBLING CHALLENGE. God had punished Israel on account of sin. Israel was not penitent, but in self-righteousness judged that the Lord was harsh and severe. "Come, then," says God, "come and plead your suit with Me. Put Me in remembrance of any virtues on your part which I may be supposed to have overlooked. If I have misjudged you, if you have not really been neglectful of My service and worship, let the matter be rectified. If really you have a righteousness of your own, put Me in remembrance of it." 1. On looking back we find that the Lord had charged His people with neglect of prayer. "But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob." This is the charge which we are compelled to bring against all unconverted men and women. Perhaps you offer a form of prayer; but that is nothing if your heart goes not with the words. This is rather to mock God than truly to call upon Him. But come now; if there be any mistake in this charge, disprove it! 2. Next, the Lord charged it upon Israel that they had not delighted in Him. "Thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel." Can you deny this? If you can, you are invited to state your innocence before the Lord. 3. The Lord had also said that these people did not honour Him. "Thou hast not brought Me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured Me with thy sacrifices." It may be you have presented no tokens of love to the Lord at all; or, on the other hand, you may have brought sacrifices, but you have not honoured God by them. You have given that you might be known to give, or because others did so, but not with the view of honouring God. Yet if it be so, if any unconverted man can say that whether he eats or drinks, or whatsoever he does, he seeks to do all to the glory of God, this ought to be known. It would be a new thing under the sun. In truth, it would prove that the man was converted, and had been renewed in the spirit of his mind by the grace of God. But it is not so. 4. Moreover, the Lord charged Israel that they did not love Him. "Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled Me with the fat of thy sacrifices." No token of love had been presented, but they had made the Lord to serve with their sins. The purchase of calamus with money had not come into their thoughts. They could not afford it, they said; but when they were worshipping their false gods they could find money enough—"They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance." So there are men who cannot afford to give anything to the cause of God or Christian charity, but for their sinful pleasures they can waste their substance. He challenges thee to plead thine innocence if thou canst. Darest thou take up the glove? 5. The Lord again challenges them upon the charge that they had not obeyed Him. "Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins"—thou hast made Me a very slave with thy waywardness. "Thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities,"—God's patience was tried to the utmost with their wanton wickedness. Is not this charge sadly true of many? If it be not so, you are now challenged to vindicate your characters. Do not set up a lying defence, but speak the truth. 6. The challenge before us is occupied not only with the ways of man, but with the ways of God; for the Lord here asserts of Himself, "I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense." That is to say, God is no hard taskmaster. The commandments of God are essential justice; you could not improve upon them; no law could be more for our benefit than that which He has given us. If God has treated you like slaves, then say so, and state your grievance in solemn converse with God. When God forbids us anything, it is because He knows it would be for our harm; and when God commands us to do anything, it is because He knows that it is for our soul's eternal good. II. I hope you will be able to follow me while our penitence suggests AN AMENDED VERSION. Let us take the text as our consciousness of guilt desires to read it. There are certain things which God in great love invites us to bring before His memory. If you cannot take up His challenge, and prove your personal righteousness, let the charges stand, with your silence as an assent to them; and now plead with Him, and put Him in remembrance of matters which may serve your turn, and lead to your forgiveness. 1. Put the Lord in remembrance of that glorious act of amnesty and oblivion which in sovereign grace He has proclaimed to the sons of men in the preceding verse. That done, proceed to put the Lord in remembrance of your sins. Make an open unreserved acknowledgment unto the Lord. Confess this also, that

you have continued by your sins to go away from Him who invites you to return, and promises you a welcome reception. 2. When you have done this, if your spirit is much depressed, and your heart is driven to despair by a sense of your guilt, then put the Lord in remembrance of the extraordinary reason which He gives for pardoning sin: "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake." Say unto Him thus: "Lord, there is no reason in me why Thou shouldest spare me, but do it for Thine own sake—for Thy love's sake, for Thy mercy's sake." 3. When you have gone as far as that in putting God in remembrance, I would advise you to plead the Lord's purpose and intent revealed in verse 21: "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall shew forth My praise." Say, "Lord, I am Thy poor creature. Thou hast made me; even my very body is fearfully and wonderfully made; and the mysterious thing which dwells within me which I call my soul, is also the creature of Thy power. Hast Thou not made me for Thyself? Wilt Thou not have a desire to the work of Thine own hands? Lord, come and bless me! Sinner as I am, and utterly undeserving, yet I am Thy creature; do not fling me upon the dunghill. If Thou wilt forgive me, Lord, might I not praise Thee?" 4. If that does not ease you, go a little further back in the chapter till you come to verse 19: "Behold, I will do a new thing," &c. Plead that published declaration! Say, "Lord, Thou hast said 'I will do a new thing': it will indeed be a new thing if I am saved. I am driven to such self-abhorrence, that if ever I am saved I shall be a leading wonder among Thy miracles of grace." It may be you can say—"Lord, I have been sighing and crying and groaning now by the month together, and I can find no peace. Oh, if Thou wilt but put a new song into my mouth, the dragons and the owls that saw me in my gloom shall open their eyes and be astonished, and honour the Lord God of Israel!" I know some who might say, "Lord, it will fill all the workshop with wonder if I shall rejoice in Jesus. All my friends and companions will wonder that I should become happy and holy through sovereign grace." III. Our text affords us some PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS. If the Lord says, "Put Me in remembrance," then—1. It is very clear that we ought to remember these things ourselves. Oh, you that are not saved, remember the years in which you have lived without prayer! What a wonder that you have been permitted to live at all! Remember, next, for your humbling, how weary you have been of God. Some I would urge to remember long years of neglect of God's service, with all their niggardliness to the cause of God, all their want of love to God, all the many times in which they have hardened their hearts, stopped their ears, and refused the warnings and invitations of their Saviour. 2. It is time that we should now begin our pleading with God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 27. **Thy first father hath sinned.**—*Israel's sin*:—Its history from the first is a tissue of sins. "Thy first father sinned, and thy mediators have fallen away from Me." By the first father, Hitzig, Knobel, and others understand Adam; but Adam is the progenitor of mankind, not of Israel specially, and Adam's guilt is mankind's guilt, not Israel's. Either Abraham is meant (Hofmann, Stier, Hahn, and others), or Jacob-Israel (Ewald, Cheyne, von Orelli), who has more to do with the sinful nature of the nation springing from him than Abraham (cf. Deut. xxvi. 5). The interpreters and mediators generally (2 Chron. xxxii. 31; Job xxxiii. 23) are the prophets and priests, standing between Jehovah and Israel, and mediating the intercourse of both in word and act; even these for the most part have proved unfaithful to God, falling a prey to ungodly magic and false worship. Thus Israel's sin was as ancient as its origin; and the apostasy has broken out even among those who, by reason of their offices, should be the best and holiest. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Thy first father*:—To the unreflecting upon human nature it has not occurred that mankind might have been introduced to our world by other means than by being "born of a woman." Every human being might have been a distinct creation. But the constitution given to the vegetable and to the animal kingdoms was given also to man; and as herbs and animals contain the seed of their own kind, and are propagated of each other, so man was made to be "fruitful, to multiply, and to replenish the earth." Among other reasons for this constitution was the intention of securing (through the intimate and peculiar relationships it involves) a powerful influence of man upon man. Judging by the conjugal, paternal, and filial relationships, it is evident that God intended men to exert a considerable amount and a high kind of influence upon each other. But while the domestic bonds are the chief channels through

which human influence is transmitted, there are other sources of power. Extraordinary talent, peculiar circumstances, great earnestness, and remarkable labours raise men to the guidance and control of their fellows. The position of the first man was in many respects singular. All other of the human kind have been born of each other. Even Eve was made out of man. Adam alone was created. Excepting Eve and Adam, every other human being has commenced existence an infant, and living, has passed from infancy through childhood and youth to manhood. And Adam was the first of human kind. Adam, moreover, according to the constitution given him, and by the fact of his creation, was the natural father of the human race. We shall treat the subject by discussing two questions. I. WAS ADAM TO THE HUMAN FAMILY MORE THAN THEIR NATURAL PARENT? According to the historical and doctrinal statements of the Scriptures, Adam did sustain another and a more important relationship. II. ADMITTING THAT ADAM WAS MORE THAN THE FIRST PARENT OF THE HUMAN FAMILY, WHAT WAS HE BESIDE? AND WHAT DID THIS RELATIONSHIP INVOLVE? As the first parent of the human race, and according to laws with which we are all familiar, Adam would exert a serious influence upon his whole posterity. But Adam was more than the first parent. He is called by the apostle Paul, "the figure of him that was to come"—literally, the type. Paul declared that Adam in his connection with mankind was the form, or the ensample, or the pattern of what Jesus Christ was to be to redeemed men; so that as Jesus Christ is the public representative and head of the saved of mankind, so Adam was the representative of the human race. What did the placing of Adam in this position involve? 1. By this arrangement the whole race is tried or proved by one man. 2. It pleased God to suspend upon the trial of one man the life and the death of the human race. Adam's guilt must ever be his own—that cannot be another's. Adam's punishment must rest on his own head—that cannot be transferred to his posterity. But the results of Adam's conduct his posterity were to share. Awfully responsible was Adam's position! God's reasons for the order of things are to us unsearchable. We may consider that the trial of a race in one man was more simple than the probation of every individual—we may see how (God foreknowing the apostasy of human nature) this mode of government admitted the immediate introduction of another and of a remedial dispensation—still, God's ways in this dispensation are past finding out. The fact is declared; and the reason of this arrangement we must resolve into the sovereignty of God. One serious lesson fail not to learn—the extent of parental responsibility. Moral and intellectual and physical qualities are doubtless transmissible. Weakness and disease of body and evil dispositions of soul are conveyed from parent to child. Sow not, therefore, to the flesh. (*S. Martin.*)

Ver. 28. **Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary.**—*Holy princes:*—"Then I profaned holy princes, and gave up Jacob to the ban, and Israel to revilings." "Holy princes" are the hierarchs (1 Chron. xxiv. 5), the highest spiritual authorities in distinction from the secular. Their profanation consisted in their being ruthlessly dragged into a foreign land, where their official work ceased of necessity. So the heads of religion fared, and the whole nation, bearing the honourable names of Jacob and Israel, fell victim to the cursing and revilings of heathen nations. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XLIV.

VERS. 1-5. **Yet now hear, O Jacob, My servant.**—*Why are the people of God called by the name of Jacob?*—Have you never wondered why the people of God should be called by the name of the third of the ancient patriarchs in preference to th first two? We often, indeed, find them called the seed of Abraham, and we should easily understand what was meant if we read of the children of Isaac; but, as far as I remember, they are nowhere called simply Abraham or Isaac, whereas it is perfectly common to hear them called Jacob or Israel, the name of the third patriarch being directly transferred to his descendants. Not only so: this usage has passed over into the New Testament, and we still sometimes call the whole

body of living Christians the Israel of God. This is a somewhat surprising circumstance; for of the three patriarchs the third is certainly not the favourite. Why, then, is it that the name of the third patriarch is attached to God's people, as if he were more directly their progenitor than the other two? Is it because they are liker him than they are to Abraham or Isaac? Is the average Christian an imperfect, stumbling mortal, a compound of obvious vices and struggling virtues, as Jacob was? It would be harsh to say so. But we may come nearer the mark if we put this suggestion in a different form. Jacob was the progressive character among the patriarchs. His beginnings were ignoble, and the vices of his nature long clave to him; yet by degrees he surmounted them: he lived down the evil which was in him; and his end was that of one who, after many defeats, had at last obtained the victory. Abraham is a much grander figure than Jacob, but he has far less history. He may almost be said to be perfect from the first. If in him there was a slow development from small beginnings, we have no record of it. Isaac, again, was, as far as the records inform us, a back-going rather than a progressive character. The opening scenes of his history are beautiful and noble; but his character lacked back-bone, and we see him sinking into physical grossness and moral flaccidity. Jacob's life, on the contrary, in spite of great defects to begin with and many faults by the way, was a developing and ascending one. This is shown by the names he bore: he was first Jacob and then Israel. And it may be to recommend such a life of progress that his names are given to God's people. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *Biography in three words*:—I. JACOB. 1. This was the name of the natural man. After he had received his new name the very mention of the old one must have reminded him of the evil time when he was an unbrotherly brother and an unfilial son. It is true that, while he was still Jacob, he went through the experience of Bethel, where he saw the vision of the ladder reaching up to heaven. This is usually regarded as his conversion, but, if it was, he was afterwards a backslider, for his subsequent life in Padan-aram was far more guided by selfish cleverness than by the law of God. The name Jacob, in short, was a memorial of a youth of sin and of a manhood of worldliness. But is it not, thus understood, an appropriate name for the people of God? Is there not for them also a bad past to remember? It is well sometimes to go back to what we were, because the old habits may still spring up and trouble us; though we may now have received a new name, the old Jacob is in us still. Above all, we ought to go back on that old time, because it helps to magnify the grace which brought us out of it. 2. But there is another idea inseparably connected with the name of Jacob: it is that of Divine choice. In our text this is very prominent—"Israel, whom I have chosen," "Jesurun, whom I have chosen." It is, indeed, connected with the other two names here, because these indicate that to which he was chosen. But he was the choice of God, in preference to Esau, while he was still Jacob. As He chose Jacob, while he was still Jacob, so He loved us while we were yet sinners. II. ISRAEL. 1. The patriarch received a new name because he had become a new man. God does not trifle with such things. A change of name among us may be a mere freak of caprice; but when God deliberately changed a man's name, it was an outward monument of an inward change. If it did not mean that the natural man, which the name Jacob designated, was entirely exterminated, it meant that it was so far overcome that the complexion of the life would henceforth be different. The reign of selfishness and worldliness was over, and a new spirit had entered in and taken possession. If we ask how this came about, it may have been a slower and more complex process than we have any record of; for what appears a sudden spiritual change is often only the culmination of movements going on for a long time before. But what we are permitted to see clearly in the records of the patriarch's life is the midnight scene on the bank of the Jabbok. It is far away, and it is evidently concealed under forms of speech which are now alien to us; but this at least is evident, that the patriarch was that night, if a homely phrase may be allowed, at cross grips with God. That night God was not to him vague and far-off, but intensely real and very near; and Jacob had transactions with Him face to face—ay, hand to hand. Is not this what the religion of many people lacks? To a certain extent they are religious. Yet somehow it never comes to close quarters between them and God. What they need is Christ, the reconciler. 2. But the new name of Israel denoted more than this. It was expressly said to him, as he received it, "As a prince hast thou had power with God and hast prevailed," and this was what the name meant—the possession of power with God. Evidently a great crisis had come in Jacob's experience, in

which his will came into collision with the will Divine. But what an unequal struggle! The mysterious man had only to touch Jacob in the seat of his strength, and it yielded in a moment; the sinew shrank, and he could struggle no more. Yet in the moment when he appeared to be thoroughly beaten, it turned out that he had gained the victory and won the blessing. This is not so mysterious as it looks. It is repeated in every great spiritual crisis. It is through such experiences that men and women enter into the secret of the Lord, become mighty in prayer, are endowed with spiritual power, and if they do not receive new names on earth, yet obtain a stamp and a signature of character leaving no doubt that they have new names in heaven. III. JESHURUN. There is no evidence that this name belonged to the third patriarch, though it may have done so. But there can be little doubt that, standing where it does, alongside of the other two, it was meant, like them, for a symbol of character. The root from which it appears to be derived means straight or upright, and this is its most probable meaning. This was precisely the development of character which the third patriarch needed, after he had received the new name of Israel. What happened the very next morning after the great midnight scene on which we have been looking? He went forth to meet his brother Esau; and this is the account of how he behaved: "Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold Esau came, and with him four hundred men; . . . and he bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother." Bowed himself—to the ground—seven times! This to his own brother! What was he bowing for? Why could he not stand up straight on his feet and look his brother in the face? Read the whole account of the preparations and dispositions which he elaborated before meeting Esau, and of the sly, suspicious way in which he met and managed his rough but generous brother, and you will feel inclined to sneer: Is this the man who was called last night a prince who had power with God? There is far too much bowing and becking, twisting and turning. This man is not straight; he is not upright. It seems to me that sometimes in people who have had their Bethels and Mahanaims and Peniels, and can speak to you about experiences of struggle and emptying, and of being filled with the Holy Spirit, there is a defect of a similar kind. Although they have had dealings with God, and feel themselves on a footing of reconciliation with Him, they are not right in their dealings with men. There are few things which so injure the cause of religion in the world as these defects of men of God. On the contrary, how noble and God-honouring a sight it is when one who is a prince with God is acknowledged on earth also to be a princely man; and when one who has power with God has at the same time influence with men through his manliness, uprightness, and charity. Our text is a message of hope. It speaks of the possibilities of spiritual transformation and development. (*Ibid.*) *Jacob, Israel, Jeshurun:*—I take these three names in their order as teaching us—I. THE PATH OF TRANSFORMATION. Every "Jacob" may become a "righteous one" if he will tread Jacob's road. We start with that first name of nature which, according to Esau's bitter etymology of it, meant "a supplanter,"—not without some suggestions of craft and treachery in it. It is descriptive of the natural disposition of the patriarch, which was by no means attractive. All through his earlier career he does not look like the stuff of which heroes and saints are made. But in the mid-path of his life there came that hour of deep dejection and helplessness when, driven out of all dependence on self, and feeling round in his agony for something to lay hold upon, there came into this nightly solitude a vision of God. In conscious weakness, and in the confidence of self-despair, he wrestled with the mysterious Visitant in the only fashion in which He can be wrestled with. "He wept and made supplication to Him," as one of the prophets puts it, and so he bore away the threefold gift-blessing from those mighty lips whose blessing is the communication, and not only the invocation of the mercy, a deeper knowledge of that Divine and mysterious Name, and for himself a new name. That new name implied a new direction given to his character. Hitherto he had wrestled with men whom he would supplant, for his own advantage, by craft and subtlety; henceforward he strove with God for higher blessings, which, in striving, he won. All the rest of his life was on a loftier plane. That is the outline of the only way in which, from out of the evil and the sinfulness of our natural disposition, any of us can be raised to the loftiness and purity of a righteous life. There must be a Peniel between the two halves of the character if there is to be transformation. How different that path is from the road which men are apt to take in working out their own self-improvement! How many forms of religion, and how many toiling souls in effect just reverse the process, and say practically—first

make yourselves righteous, and then you will get communion with God. That is an endless and a hopeless task! This sequence, too, may very fairly be used to teach us the lesson that there is no kind of character so debased but that it may partake of the purifying and ennobling influence. II. THE LAW FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. There are some religious people that seem to think that it is enough if only they can say: "Well! I have been to Jesus Christ, and I have got my past sins forgiven; I have been on the mountain and have held communion with God." Now, the order of these names here points the lesson that the apex of the pyramid, the goal of the whole course, is—righteousness. God does not tell us His name merely in order that we may know His name, but in order that, knowing it, we may be smitten with the love of it, and so may come into the likeness of it. Take, then, these three names of my text as preaching, in antique guise, the same lesson that the very Apostle of affectionate contemplation uttered with such earnestness: "Little children! let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." III. THE MERCIFUL JUDGMENT WHICH GOD MAKES OF THE CHARACTER OF THEM THAT LOVE HIM. Jeshurun means "the righteous one." How far beneath the ideal of the name these Jewish people fell we all know, and yet the name is applied to them. Although the realisation of the ideal has been so imperfect, the ideal is not destroyed. And so we Christian people find that the New Testament calls us "saints." All wrong-doing is inconsistent with Christianity, but it is not for us to say that any wrong-doing is incompatible with it; and therefore for ourselves there is hope, and for our estimate of one another there is the lesson of charity, and for all Christian people there is a lesson—live up to your name. *Noblesse oblige!* Fulfil your ideal. Be what God calls you, and "press toward the mark for the prize." IV. THE UNION BETWEEN THE FOUNDER OF THE NATION AND THE NATION. The name of the patriarch passes to his descendants, the nation is called after him that begat it. In some sense it prolongs his life and spirit and character upon the earth. That is the old-world way of looking at the solidarity of a nation. There is a New Testament fact that goes even deeper than that. The names which Christ bears are given to Christ's followers. Is He a King, is He a Priest? He makes us kings and priests. Is He anointed the Messiah? God "hath anointed us in Him." Is He the light of the world? "Ye are the light of the world." His life passeth into all that love Him in the measure of their trust and love. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The Church comforted and revived:*—I. AN ADDRESS MOST GRACIOUS AND COMFORTING. "Yet now hear, O Jacob, My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen," &c. The persons to whom these words were spoken are represented—1. As the servants of God. How great the honour to be acknowledged as a servant of the King of kings! 2. As the people of His special choice. 3. As the objects of His wonderful interpositions. The words, "Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb," refer to them in their national character. The relationship He sustained to them, and the great things He had done for them, are employed as arguments to inspire them with confidence, and lead them to be of good courage. II. A PROMISE EMINENTLY CHEERING. "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty," &c. They are evidently spiritual blessings which are here promised, of which water is frequently employed as an emblem. In this passage we are reminded of the following particulars. 1. Their nature. In some places the cleansing property of water is intended. At other times its quality of quenching the thirst is set forth. But it is to be understood here in connection with its refreshing and fertilising influences. 2. Their value. We have but a faint conception of the importance of water, on account of its being so common with us. But, in those countries where it is scarce, its worth is very differently estimated. 3. Their seasonableness. When the soil is parched through long-continued drought, how welcome are the genial showers. And to the dry and barren soul, how cheering are the waters of life and salvation! 4. Their abundance. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." Nor are they ample in quantity alone, but in their range they are most extensive. Besides embracing the people of God themselves, they also embrace their offspring. III. A RESULT TRULY REFRESHING. "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." We have here—1. An important principle indicated. It is that God's own people must be first revived before large accessions can be expected to the Church from without. 2. The blessed truth declared. (*Anon.*) *A promise for us, and for our children:*—"Yet." What an ominous word as to the past! What a cheering word as to the future! "Yet." What black words are those which come before it!

God's people were represented as being in a sadly backsliding state. Consequently God gave them up to the curse and the reproach. It may be that such is our case, though we be God's people. "Yet," says the text—though you have fallen into this state, do not despair; I love you; you are My chosen; yet will I return unto you in favour. Come then, if we have wandered never so far, let this word sound like the shepherd's call to bring us back. I. THE LORD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE BY THE REMEMBRANCE OF WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR THEM. Taking the text as our guide, let us notice—1. The grace we have experienced in its practical effect. To make us God's servants—"Yet now hear, O Jacob, My servant." We may be unfaithful servants: we certainly are unprofitable ones, but, if not awfully deceived, we are His true servants. We were once the servants of sin and the slaves of our own passions, but He who made us free has now taken us into His own family and taught us obedience to His will. 2. This grace is peculiar, discriminating and distinguishing. "My chosen." 3. Reflect again upon the ennobling influence of grace. The people are first called Jacob, but only in the next line they are styled Israel. You and I were but of the common order. If we had boasted of anything we should have been called Jacobs, supplanters, boasting beyond our line; but as Jacob at the brook Jabbok wrestled with the angel and prevailed, and gained the august title of prince—prevailing prince—even so has grace ennobled us! 4. The text conducts us onward to notice the creating and sustaining energy of that grace. "Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb." Men might as well claim the honour of creation or resurrection as boast of commencing their own spiritual life. 5. This grace has the characteristic of intense affection in it. God gives to His people the title of Jeshurun, which means "the righteous people," according to some translators, but most interpreters are agreed that it is an affectionate title which God gives to His people. Perhaps it may be considered to be a diminutive of Israel. Just as fathers and mothers, when they have great affection for their children, will frequently give them an endearing name—shorten their usual name, or call them by a familiar title only used in the family—so, in calling Israel Jeshurun, the Lord setteth forth His near and dear love. God's grace to us is not merely the mercy of the good Samaritan towards a poor stranger whom he finds wounded by the way, but it is the love of a mother to her sick child; the fondness of a husband towards a weeping wife; the tenderness of the head towards the wounded members. II. WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY THE PROMISE OF WHAT GOD WILL DO. "Fear not; I will help thee." You cannot pray as you desire—"I will help thee." You feel unable to overcome sin—"I will help thee." You are engaged in service too heavy for you—"I will help thee." Then comes a promise, fuller in words and as rich in grace, "I will pour water on him that is thirsty." You shall be refreshed; your desires shall be gratified. Water quickens sleeping vegetable life: your life shall be quickened by fresh grace. Water swells the buds and makes the fruits ripe: you shall have fructifying grace; you shall be made fruitful in the ways of God. Whatever good quality there is in Divine grace, you shall enjoy it to the full. You shall be, as it were, drenched with it. III. AS A VERY GREAT COMFORT TO HIS MOURNING PEOPLE, THE LORD NOW PROMISES A BLESSING UPON THEIR CHILDREN. They must get the blessing for themselves first. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground,"—that is first; and then afterwards—"I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed." We must not expect to see our children blessed unless we ourselves grow in grace. It is often the inconsistency of parents which is the outward obstacle to the conversion of their children. But now, if we have had faith to receive much grace from God, here comes a blessed promise for our children—"I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed," in which observe—1. The need. To give a new heart and a right spirit is the work of the Holy Spirit, and of the Holy Spirit alone. 2. The source of the mercy which God will give. "My Spirit." 3. The plenty of grace which God gives. "Pour": not a little of it—but abundance. 4. The blessedness of all this. "And My blessing upon thine offspring." What a blessing it is to have our offspring saved! What a blessing to have our children enlisted in Christ's army! 5. Notice the vigour with which these children shall grow. "They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses." Close by the water's edge the grass grows very green, and the willow is a well-known tree for speedily shooting forth its branches. Our farmers lop their willows often, but they very soon sprout again. The willow grows fast, and so do young Christians. 6. The manifestation of this in public. Not only are our children to have the Spirit of God in their inward parts, but they are to make a profession of it. One shall say, "I am the Lord's,"—he shall come out boldly and avow

himself on the Lord's side; and another shall so ally himself to God's Church that he "shall call himself by the name of Jacob"; and then another who can hardly speak quite so positively, but who means it quite as sincerely, "shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord"; and a fourth "shall surname himself by the name of Israel." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Spirit promised to the seed of Jacob*:—The text contains one of those interesting passages in which the Holy Spirit is promised in the Old Testament. Consider—I. THE PEOPLE TO WHOM THE PROMISE IS MADE. II. THE PROMISE ITSELF. III. THE EFFECTS ATTENDING ITS FULFILMENT. (*D. Rees.*) *Jesurun*, or Jeshurun, is supposed to be derived from a word which literally means "straight" or "even." The symbolic meaning is therefore upright or "righteous." St. Jerome renders it "most upright." In the Septuagint it is translated "most beloved," a term of endearment. A German commentator gives it the quaint and familiar rendering of "gentleman," or "one of gentlemanly or honourable mind" (Delitzsch),—a noble epithet alike for the individual or the nation. Taking it in connection with the only other two places in Scripture where the word is used, Isaiah, in employing it here, has probably reference to the primitive virtues which characterised the patriarchal ages—the faith and purity and rectitude of the old founders of the nation—those to whom Israel pointed with something of the same pride and glory as we do to our covenanting forefathers. (Deut. xxxiii. 5, 26–29.) (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*)

Vers. 3–5. **For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty.**—*God's Spirit as water and floods*:—The double figure is expressive of copiousness, abundance, variety (both the "water" and the "floods"), the rain from heaven and the mountain torrents to refresh the parched land. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *The Holy Spirit for both Jews and Gentiles*:—If these expressions are intended to signify different classes of people, the former may denote, in a figurative sense, the Jews, who had not yet received the Holy Spirit in that plentiful measure which they earnestly desired, and, unsatisfied with present enjoyments, were ardently longing for further communications of Divine grace, and the salvation of the Lord. The latter may signify the Gentiles, who had not been favoured with Divine ordinances and Divine influences, whose condition had been exhibited in preceding passages of these prophecies as uncultivated and barren, resembling a wilderness. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Revival*:—A work of revival almost always begins with the children of God. God pours water first on "him that is thirsty," and then on "the dry ground." (*R. M. M'Cheyne.*) *The influences of the Holy Spirit*:—I. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A DISTINCT AGENT IN THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION. II. THE PROMISE OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT TO SECURE THE GRAND PURPOSES OF REDEMPTION FORMS A PROMINENT AND INTERESTING PART OF REVELATION. III. EVERY PERSON WHO BELIEVES THE GOSPEL RECEIVES THE DIVINE INFLUENCE WHICH IT PROMISES. IV. THE HAPPINESS AND USEFULNESS OF BELIEVERS REQUIRE THEM TO SEEK A MOST COPIOUS EFFUSION OF THE INFLUENCES OF THE SPIRIT. The Spirit promotes the happiness of believers—1. By gradually advancing their sanctification. 2. By making them increasingly the objects of Divine complacency. 3. By preserving them from temptation, and habitually disposing them to seek communion with God. V. EVERY BELIEVER HAS REASON TO EXPECT THAT THE INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL BE MOST COPIOUSLY IMPARTED TO HIM. VI. THERE IS AN APPOINTED ORDER OF MEANS WITH WHICH THE BESTOWMENT OF DIVINE INFLUENCE IS CONNECTED, and in the constant observance of which its most copious effusion should be sought. VII. IF WE HAVE NOT THE INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, OR IF WE DO NOT POSSESS THEM IN AN EMINENT DEGREE, WE ARE NOT MERELY UNFORTUNATE BUT GUILTY. (*L. Forster.*) *Water an emblem of the Holy Spirit*:—1. Water is a blessing universally necessary. 2. A blessing universally diffused. 3. An abundant blessing. 4. A cheap blessing. (*D. Rees.*) *The Spirit acts through believers*:—The Spirit must first show forth His virtue in us according to our faith before He can act upon our neighbours. He must be a Spirit of revealing truth in us before He can go forth from us to illuminate the world. He must be a Spirit of conviction in us, making us mindful of our errancies, before He can lead the world to penitence. He must be a Spirit of assurance in us before He can chase the fears and dry the tears of a mourning world. He must be a Spirit of holy, tender, undefiled charity in us before He can assimilate the world to Christ's great law of love. And all these things the Spirit becomes to us through faith. Some districts are riverless, not because

the rain never falls, but because the soil for a great depth down is so porous that the rainfall passes through it like a sieve. The district that cradles rivers must have a soil and underlying foundation that will hold the rain like a sponge. And the graces and virtues present in the character whose root-principle is unfeigned faith hold the benign influences of the Spirit as in hidden fountains and storehouses, so that the world may be blessed by the steadfast outflow. (*T. G. Selby.*) *The essential diffusiveness of spiritual religion*:—These words remind us of the essential diffusiveness of the religion which has faith for its ruling principle and the presence of the Holy Ghost for its daily heritage. The scale according to which we receive the Spirit must not be that of our own personal necessities only or the demands of the passing opportunity. As the Spirit dwelt in Christ with inexhaustible spontaneity for the sake of the larger humanity He had come to bless, as well as for Himself, so must it be with us. However narrow the visible measurements of our life, if we receive the fulness of the Spirit we shall touch the entire world through those subtle and expansive forces which brood within us. We are sometimes humbled because our sphere of action seems so cramped and circumscribed. We long for wider fields. We should like to be the instruments of Divine activities which will affect continents and live through centuries. But into what a little space our aspiring natures seem to be shut up! There are Christians, excellent in character and rich in mental gifts, whose influence seems to go no further than the home, the shop, the office, a select coterie of friends. If the Spirit is in us, however, these mystic rivers will flow forth, and for the honour of Him whose name we trust the Spirit will see to it that our opportunities are imperial in their magnitude. We shall affect for good the fortunes of many lands, and our destiny shall be large and resplendent as our best aspirations. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred we will not let our influence take wings and pass through its appointed realms and latitudes. The panting springs can find no outlet, and the Spirit is restrained because those are so narrow who give to Him an earthly home. Our religious toleration, for instance, we carry to an extent that is simply sinful. We see men in process of being ruined, and, forsooth, we do not wish to interfere with their "religious convictions," as we call them,—just as if any man's convictions were worthy of respect when they do not keep him from sin! We think of ourselves as wells to which our neighbours may come if they wish; but the murmuring streams are forced back into the fountain-head, and wells become little better than cesspools. There must be an onward-pushing force in our religious life. (*Ibid.*) *Vitalising power in Spirit-filled men*:—There are souls around us so arid, scorched, and desolate that it seems almost impossible to educe within them a single grace or morality. Races are to be found—at least such is the testimony of the white men who are anxious to supplant them—which lack the rudimentary aptitudes for virtue, humanity, religion. They have received a prodigious endowment of appetite, passion, blood-thirstiness from the beast-world below them; but the spirit-world above them seems to have failed to filter down into their lives a single principle of light, truth, tenderness. Even these may be vitalised with a new ethic and fitted for a higher destiny than that of the dust-heap. But it must be by the Spirit in Christ's disciples. The trader who is a nominal Christian and a practical savage goes into their borders, and is an emissary of swift and complete destruction. They are touched by European commerce, and deteriorate and die off in swarms. They are forced into contact with Western civilisation, and they resent its restraints and perish from the lands of their forefathers. All these secondary influences are but as rivers of poison flowing through their borders, and a strange fate compels them to drink what they know to be the cup of death. The streams which can make this human desert, without a hint of verdure and land-marked with whitened bones, into a paradise, and keep it shaded with foliage, glorious with fruit, thick-set with holy homes and song-filled temples, must go out from the souls of men and women who have received the Holy Ghost. (*Ibid.*) *Encouragement for parents and children*:—In its relation to the Jews, there was a partial and very interesting fulfilment of this promise on the day of Pentecost, in the remarkable effusion of the Holy Spirit which then took place, and the blessed effects by which this was followed: but there is a still more striking and illustrious accomplishment to be realised, when, as the result of Divine influence, the Jews, as a nation and people, shall be brought back to God, and become incorporated with the Gentiles in that "one fold," of which Christ shall be acknowledged the true and only Shepherd. As a promise pertaining to Gospel

times, it is one in which we have a clear and direct interest. As to the particular design of the promise, the very terms in which it is expressed show that it is intended to refer, not perhaps exclusively, but still most emphatically, to the children and posterity of those who have themselves loved and feared God. Consider the promise,—I. IN ITS APPLICATION TO CHRISTIAN PARENTS. It should be regarded—1. As an encouragement to the faithful exercise of parental discipline and instruction. 2. As a warrant for believing application at the throne of grace. 3. As a satisfactory ground for hope and encouragement, even under the most unpromising appearances. II. IN ITS APPLICATION TO THE DESCENDANTS, AND MORE ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN OF PIOUS PARENTS. 1. This promise affords you no security, apart from your personal acceptance of Christ and submission to His authority. 2. This promise supplies you with the richest encouragement in seeking your salvation and an interest in the Divine favour. 3. This promise should encourage the pious descendants of godly ancestors to aim at more than ordinary eminence in their personal devotedness to God. The imagery of the text seems to imply that a special decision and fixedness of purpose may be expected: "One shall say, I am the Lord's," &c. It indicates, too, great vigour and rapidity of growth: they shall grow "as willows by the water-courses." 4. This promise will leave you doubly without excuse, and greatly aggravate your guilt, if you persist in neglecting salvation. How pleasing to perceive that while the promise applies more especially to the posterity of believers, it does not exclude others! Not only will God give His Spirit and impart His blessing to the seed and offspring of His people, but He will pour water upon every one who is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *The Church and the children:*—These "exceeding great and precious promises" are "unto us and our children." I. GOD'S PROMISE OF BLESSING UPON THE CHURCH. 1. Its import. Refers to the effusion of the Spirit. 2. Its participants. God's ancient people—in a sadly backsliding state. How deeply they needed the effusion of the Spirit! Two facts prove this to be our great want. (1) The low and languid piety of many. (2) The comparatively small success of the various agencies for the conversion of souls. 3. Its abundance. God gives what He promises only in answer to prayer. His promise cannot fail. "I will." II. GOD'S PROMISE OF BLESSING UPON THE CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH. 1. Our children need the Holy Spirit. Religion is not hereditary. No natural goodness can supersede His work. Spiritual life is not natural life carried up to its highest point of attainment. 2. God promises to give the Spirit as abundantly to them as to us. Same terms used. And having received the Spirit, they are to grow in grace vigorously (ver. 4). The manifestation of this in public (ver. 5). (*A. Tucker.*) *Revival:*—Foremost among the judgments which followed Israel's idolatries was the visitation of drought. Dwelling, as we do, under milder skies, and in a sea-girt isle, we enjoy copious supplies of fertilising rain. Yet, even in our own land, a sensible reduction of the rainfall in spring is followed by empty shocks in August. But in the sunny climes of Syria, if the half-yearly gift of rain failed, the effect was disastrous in the extreme. In the footsteps of famine marched dark-robed pestilence, and grim Death with his scythe of keenest edge. Nor was this all. Towns and hamlets, stripped of strong men, became an easy prey to the marauder. Successful raids paved the way for desolating war; and defeat, oppression, national ruin, came in swift procession. Hence, impiety must have grown bold indeed, if the Hebrews did not earnestly ask for the "early and the latter rain." Now if drought is so injurious in the fields of nature, is it not equally injurious in the Church? I. A STATE OF BARRENNESS DESCRIBED. The ground is said to be "dry"—that is, in a parched and impenetrable condition. This is not its normal state: this is deadly to vegetable growth. For some reason the land has been deprived of dew and rain. No seed, however big with latent life, can break its rigid shell; much less spring up or prosper. With such homely imagery as this the prophet leads our thoughts from the outer world to the inner. There is a sense of need expressed. Here is a marked improvement. The soul is athirst; the insensibility is gone. The rigid hardness of winter is at an end. II. A GENEROUS GIFT PROVIDED. A promise from God is as good as its performance. 1. The Source of the supply. It must come from above. The great folly to which all men are prone, is to seek the supply of their wants apart from God. 2. The suitableness of the means. What can be more suitable than showers of rain for a thirsty soil? Yet equally suitable is every gift of God to satisfy the wants of dependent man! 3. The copiousness of the gift. If

showers will not suffice, there shall be floods. 4. The range of the promise. It shall not terminate with ourselves: it shall extend to our children—ay, to our children's children! III. ABUNDANT FERTILITY FORESEEN. There shall be a revival of life in the Church, as in the parched fields after a copious shower—as in nature, at the advent of spring. 1. Multiplicity of conversions is here predicted. "They shall spring up as amongst the grass." 2. Rapidity of growth shall be another feature of this era. 3. Constancy of verdure will be enjoyed. They shall be "as willows by the water-courses." In the arid deserts of the East you will find here and there—conspicuous for their rarity—bright spots of luxuriant herbage, fruitful palms, fragrant flowers, in the midst of scorching sand. The secret is here,—that far down beneath the surface, a fount bubbles from the riven rock, which, watering the roots of trees and grass, produces beauty, shade, and fruit. So have we seen a man, placed in a very desert of privation—exposed to a scorching sun of trial—yet retaining all the freshness of his piety, and yielding fruits of wisdom, patience, hope. For the roots of his faith were nourished from a secret spring. (*Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *A revival promise:*—I. THE GREAT COVENANT BLESSING OF THE CHURCH. The gift of the Holy Ghost. Whatever metaphor is used this is the meaning of it. 1. This blessing has been already given. We must never underrate the importance of the ascension of our Lord, and the gift of the Spirit which followed thereupon. He is permanently resident in the midst of the Church. 2. This blessing is the subject of a promise. A promise of God is the essence of truth, the soul of certainty, the voice of faithfulness, and the substance of blessing. What a right royal promise it is! We hear the double "I will, I will." 3. This gift is a most needful blessing. 4. While we need the Spirit of God, His working is most effectual to supply all our needs when He does come upon us. In the East, you can generally tell where there is a stream or a river by the line of emerald which marks it. If you stood on a hill, you could see certain lines of green, made up of grass, reeds, rushes, and occasional trees, which have sprung up along the water-courses. Nothing is required to make the land fertile but to water it. Even thus let the Spirit of God come upon any Church, and it is all that it needs to make it living and fruitful. 5. The promise is liberal and unstinted. "Pour floods." I have seen in Italy the fields watered by the processes of irrigation: there are trenches made to run along the garden, and smaller gutters to carry the lesser streams to each bed, so that each plant gets its share of water; but the husbandman has to be very careful, for he has but little water in his tank, and only an allotted share of the public reservoir. No plant must have too much; no plot of ground must be drenched. How different is this from the methods of the Lord! He pours the water; He deluges the land. 6. This covenant blessing is peculiarly promised to a certain class of persons who are especially dear to us. "I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed," &c. II. THE GLORIOUS RESULT OF THIS COVENANT BLESSING. 1. The upspringing of spiritual life. Wherever the Spirit of God comes, there will be life in the Church and in the ministry; life in prayer, in effort, in holiness, in brotherly love. 2. The next effect will be seen in the calling out of numerous converts by the Holy Spirit. "They shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows by the water-courses." Who can count the blades of grass? The converts called out by the Spirit of God are vigorous and lively. The grass in the East springs up without any sowing, cultivating, or any other attention: it comes up of itself from the fruitful soil. There is the water, and there is the grass. So where the Spirit of God is with a Church there are sure to be conversions, it cannot be otherwise. 3. These conversions will come from all quarters. One shall say, another shall call, another shall subscribe. One comes from the wealthy, another from the poor, a third from nobody knows where. They shall come from all trades and occupations, from all churches and denominations. 4. These converted people shall be led to avow their faith. They shall not, like Nicodemus, come to Jesus by night. III. THE CONDUCT SUITABLE IF WE OBTAIN THIS BLESSING. 1. We must confess how dry, how wilderness-like we are. 2. Let us cultivate prayer. 3. We must put forth our own personal effort. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Overflowing in usefulness to others:*—Egypt has the river Nile all the year round, but as a fertilising power the Nile is practically useless till it is in flood and overflowing its banks. Then it bestows the needed blessing upon every foot of land it touches. It is when we are filled with the Spirit to the point of overflowing that we become a power for good to others. (*T. Waugh.*) *Revived Churches:*—If you go down to some of our Thames bridges, you will find the barges stuck

fast in the mud, and you cannot stir them. It would be a very difficult thing to provide machinery with which to move them; all the king's horses and all the king's men could not do it. But wait till the tide comes in; now every black, heavy old barge "walks the waters like a thing of life." Everything that can float is movable as soon as the silver flood has returned. So, many of our Churches lie in the mud. Everything seems motionless, powerless; but when the Spirit of God comes in like a flood, all is altered. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed.**—*God's covenant with Christian parents* (with Acts ii. 39):—Has God given to us any sure grounds to expect the conversion of the children of His people? Note—I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHILDREN TO THE PARENTS, as it is laid down in Scripture. It is plain that when God becomes our God, He becomes the God of our children. II. CHRISTIAN NURTURE furnishes us with another reason for expecting the salvation of our children. "Train up a child," &c. III. WE MAY FOUND OUR HOPES UPON GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AS A PRAYER-HEARING GOD. Let us not despair if the answer to prayer be long delayed. The Rev. Mr. Grimshaw, rector of Haworth, had but one son, and he did not follow his father's footsteps. After his father's death, he was heard to say, in his maudlin drunkenness, when riding, "This horse once carried a saint; now it carries a devil." Yet, hopeless as this case seemed, he became a true penitent, and one of his deathbed sayings was, "How astonished my father will be to see me in heaven!" (*Evangelical Advocate.*) *Christian home environment*:—There have been few of the great teachers of Christendom who have not derived their deepest convictions from the impressions made by their earliest domestic environment. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *The value of young life*:—The nation of the future rests upon the cradles of to-day. The young life in any institution is that which repairs its defects, enlarges its usefulness, and stimulates its charities. The young life, in any family, is the influence which suns the path of age, invigorates exertion, and quickens the growth of the virtues. Where would the valour and vigour of the country be if deprived of the support of young life? Disraeli says that almost everything that is great has been done by youth; and the history of heroes is the history of youth. In the vegetable world the mission and influence of the young life is not less plain than powerful. According to Louis Figuier, the bud must be considered as a fundamental element in the plant, which, without it, would soon perish. It is the bud which year by year repairs the losses, supplies the flowers, the leaves, the branches which have disappeared. Through its means the plant increases in growth. Through it its existence is prolonged. The bud is the true renovator of the vegetable world. Therefore these buds are everywhere —on the roots, the leaves, and sometimes even on the flowers, for Nature never loses sight of the phenomena essential to organic life—namely, the production of new beings. (*Scientific Illustrations and Symbols.*) *Child-piety*:—A Christian gentleman's little son, just before he died, said to his father: "When I get to heaven, I shall go up to Jesus and say, 'Jesus, I know You; my papa told me about You.'" (*T. Champness.*) *A Christian childhood*:—Rev. F. B. Meyer was asked: "How did you find Christ?" This is his written reply: "I do not remember when first I became a Christian. The love of God came over me as the dawn over a summer sky; and it was only in after years that I realised what God had done for me in those early days. My mother and father were godly people. They expected me to be a Christian, and at my mother's knee I said my morning and evening prayers. It is to their prayer and faith and unremitting care that I owe everything." *God's blessing on the offspring of His people*:—Speaking of the way in which his mother received him when he informed her that he had decided to leave the railway office and become a minister, the Rev. John M'Neill said: "Taking my face between her hands, she drew it close to her own and said, 'John, I meant you for that before I ever saw your face.' I knew then, what I had never guessed before, that I owe my conversion and my ministry to my mother's prayer." (*Presbyterian.*)

Ver. 4. **And they shall spring up as among the grass.**—*Springing up as grass*:—R.V., more accurately, omits "as"; but the text is unquestionably corrupt. There is no doubt that the LXX. preserves the true reading: "spring up as grass among the waters." (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) **As willows by the water-courses.**—*The willow*, Heb. *'arab*, a tree growing on the banks of streams in Palestine, Egypt, and Babylon (Lev. xxiii. 40; Job xl. 22; Ps. cxxxvii. 2). It grows to a considerable size, and was found generally in groves. It has, indeed,

been pointed out that the tree now called 'arab by the Arabs is not a willow but a species of poplar (*Populus Euphratica*). As, however, this tree is confined to hot countries like those on the lower Euphrates, it seems more likely that the name was originally that of the willow, and that it was subsequently transferred to the poplar. The Arabic translation of the Bible renders the Heb. 'arab by *saphsaph*, which means "willow," or, according to the Talmud, a species of the willow growing by brooks. (*J. Macpherson, M.A.*) *Willows* (Heb. *'arâbim*) are mentioned five times in the Bible, always associated with rivers or water-courses. The willow (*Salix*) is represented in Palestine by several species, though it is by no means a conspicuous tree in any part of the country. The weight of authority is decidedly in favour of the willow, which though not a conspicuous tree would be doubtless associated in the minds of the inhabitants with pleasurable feelings, as testifying to the presence of the much-prized water. (*W. Houghton, M.A.*) *The "willow":*—Branches of the *garab*, which R. Kiepert brought with him, according to Wetzstein's indication of the place, and which O. Kersten, the secretary of the Imperial German Consulate, sent to the Royal Herbarium at Berlin, show that the *garab* is the Oriental poplar, *Populus Euphratica* (Olivier), whose undergrowth may easily on superficial observation be confounded with willow bushes; but it is distinguished from the willow by its leaves, which, although small, are almost quite smooth-edged, and not saw-like. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *The growth of the willow:*—In the Duke of Bedford's willow garden was a willow which grew in twenty years to the height of between 60 and 70 feet. Four feet from the ground it was 7 feet in circumference. A small cutting grew to the height of 25 feet in four years. Fuller says: "In the isle of Ely, where willows flourish, there is a proverb to this effect, The profit by willows will buy the owner a horse, before that by other trees will pay for the saddle." *Willows by the water-courses:*—Every year we welcome the opening buds of the willow with their silky down, as among the first indications of approaching spring. The children delight to pluck off the shooting twigs, in their rambles in the meadows in search of early flowers. They call them palm branches, though they have little in common with the palm save that willow branches as well as palm branches were carried in the hand of the Jews on their great festival. There are many varieties of the willow, distributed over all parts of the globe, but they are most common in the temperate and sub-tropical regions, where they form a pleasing feature in the landscape, especially in the vicinity of ponds and rivers. The Jewish exiles in the watered plains of Babylon were painfully familiar with the willows, for on their branches they hung their silent harps and wept as they thought of far-away Zion (Ps. cxxxvii.). Yet the prophet who came to his countrymen with the cheering promise of Divine pardon and speedy restoration to their native land, found in these same willows a beautiful illustration of the happy change that would be produced and the blessings that would speedily follow their restoration to Divine favour and Fatherland. 1. The rapid and luxuriant growth of the willow is suggestive. A mere stake driven into the ground in the vicinity of water where there is plenty of moisture will take root and bud into leaf and branch in a remarkably short space of time. We are familiar with the immense crop of long and slender twigs that shoot up in the summer months and are yearly cut for basket-making in the osier beds by the banks of our rivers. A well-watered soil seems to be the one thing necessary to ensure the life and growth of the willow. In the winter the pollards stand out in the landscape, gaunt and desolate, like old and rotten sign-posts, and the osier beds look like a muddled mass of chopped root stumps. But in summer there is a perfect transformation from apparent death into new life, with graceful and luxuriant growth and greenness. Now, it is winter with men when they live apart from God and strangers to the blessings and comforts of the Gospel. But as soon as men are brought under the gracious influence of the Gospel of Christ, and come into touch with the "river of the water of life," all things are changed in them and for them. And the beauty and the joy for us is that so much of this change comes quickly. Certainly, for some of the choicest experiences of the Divine life the Christian has to wait. But very many of the comforts and beauties of the Gospel come to the Christian speedily. 2. The willow is capable of service. The wood of the willow is not to be compared to that of the oak and the other slow-growing forest trees. And yet there is a special power and service in the willow which make its cultivation important and of commercial value. Indeed, no growth in nature is without this capacity for service when it falls into the hands of those who know how to use

it. You know what power may be found in the delicate pore of such grasses as the flax and hemp when it is properly prepared and spun into cordage. And the slender twigs of the willow, though so rapid in their growth, are yet so tough and flexible that they are extensively used in basket-making, which is, perhaps, the oldest industry in the world. The wood of the larger kinds of willow also is so tough and durable as well as flexible that the ancients employed it in the making of shields for the soldier and warships for the sailor. While the steamer has largely superseded the sailing boat, the paddle-blades of steamers are still made of willow-wood, and if shields have been superseded, the cricket fields of the world still make a large demand upon the willow for the best bats. Even more surprising is it to find that the most suitable charcoal for making gunpowder is procured from the willow-wood, so that even the slender willow, the whip and plaything of the child, can become a powerful force in war. And as soon as men come under the influence of the Gospel of Christ they become serviceable as they never were before. Even the youngest Christians are powers for good in many ways in all our Churches. While there are some things for which we need the firmness, wisdom, and experience of years, we have almost endless capacity and readiness for service in the young Christians. (*J. Menzies.*)

Ver. 5. **One shall say, I am the Lord's.**—*A public profession of religion* :—Those who become the subjects of special grace will choose to join the Church, and enter into covenant to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. I. DESCRIBE THE SUBJECTS OF SPECIAL GRACE. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THEIR PROFESSING RELIGION. III. WHY THE SUBJECTS OF SPECIAL GRACE CHOOSE TO JOIN THE CHURCH AND ENTER INTO COVENANT WITH GOD. 1. They love the commands of God. 2. They love the ordinances of God. 3. Their hearts are united to Christians. 4. They desire to promote the cause and interest of God in the world. 5. They desire to grow in grace. 6. They are so sensible of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, and their proneness to forget and forsake God, that they desire to bind themselves, by covenant vows and obligations, to be steadfast and unmovable in His service. Those who have sincerely made a public profession of religion must rejoice to see any who appear to be the subjects of special grace, make a public profession of religion. Improvement—1. If those who have become the subjects of special grace desire to make a public profession of religion, and to enter into covenant with God, then none who have really become subjects of special grace have any just excuse for neglecting to join the Church, and neglecting to bind themselves to love and obey God for ever. 2. If the subjects of special grace always desire to profess religion and partake of Divine ordinances, then so long as they neglect their duty they must necessarily feel unhappy. 3. While the subjects of special grace neglect to join the Church, they live in a very sinful manner. They greatly injure both themselves and religion. 4. It appears from what has been said that some who have long entertained a hope of being the subjects of special grace, must soon give up their hope if they continue to neglect joining the Church. 5. It highly concerns those who have entered into covenant with God, to be steadfast in His covenant, and persevere in universal obedience. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Converts, and their confession of faith* :—This is to take place after the Lord has poured out His Spirit upon His people, and upon their offspring. The mainspring of everything good and gracious is the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit of God comes, converts come too. If they do not come by the Spirit of God, they are not worth having. Converts will come forward to confess their faith. I. THIS CONFESSION OF FAITH IS PERSONAL. "One shall say, I am the Lord's," &c. It is not a joint confession, but an individual one. It is "one" and "another" and "another." 1. All confession of Christ must be personal; anything else is unreal and worthless. All religion that is true is personal. 2. This personal confession needs to be carefully attended to when there are many coming forward. 3. This individual confession of your faith in Christ is incumbent upon you very specially when there are few coming forward. I should say to myself, "If there is nobody in this village confessing Christ, then it is all the more urgent upon me that I should confess Him. If there are few added to the Church, then I will go that the Church may not be discouraged in its Christian efforts." I like to have around me those who feel, "It is no consideration with me whether there are many or few; I have to act as before God on my own account. If there be few who do right, that is all the more reason why I should do it." II. THIS CONFESSION IS VARIED,

1. One person speaks out for himself: "One shall say, I am the Lord's." That is a fine speech. If you, from your very soul, can say this in any company, and not be ashamed to say it before men, angels, or devils, God has taught you a noble piece of eloquence. 2. The next person mentioned in our text confessed his faith in a different way, for he called himself by the name of Jacob; that is to say, he took up his position with the people of God under their lowliest title. "There," said he. "I am prepared to suffer affliction with the people of God, to be reproached when they are reproached, to be shunned when they are shunned, to be ridiculed when they are ridiculed. I belong to Jacob. He is an extraordinary person, cut off from the rest of the world to be the Lord's, and I go with him." 3. But here is a third person, who makes his confession in a still different way: "Another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." I do not know this person; sometimes, I think that he is a friend of mine, who is afraid to speak, but who likes to write. "I could not," says one, "speak my confession of faith, but I could joyfully sit down and write it." Yes, you are timid, and trembling, and slow of speech. Do not condemn yourself for that. Still, I am not sure that this is the person mentioned in the text. I seem to fancy that it is a stronger body, a man who is not content with saying it, but who writes it down in black and white, "I am the Lord's." That which is written remains; so he puts it down. This person who thus subscribed, or wrote with his hand, unto the Lord, also went the whole way towards God and His people at their best, for it is added that he surnamed himself by the name of Israel. There are some who give themselves up to the Church of God in a very complete and unreserved manner, resolving that all the privileges they can enjoy they will have, all the holiness they can ever attain to they will gain, and all the consecration that lies within the region of possibility they will strive after and secure. III. THESE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH ARE ALL GRACIOUS. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) "*I am the Lord's*":—1. "I am His" follows "My Beloved is mine." You must have Christ before you say that you belong to Christ. 2. This is a very practical confession. If I am the Lord's, then I must not give myself up to be the slave of another. 3. It will also be a high incentive to duty to say truly, "I am the Lord's." I must live for Him. 4. This confession has a sweet, comforting aspect. 5. This is my hope of safety and perfection. (*Ibid.*) **Another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord.**—*Subscribing with the hand*:—In the day when the prophet Isaiah wrote his book, it was a custom for people to draw on their hand the name, likeness, or symbol of the person they loved or the master they served. It was often painted on the hand of a woman with an ink which could be rubbed off only with much trouble; but men punctured their skin with a needle, dropping in the ink at the same time, as is now frequently done by sailors; and occasionally the name or symbol was branded on their skin with a hot iron. In this way, a man would write on his hand, or on some other portion of his body, the name or likeness of the god he worshipped; the soldier would bear the name of his commander; the slave would have the name of his master; and we are informed that, in a subsequent age, the early Christians printed upon their hand or arm, and sometimes upon their breast, the name of Jesus and a likeness of the cross. Having this custom in mind, the prophet, writing as though God were speaking through him to His weary people,—as, no doubt, was the case,—says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on her own son? yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands" (chap. xlix. 16). Had our text in English been written more in harmony with the original language, it would have read thus—"Another shall subscribe, or write, upon his hand, I belong to Jehovah!" (*W. Birch.*) *Tattooing*:—There are constant allusions to this in the classics. We know that devout worshippers dedicated themselves to the god they worshipped, and were stamped with a secret mark. Paul alludes to this when he says, "Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"; as much as to say, "I am Christ's: I have had His name branded upon me." When he suffered from being scourged and beaten with rods, he called it bearing the marks of the Lord Jesus, and did as good as say, "Flog away, you will only engrave His name into my flesh, for I am Christ's." Now it would be a very superstitious and foolish thing for any man to be tattooed with the name of the Lord, or with a cross; but all that such an act meant in those who did it of old we ought to mean, namely, that we are for ever, and beyond recall, the property of Jesus.

(*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Subscribers* :—My object is to persuade you to subscribe your life to the Lord. You may answer, "Who is the Lord?" I reply—1. He is the Creator. 2. He is the Father of your spirit. 3. If so, He is impressionable. He is grieved because of sin. Is not the Saviour's broken heart a manifestation of the heart of our Heavenly Father? 4. He is your true Friend. 5. I call on you to subscribe your life unto the Lord, because of your everlasting welfare. (*W. Birch.*)

Ver. 6. **Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel**—"*I am the First, and I am the Last*": —This affirmation of God's existence appears more comprehensive than the similar one, made by Him to Moses, "I am that I am." It is true, when we say that He is by His own absolute will and power, we assert by implication all that belongs necessarily to the essence and character of the Almighty. We assert His eternity; for He who so exists could have had no beginning, and can have no end: we assert His creation of all other beings, and His sovereignty over them; for He who alone is from eternity, must have given existence to all things that are besides Himself; and, as the Author of all, in and for whom all exist, must be the sovereign Ruler and Disposer of all. Nevertheless the ampler form of expression, "I am the First and I am the Last," implying comparison with and precedency to all other existences, would seem to convey to the mind more distinct notions of the eternity, the omnipotence, the creative will and beneficence, of that infinite Being "who is above all, and before all, and in all." (*R. Cattermole, B.D.*) *The First and the Last* :— Bitter was the sorrow of the prophet who spoke these words when he saw his people turn away from Jehovah. Israel had been enlightened by the purest lights. Alone of all the nations of the ancient world, it possessed the knowledge of the One living and holy God. Yet these truths are forgotten; these privileges are rejected; this God is denied. Obedient to the idolatrous inspirations of the Semitic races whose vitiated blood runs through their veins, the Israelites turn towards Moloch, Baal, Astarte. Then the prophet argues, struggles, waxes indignant, implores; he shows the inanity of that idolatrous worship and the infamy of those hideous rites; he reminds Israel of the greatness of their origin and of their destiny; he calls up before their eyes the sacred figure of Jehovah; he tells his people, in the words which the Almighty Himself has put into his mouth, "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and His redeemer the Lord of Hosts; I am the First, and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God." This history is our own. A light more resplendent far than that which illumined Israel hath shone upon the Christian nations. What has all this availed us, and whither are marching the rising generations? Doubtless, the stone and wooden idols of the past cannot be set up again. But this gloomy fatality before which men would compel us to abdicate our reason, is it not an idol too? I. "I AM THE FIRST." 1. We find in this the affirmation of the fundamental doctrine of the supreme God, the Creator of all things. To-day men would teach us another Genesis of the world: the old doctrines of Epicurus are once more becoming current; we hear of eternal matter, of millions and millions of atoms which, by whirling about continually in space, have unconsciously and spontaneously invested themselves with a motion in accordance with the mathematical laws which they had themselves called into existence. We are told that out of a mechanical combination suddenly issued a living cell, and that, millions of centuries aiding, this life has become vegetative, then animal, then conscious, intellectual, and finally moral; we are asked to acknowledge this ascending progression of matter which, from the inert molecule it was in the first instance, has become sensitive protoplasm, then has been transformed into the plant, which in its turn has become endowed with motion, then advancing one step further has turned into the hideous animal, creeping in the mire of the primitive marshes, to rise up at length in its conquered majesty and call itself Plato, Aristotle, Jesus Christ. And having thus accounted for the formation of things, men look with scornful pity upon those who still have recourse to the intervention of an all-creating God; their idea of the Divine Being may be expressed in the words of the learned Laplace to Napoleon the First: "I have had no need of this hypothesis." In presence of this self-styled scientific Genesis, it is not only my faith which revolts, but my reason repeats, with the enthusiasm of a conviction firmer than ever, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"; for if there is in my reason an immovable principle, it is indeed this: that no effect can exist without a cause, that all which is in the effect must also be in the cause; that, consequently, matter can never have brought

forth intelligence, chaos can never have given birth to harmony, for in nowise can the lesser ever have produced the greater. 2 This reminds us, further, that as God is the supreme Cause, He must also be the supreme End of all that exists, the centre of the thoughts and affections of all the beings He has created. All things, says St. Paul, are by Him and for Him. Every being has a destination, and the noblest destination of all beings is that which the Scriptures call the glory of God. You know what this ideal has become, and what sin has made of it. 3. This means, further, that God is at the basis of all that is done to raise and save humanity, to bring it back to the true life which it has lost by separating itself from Him. God is at work in the midst of mankind. It is in a region higher than that of science that we must seek the hidden sources of the river of life which brings regeneration, consolation, and eternal hope to the world. Whence come they then? They gush from the depths of the religious revelation which the God whom we serve has given to mankind. God the Creator is also God the Redeemer, and, in order of grace as in that of nature, He may truly say: "I am the First." What has been accomplished in the world must also be accomplished in each individual being, and the redemption of humanity is nothing if it is not worked out in the innermost soul of those who are to reap its fruits. II. "I AM THE LAST." By this we must understand—1. That God never abdicates, and that He shall ever remain the Supreme Master, when all the lords of a day shall have passed away after having made a little noise in the world. 2. That God remains the Supreme Judge, and that, consequently, the hour of justice shall certainly strike. 3. That God is the Supreme Refuge of every soul that calls upon Him, the only one which remains standing when all others have disappeared. (*E. Bersier, D.D.*) *Biblical monotheism:*—As to this, the sublimest utterance of Scripture, we offer three preliminary remarks—1. It is supported by the structure and order of nature. So far as the universe has come within the sweep of scientific observation and research, it appears as one complete whole. All its parts are beautifully harmonised; all its forces are nicely balanced. 2. It is in direct antagonism to certain prevalent opinions. It is opposed to atheism, which declares there is no God; to fetichism, the worship of any material object that a capricious superstition may select; to polytheism, which holds the plurality of gods; and to pantheism, which regards nature as identical with Deity, and thus destroys a Divine personality. 3. It is accepted as a fundamental truth in all evangelical churches. But our object is to consider the practical uses of Biblical monotheism. I. IT REVEALS THE GREATNESS OF THE CREATOR. Survey this wondrous universe. Gaze upon the vast, and examine the minute in the clearest and broadest light of modern science, and what do you see—wisdom? Yes, manifold wisdom. Goodness? Yes, like an overflowing tide, overflowing all. Power? In rearing the stupendous fabrics, building up the mountains, pouring out the oceans, stretching out the heavens. Do you see wealth in all this? If you attach value to one acre of earth, what is the value of the globe? If there be but one God, how great must He be! II. IT REVEALS THE DEFINITENESS OF MORAL OBLIGATION. Deep in the souls of all men is the sense of duty. My definition of virtue is this—"following a right rule from a right motive." What is the rule? Clearly, if there be but one God, the will of that one God must be the rule. What is the motive? Clearly, if there be but one God, supreme love to that one God. Were there a plurality of gods there would be a difficulty to find out what virtue is; we should have to determine whose will to obey—the will of each, or some, or all. And we should also have to find out who of all the gods we should love the most. III. IT REVEALS THE FITNESS OF RELIGION TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SOUL. 1. The human heart has a centralising tendency. Deep in our emotional nature is a craving for some one object on which to place entire confidence, and centre the deepest love. 2. The moral character of the soul depends upon its central object. By a law of our nature we become like that we most love. He who loves God becomes a partaker of the Divine nature. 3. The soul's happiness is determined by the character of the object most loved. All experience shows that most of our happiness and misery comes out of our supreme love. All, in every age, who have loved the one God supremely have felt with the psalmist who said, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" IV. IT REVEALS THE HUMAN BROTHERHOOD OF SOULS. "To us," says Paul, "there is but one God, the Father of all things, and we in Him." V. IT REVEALS THE WONDERFUL IN MEDIATION. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," &c. Here is love passing knowledge. 1. What a disparity between Him who

loves and them who are loved! What a disparity in natures! God, the Almighty, the All-wise, the Eternal. Man, the feeble, the ignorant, and the dying. What a disparity in character! God, the Essence and Fountain of all holiness. Man, vile and polluted with sin. 2. What a manifestation of the greatness of His love. Is this one God our one God? Have we no idols? (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **Fear ye not.**—*Christian courage:*—Boldness for God, and boldness in dealing with God, should form part of the Christian character; and the Word of God encourages this Christian boldness. We are repeatedly exhorted to "fear not," to "be of good courage." I. WHY ARE WE TO EXPECT THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD WOULD BE LIKELY TO FEAR? 1. They have always been a persecuted people. 2. Many a man, before he is decided for God, finds out that, if he makes up his mind to enter into the service of the Lord, his worldly interest is nearly sure to suffer. 3. Others, again, know their personal interest for their worldly circumstances. They know, for instance, their birth, their wealth, their talent. Then perhaps they are called of God to think seriously about their eternal state; and the result is, that they feel in their own minds, "If I forsake all this outward display of means, and show that I do not value it as I have hitherto done, my influence amongst others will very greatly suffer." 4. There is many a man, if he would serve the Lord, must make a sacrifice of many of his personal and worldly comforts. 5. Then, take the case of doctrines. There are many who imbibe from their earliest days the idea that religion is gloomy, that God is an object of terror, that death must be misery; they live in no thought of the Lord's coming again in joy and happiness, and heaven itself, with its delights and its pleasures, is never really considered. Now, all these things frequently produce fear in our minds. II. THE REASON WHY WE SHOULD NOT FEAR. The reason is, that the Lord thus argues with us: "Have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it?" That is, God challenges man to deny this fact, that He knows the end from the beginning, and has proved that He knows it by foretelling the end from the beginning. This is the manner in which God argues in other passages (chap. xlii. 9). God knows the end; God foresees the means, and foreseeing the means He exercises control over those means—everything that happens therefore, great or small, is under the control of God, who "orders all things after the counsel of His own will," and consequently we have nothing to fear, because we are in His hands who "doeth all things well." This is the manner in which we find the argument used in chapter li. 12. III. Having thus stated the Christian's duty as well as his privilege—not to fear; and having seen what the reason is, that God has foretold all things, and therefore decreed and settled all things from the beginning, HE THEN CHALLENGES HIS PEOPLE in these words—"Ye are even My witnesses," and therefore urges upon them, by the strongest possible personal appeal, to bear testimony to the fact that the Lord He is God, and our God too, for ever and for ever. (*M. Villiers, M.A.*)

Vers. 9–20. **They that make a graven image.**—*The vanity of graven images:*—Substituting homely prose for glowing poetry we may, after a fashion, reduce the prophet's thought to propositions like the following—1. Neither the idol nor its god knows anything, while Jehovah knows all. 2. Neither the idol nor its god can do aught, while Jehovah is almighty. 3. Neither the idol nor its god is aught, while Jehovah is the living God, God of the entire universe, and a God of love,—in a word, the perfect Personality. 4. The worship of idols or their gods is degrading, while that of Jehovah exalts and saves the soul. (*W. S. Ayres.*) *The idolater's folly:*—With a dash of pungent satire, Isaiah shows what a silly man he is. We have here the whole process of god-manufacture. The poor devotee selects a cedar, or a cypress, or an oak, which probably his own hands planted many years ago; and, having hewn it down, sets to work with line, and plane, and chisel, to fashion it into the resemblance of a human being. This being done, he places it in a shrine or temple, and falls down before it, and worships it. What becomes of the rest of the tree? Oh, with it he makes a blazing fire to warm himself, or to bake his bread! So that it is quite a chance which portion of the wood becomes a god, and which portion turns to ashes on the hearth; the same tree suffices to cook food for his hungry body, and to provide an object of adoration for his hungry soul. The man is an utter fool, only to be ridiculed and laughed at; and the prophet holds him up to the derision of all sensible men, as one whose head is surely turned, or who has fairly lost his wits. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **He planteth an ash.**—*The planter and the rain:*—The civilised and cultivated tree is the joint product of human care and the earth's fertility. Let us study the picture and see how true it is to what the world contains. 1. We may ask ourselves how it is that any institution or established form of human living comes to be prevalent and dominant. A strong idea, of freedom, of justice, of mercy, enters into some strong man's soul. It makes itself completely his. Then it will not be satisfied with him; it grows restless within him, and demands the world. Then he takes it out some day and plants it. With some vigorous, incisive word or deed he thrusts his live and fiery idea down deep into the fruitful soil of human life. Then human life takes up his idea and nourishes it. Wonderfully all the forces gather around it and give it their vitality. History bears witness that it has all been living by the power of that idea unknown, unguessed; philosophy says that in it lies the key of her hard problems; economy discovers that by it life may be made more thrifty and complete; poetry shows its nobleness; affection wreaths it with love; all the essential hopes and fears and needs of human nature come flocking to it; until at last you can no more conceive of human life without that idea than you can think with complacency of the landscape without the great tree which is as thoroughly a part of it as is the very ground itself. A free Church, a just court, a popular government—this is the way in which every institution comes to be. Here is the relation of the world's few great creative men to the great mass and body of its life. Helpless Europe without Martin Luther. Helpless also Martin Luther without Europe. Here is the mutual need of great souls and the great world. 2. We have another illustration, even more striking, close at our hand, in the way in which character grows up in our personal nature. Where do our characters come from? It is easy sometimes to represent them as the result of strong influence which other men have had over us. It is easy at other times to think of them as if they made themselves, shaping themselves by mere internal fermentation into the result we see. But neither account tells the story by itself. When we question ourselves, not about character in general, but about special points and qualities of character, then we are sure that it was by some outer influence made our own, some seed of motive or example set into our lives and then taken possession of by those lives and filled with their vitality, developed into their own type and kind of vice or virtue—it was thus that this, which is now so intimate that we call it not merely ours but ourselves, came into being. This is the reason of the perpetual identity along with the perpetual variety of goodness and badness. We are all good and bad alike; and yet every man is good and bad in a way all his own—in a way in which no other man has ever been bad or good since the world began,—just as all ash-trees are alike because they have all been planted from the same nurseries; and yet every ash-tree is different from every other because it has grown in its own soil and fed on its own rain: the society and the individuality of moral life. 3. The truth has its clearest illustration, it may be, in the way in which God has sent into the world the Gospel of His Son. Most sharp and clear and definite stands out in history the life and death of Jesus Christ. It was the entrance of a new, Divine force into the world. But what has been the story of that force once introduced? It has been subjected to the influences which have created the ordinary currents of human life. The characters and thoughts of men have told upon it. The Gospel has shared in the fortunes of the Christian world. It has followed in the track of conquering armies; it has been beaten back and hindered by the tempests of revolution and misrule; it has been tossed upon the waves of philosophical speculation; it has been made the plaything or the tool of politics; it has taken possession of countries and centuries only by taking possession of men through the natural affections of their human hearts; it has worked through institutions which it only helped to create. While it has helped to make the world, it has also at every moment been made by the world into something different from its own pure self. If you try to take either half of the truth by itself you get into the midst of puzzle and mistake. Think of the Gospel simply as an intrusion of Divine force kept apart from any mixture with the influences of the world, and it is impossible to understand the forms in which it has been allowed to present itself. Its weaknesses and its strength are alike unintelligible. Think of it as a mere development of human life, and you cannot conceive how it came to exist at all. But consider it in its completeness. Remember that it is a Divine force working through human conditions; let it be all one long incarnation, God manifest in the flesh—and then you see at once why it is so weak and why it is so strong; why it has not occupied

the world with one lightning flash of power, and why it must at last, however slowly, accomplish its complete salvation. 4. Every Christian is a little Christendom; and the method of the entrance of the Gospel into the great world is repeated in the way in which the Gospel enters into every soul, which then it occupies and changes. Again, there is the special act of the implanting of the new life, and then there is the intrusting of the new-implanted life to the nature and its circumstances. The man was born again! Since then, long years have come and gone. What have they seen? The rain has nourished it—that long-sown seed! Nothing has happened since which has not touched that seed and helped or hindered its maturity. Still remember, it is His rain. The influences into whose influence the seed was given still were God's. He took the child, and gave the friend, and sent you on the journey, and shaped the nature which bestowed on the Christian life its distinctive character. 5. May we not say that the principle itself includes the whole truth of the supernatural, and its relation to the natural? (*Phillips Brooks, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **He burneth part thereof in the fire.**—Which is to far better purpose than the other part made into an idol. (*J. Trapp.*) **Aha, I am warm.**—*Cold*:—This is an expression of that natural joy which will escape from one in some way or other, when from a comfortless apartment, or from a frosty street, or from some wintry office of obligation, he sees the shining of his own hearth. If it could be introduced thus with an exclamation in the land of Judea, that mild land, it should certainly be repeated in this stern climate with a deep feeling of relief and thankfulness. The household gods of ancient Italy were set up about the fireplace of each dwelling, as about a sacred spot, deserving to be surrounded with the images of a divine protection; and even now, all over the world, altar and hearth are but another phrase for home. "Who," asks the psalmist, "can stand before His cold?" God sends it; and He has filled the earth with materials, and the mind of man with resources, to repel and overcome it. He is the same Sovereign Wisdom and Goodness in this as in every other part of His works. And yet we must confess that it is one of His unwelcome ministers; but, like all the rest of what we account so in the natural world, subservient to high purposes in the holy providence of the Lord. Let us turn to the various instrumentality by which its vigour is mitigated and its power for mischief broken. "I am warm," says the speaker in the text. So would the ground say if it had a tongue, while it lies sheltered under the fleecy garments of dazzling whiteness, which the very cold has woven for it out of the dark mists. "I am warm," say the beast and the bird of the frozen zone, as the one lies close in his furry coat or the locks of his long hair, and the other is not afraid to cleave the inexorable sky with his breast of down. "I am warm," repeat the animals who are natives of our own temperate circle, as they take shelter in the hollow retreats which their industry has contrived, or make their way towards the more genial countries whither their instincts direct them. "I am warm," say the lake and the stream, while they are armed with the polished breast-plate which has been forged for them, not among furnaces of glowing heat, but in the "magazines of the hail." "I am warm," says man; he who commands the inferior creatures, he who makes a path for himself even over the deep, he who compels into his bond-service the substances and the elements of the world. He cuts down the trees, and makes them do him a kinder office by their blaze than they had done before by their shadow. And better than this; he opens the dark treasures with which a gracious providence has stored the lower parts of the earth, and he finds them more precious than the "vein for the silver," than "the place of sapphires and dust of gold." What are the feelings which the consideration of the cold and all its alleviating circumstances should impress upon the mind? 1. Thankfulness towards God. There is no small danger of losing sight of the Almighty Benefactor in partaking of His benefits. There is no small danger of even turning those very benefits into a sort of idols that we substitute in His place. This was precisely and literally the case with the person whom the prophet describes as speaking in the text. You are like him, who transform your interest into your religion; making a show of worship, when you are thinking only how to be warmed and fed. You, too, are like him who shape your faith and your convenience out of the same material; making the concerns of the soul but part and parcel with common necessities. We are all like him, so far as we turn our comforts into our divinities. 2. Sympathy with His suffering creatures. (*N. L. Frothingham.*) *The wisdom of God in the freezing of water*:—I cannot omit calling your attention to

a remarkable fact in the freezing of water, which has nothing to surpass it in the surprising wisdom of its ordination, even if it has any perfect parallel in the whole economy of nature. We know it to be a general law of material substances, that they expand with the heat and contract with the cold. The particles of water are subjected to this rule, like all other particles of matter. But if this were allowed to hold on throughout, giving way to no exception, do but reflect what would be the consequences. The drops at the surface, as they were successively congealed, would sink. The process of freezing would begin at the bottom. Layer after layer would thus be deposited, which no returning suns could penetrate to dissolve; and the most that the summer could do would be to wet the face of the flinty mass. The water-courses would be for ever stopped in their glad and wholesome flow; and many a broad river would scarcely float a boat upon its plashy shallows. And now what has been done to avert such a calamity? A new law has been instituted, in direct contravention of the old, to meet the exigency of the case. The water, precisely at the moment of congelation, breaks away into the line of an opposite decree. It expands and grows lighter. It refuses to descend. It rests fixed upon the top, an ornament and a defence. I know not how others may be affected by a view like this; but it seems to me to call for an adoring acknowledgment of that all-pervading design which thus supplies the wants of its creation by a special departure from its own method, as invariable in its action as the method itself. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 17. **And the residue thereof he maketh a god.**—*Residual religion:*—The scene is one which we may describe as very childish indeed. It belongs to the very earliest stage one might imagine of the thought of worship. The man who evidently lives under conditions by no means of the highest civilisation feels himself exposed to the natural inclemency of the weather, and to the pangs of hunger. He selects a tree, and because he needs food he breaks up the tree and kindles a fire and prepares his food. He then rejoices in the warmth of the fire that he has kindled, and he has satisfied two of the simple wants of nature. He has been hungry, and he has provided himself food. He is cold, and he has provided himself with warmth. But there is yet another instinct in his nature which demands satisfaction. He is conscious that he is a weak creature in the midst of a strange and wonderful world. Mysterious powers that he cannot fathom seem to float about his life, and to interpose their forces often to the derangement of his plans. And therefore, when he has satisfied those two simple physical wants, he takes the residue of the tree that he has cut down, and he makes it into a god. Thus it is that he satisfies three imperious desires and needs of his nature. Is it wholly untrue to say that there are many men who live after this fashion, that when they have supplied their own wants, when their body has been amply fed, when the conditions of their life have been cared for so that they are well provided with the warming comforts of life, then, out of the residue of their time, out of the residue of their money, out of the residue of their thought, they will, perchance, consecrate something to God? (*Bp. W. B. Carpenter, D.D.*) *Materials and principles of life:*—There is one very common delusion which, if we will watch ourselves, we shall find that we are all of us more or less liable to. We confuse the materials of life with the principles which ought to govern life. The materials of life in this poor man's case were very simple indeed. He is a man who can cut down a tree of the forest to make himself a habitation, and from the wood all round about him gathers what may be called the material of life, whether for the house or for the cooking of food, and these materials of life are such that you and I, looking back upon them from our refined and elevated position, say that they are very simple and very crude indeed; but he manipulates these materials after a certain principle. Given that we have different materials to deal with, and that ours is not the life of the forest and the dependence upon the forest, but that ours is the life of modern civilisation, with our railways and our telegraphs and our newspapers daily, with our opportunities of enjoyment in abundance, and with means of information in the multiplied books which are issued daily from the press. With all these things which constitute the material of our life, and with our occupations governed and guided by the principles of modern civilisation, it is possible that we may say—and we shall say truly—that the materials of life which we possess are far superior to the rude materials which belonged to that poor man's life. But is the difference between one man and another to be judged by the materials which a man uses, or by the principles which he applies in the use of those materials? (*Ibid.*) *Religion the all-comprising principle of life:*—Is religion to be looked upon as a thing that you can separate? Or are you going to regard religion

as a principle which is applicable to life, and applicable at every hour and in every place, and all through life? Was that old rhyme right that told us that the twenty-four hours of the day should be divided into eight hours for work, and eight for rest, and eight which are given to God; or was not that correction right of the man who said, "eight for toil, and eight for rest, and all for God"? Gounod had painted on his piano the head of the Christ, as if he would say, "Wherever I look before I compose, I look upon the head of the crucified Lord, and I know that the spirit of that Lord passes into me; and when I begin to compose my melodies, the music of His life penetrates my soul, and gives me the inspiration." We should look into the face of God, understand the character of God, understand that He claims every human being as His son, and understand, therefore, that there is no bondage here, but that there is the freedom of the son, and the love of the son's heart, and the desire of the son's heart to advance the kingdom and the family of God. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 20. **He feedeth on ashes.**—*Earth used as food:*—One of the most extraordinary examples of depraved or perverted appetite is the use of earth for food. This propensity is not an occasional freak, but a common custom, and is found among so large a number and variety of tribes that it may be regarded as co-extensive with the human race. From time immemorial the Chinese have been in the habit of using various kinds of edible earth as substitutes for bread in times of scarcity; and their imperial annals have always religiously noticed the discovery of such bread-stones, or stone-meal, as they are called. On the western coast of Africa a yellowish kind of earth, called "caouac," is so highly relished, and so constantly consumed by the negroes, that it has become to them a necessary of life. In the island of Java, and in various parts of the hill-country of India, a reddish earth is baked into cakes and sold in the village markets for food; while on the banks of the Orinoco, in South America, Humboldt mentions that the native Indians find a species of unctuous clay, which they knead into balls, and store up in heaps in their huts as a provision for the winter or rainy season. They are not compelled by famine to have recourse to this clay; for even when fish, game, and fruit are plentiful they still eat it after their food as a luxury. This practice of eating earth is not confined solely to the inhabitants of the Tropics. In the north of Norway and in Swedish Lapland a kind of white powdery earth, called mountain-meal, found under beds of decayed moss, is consumed in immense quantities every year. It is mixed by the people with their bread in times of scarcity; and even in Germany it has been frequently used as a means of allaying hunger. All these examples of the use of earth as food are so contrary to our experience that they might seem incredible were it not that they are thoroughly authenticated. Such an unnatural custom must, in the long run, prove injurious to the constitution of those who indulge in it, although it is wonderful how long it can be carried on by some individuals apparently with impunity. (*H. Macmillan, LL.D.*) *Feeding on ashes:*—In the spiritual world there are many who feed upon ashes. The prophet is speaking of the idolater. I. WHO IS THE IDOLATER—who is the "he" that is said to feed on ashes? The prophet had a definite audience before him. He was prophesying to the children of Israel. Notwithstanding the purity and sublimity of their own monotheistic creed, and the awful threatenings and sanctions with which it was guarded, we can trace throughout their entire history, as a marked feature of their character, a propensity to blend a theoretical belief in the true God with an accommodating reverence to the idols of the heathen Pantheon. Except when under the immediate spell of some special revelation of Jehovah, they craved for some visible shape or outward sign of the divinity—a craving which was satisfied for a time by the erection of the tabernacle and temple, and the establishment of the worship connected with them, but which soon overleaped barriers thus imposed upon it, and sought for novel sensations in the tabernacle of Moloch and in the star of the god Remphan—figures which they made to worship them. The very priests and Levites, who were most concerned in keeping the worship of Jehovah pure, were the leaders of the various national apostasies. Isaiah deeply deplored this national fickleness and spiritual inconstancy. In the passage under consideration he seeks to overwhelm it with contempt. Were Isaiah addressing us in these days his ideas would be the same, though the form in which he would present them would be different. Material idolatry, in its literal import, has passed away among civilised nations. But the essence of the temptation remains the same. Human society is changed,

but human nature is unchanged. The impulse which led to idolatry is therefore as strong at the present day as it was in the time of Isaiah; and images are set up and worshipped now as fantastic as any pagan fetich or joss. The New Testament form of the Second Commandment, "Be not conformed to this world," requires to be frequently and urgently enforced. If I were to sum up all spiritual idolatry in these days in one form, I should call it worldliness, for everything else is but a phase of this. And this worldly conformity leads speedily, in most instances, to a low moral standard, and to a weak and corrupt form of religion, and produces the same humiliating results which flowed from the idolatry of ancient times. II. WHAT IS IDOLATRY? It is a perverted spiritual appetite. In certain diseased states of the brain there is an unnatural craving for the most extraordinary and unwholesome substances. Men and women under such morbid influences have been known to eat cinders and sand with apparent relish, and even to prefer them to the richest dainties. In such cases it is not the appetite that is at fault. The controlling power of the brain, which chooses the proper food, is impaired, and this healthy appetite is set to work upon substances which are altogether unsuitable. In like manner idolatry arises from a natural craving of the soul, which was made for God, for His worship and enjoyment. It finds that it must go out of itself for the blessedness it needs. This spiritual appetite is a God-given instinct of our nature. It is the soul seeking its highest good. It is healthy and natural. But when, under the guidance and power of a deceived heart, it seeks its gratification in earthly things to the exclusion altogether of God, it affords a most melancholy example of a perverted spiritual appetite. III. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF IDOLATRY? How does idolatry affect the man guilty of it? There is a very striking and beautiful relation between the food of man and his digestive organs. He is omnivorous. He is the ruler of the world, and therefore the varied life of the world must throb in his veins. But all the varied food which she presents to him must be organic food. "Phosphorus literally flames in the brain, that thoughts may breathe and words may burn; lime gives solidity to the bones; the alkaline salts promote the oxidation and removal of the effete materials of the body. Common minerals—iron, sulphur, soda, potash, and others—circulate in the blood, or are garnered in the various tissues. But all these inorganic materials are furnished, not from the earth directly, but in the food; the various vegetable and animal products containing them in varying quantities." Such being the law of man's nutrition, it will be seen at once that if he feeds directly upon ashes, he is feeding upon substances that are altogether incongruous, and unfitted to nourish him. His organs cannot digest or assimilate ashes. And is not the analogy between spiritual and natural things here very clear? If man's spiritual appetite can feed only on God, then if man seeks his portion only in the things of the world, what can you expect but spiritual indigestion and misery? It is true, indeed, that just as the body requires inorganic elements—salt, lime, and iron—as well as organic, for its proper nourishment, so man requires the things of the world as well as the things of faith for his spiritual welfare. But then we are to seek these temporal things, not directly from the world, but through the channel of communion with God. There are natures that, by a long course of feeding upon ashes, have become accustomed to this unnatural diet. Like the clay-eaters of South America, their digestive organs become assimilated to their food, and they are put to little inconvenience by it. We meet with persons who are satisfied with their portion in this world, who mind earthly things, and are contented with the nourishment for their souls which they find in them. But are such persons the truly great and noble ones of our race? How can an infinite hunger be appeased by a finite good? The soul wants organised food; food that has spiritual life in it; food that is redolent of the sunshine and permeated with the light of heaven; food that has drunk in all the impalpable virtues and forces of the things unseen and eternal; food that can gather up in itself these vitalising influences, and transfer them to us to glow within our veins and animate our nerves; and, instead of that, we get ashes out of which all the glow and the virtue have departed. Our sin will become our punishment; our idols our scourges. I have remarked that there are some who are satisfied with their worldly portion—who, though feeding upon clay, are not put to inconvenience by it. Such individuals, in the midst of their contentment, are in reality, if they only knew it, more to be pitied than those whose truer instincts are tortured by the unsuitable food by which they endeavour to appease their spiritual cravings. (*Ibid.*) *Feeding on ashes*:—I. THE VAIN OBJECTS

TO WHICH MAN DIRECTS HIS ENERGIES. "He feedeth on ashes." II. THE REASON OF THIS PERVERTED CHOICE. "A deceived heart hath turned him aside." Sin, in its very nature, has a tendency to harden the heart. When it first begins to make advances, there is resistance offered to it. Conscience speaks, expostulates, reproaches; but sin gets the mastery. Conscience becomes by degrees blunted; the heart at length gets callous, that it cannot feel; the eye is altogether darkened, that it cannot see; the ear heavy, that it cannot hear the instruction of wisdom. Thus the heart is in due time thoroughly deceived. It rejoices in evil, instead of in good; it has an exclusive appetite for the bitter instead of the sweet. But there is a diseased state of the heart where the fatal results do not appear so manifest to the eye of man. When the world is keenly loved and followed, when self is worshipped, when God is not supreme in the affection, the root must be looked for in the heart. The heart is deceived. How dangerous is this state of heart! How much does it need of watchfulness in the case of every one of us, so that we may not be ensnared by it. III. THE DANGER OF THIS STATE, AND THE DIFFICULTY OF ITS REMEDY. "He cannot deliver himself." When the heart has been once beguiled by the deceitfulness of sin, and its affections have been riveted and firmly fixed upon earthly things, it is not in man to deliver himself. God, indeed, has provided means whereby those who have banished themselves from Him may be brought home to His fold. In Him there resides power to cut asunder the chain, however firmly it may bind us down to the earth. IV. SOME PRACTICAL QUESTIONS FOR OUR EXAMINATION. "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (*H. J. Hastings, M.A.*) *The deceived heart*:—I propose to show—I. WHAT THE SOUL PROPERLY REQUIRES. We cannot find food for the body in ourselves; we have to look for it in the animal or vegetable world. Our spiritual part—our intellect, conscience, affections—is every whit as dependent on extraneous supplies as our bodies are. II. HOW PERILOUSLY FAR SOME ARE FROM GIVING TO THEIR SOULS WHAT THEY REQUIRE. You see this magnificent provision; it is spread before your eyes. But the question is, are you feeding on it? Feeding implies taking it to yourself, appropriating it, masticating it with pleasure, receiving it into your digestion. It then becomes a part of you, and goes into your bones, your blood, your flesh, your marrow. We admit that you come to the feast, that you admire it, and that you intend to eat; but we cannot admit that you are feeding on it thus far. We cannot say you have the Word of God dwelling in you richly in all wisdom. (*J. Bolton, B.A.*) *A perverted appetite*:—Two lessons were learnt by Israel in captivity—the all-sufficiency of God, and the absurdity of idols. It is on the latter of these that we are now to dwell. Why do men act with such inconceivable folly? The prophet knows nothing of the modern theory that men do not worship the stone or wood, but accept the effigy as a help to fixedness of thought and prayer; he would affirm that with the mass of men this is a fiction, and that the worship of the devotee stops short with what he can see and touch. The cause of idolatry lies deeper. "He feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside," &c. I. THERE IS A HUNGER FOR THE DIVINE IN MAN. 1. It is universal. 2. It is significant. We can tell something of the composition of the human body by the materials which it needs for its sustenance. Similarly the true dignity of man betrays itself in the hunger which perpetually preys upon him. If man is only matter, if thought is only the movement of the grey matter of the brain, if there is no spirit and no beyond, how is it that the material world cannot supply the supreme good? 3. It is inevitable. The functions which food performs in our system are threefold. It is needed to replace the perpetual waste which is always wearing down the natural tissues; to maintain the temperature at some 98°; and to provide materials for growth. And each of these has a spiritual analogy. We need God, for the same three reasons as the body needs food. (1) To replace the perpetual waste of our spiritual forces. (2) For warmth and heat. (3) For growth. II. THIS APPETITE MAY BE PERVERTED. "He feedeth on ashes." Men tamper with their natural appetite. But there is a close similarity in their treatment with that wonderful yearning after the unseen and eternal which is part of the very constitution of our being—a hunger after the ideal Food, the ideal Beauty, the ideal Truth, which may be resisted and ignored, but still claims satisfaction; and if it does not get it in God, it will seek it in the ashes of idolatry. Men worship idols yet. The man of the world worships money, rank, high office. The child of fashion worships in the temple of human opinion, and feeds on the ashes of human applause an appetite which was meant to satisfy itself on the "Well done!"

of the Almighty. The student who questions or denies the Being of God, worships in the temple of learning; and feeds with the ashes of human opinion an appetite which was intended to be nourished by eternal truth. And in every case these substitutes for God, with which men try to satisfy themselves, are as incapable of satisfying the heart, as ashes of supporting the physical life. III. THE TRUE BREAD. 1. It is the gift of God. "My Father giveth the true Bread from heaven." God who made thee hunger for bread, made bread to grow for its appeasement. Other vegetables have their peculiar habitat. But the corn-plant will make its home in every land, and grow on every soil. He has also provided beauty for our taste, truth for our thought, love for our heart; and has gathered all these and much more into His one Gift, Jesus Christ. 2. Nature yields her provision to man through death. So it is through death that Jesus has become the Food of men. We must assimilate our food. We must receive Jesus into our hearts by an act of spiritual apprehension. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Feeding on ashes*:—I shall speak of three classes of young men who are "feeding on ashes." I. Those who are giving themselves up to SENSUAL PLEASURE. There is no one on earth who has so much right to the pleasures of the world as the believer. I do not believe in asceticism. I do not believe in pious melancholy. But this innocent hilarity, which leaves no ill results behind, is good and healthful, and a very different thing from the emmaddening gaieties of the world. II. I have a word to say to you who are setting up another idol for your worship. It is neither Venus nor Bacchus, but it is Plutus; it is WORLDLY SUBSTANCE; it is money. There is no sin in desiring to be rich, if your money comes to you honourably, and goes from you usefully. But what is all that, if that is all? Can you feed the immortal soul within you with bank cheques and good investments? Will all the gold in the Bank of England appease the hunger of your deathless spirit? No! But many seem to think it will. Such men are the most hopeless cases to deal with. I should be more sanguine of bringing to the feet of Jesus a poor bloated debauchee, than of doing any good to one of these hardened, wizened, shrivelled-up money-scrapers, who for twenty, thirty, or forty years have no other thought but this—to lay up gain. III. There is a third class of men who are daily "feeding on ashes," because "a deceived heart has turned them aside." They have got hold of a lot of INFIDEL LITERATURE, and they are stuffing their souls with as weak and poisonous rubbish as it is possible to meet with. With the prophet, I invite you to something more palatable and nourishing; I bid you to a feast of "milk and honey"; "hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) *Feeding on ashes*:—Many to-day feed on the kind of ashes Isaiah has in mind. 1. False conceptions of God. 2. False conceptions of Christ. 3. False conceptions of religion. 4. False conceptions of the Church. 5. False conceptions of morality, life, and happiness. Application—1. Upon the true or false conception of God and His relations to men conduct depends. The Christian's conception of God is revealed in the incarnation, life, and atonement of His Son. He only is a true Christian who obeys Christ's words, imitates His life, and becomes conformed to His image. He must be our ideal. 2. Again, we ask how comes it that men thus feed on ashes? "A deceived heart hath turned him aside." (*J. B. Nies, Ph.D.*) *Feeding on ashes*:—To-day we are told by a hundred voices that all religion begins at the bottom, and slowly struggles up to the top. Isaiah says the very opposite. The pure form is the primitive; the secondary form is the gross, which is a corruption. They tell us, too, that all religion pursues a process of evolution, and gradually clears itself of its more imperfect and carnal elements. Isaiah says "He cannot deliver his soul," and no religion ever worked itself up, unless under the impulse of a revelation from without. That is Isaiah's philosophy of idolatry, and I expect it will be accepted as the true one some day. I. A LIFE THAT SUBSTANTIALLY IGNORES GOD IS EMPTY OF ALL TRUE SATISFACTION. "He feedeth on ashes." Very little imagination will realise the force of that picture. The gritty cinders will irritate the lips and tongue, will dry up the moisture of the mouth, will interfere with the breathing; and there will be no nourishment in a sackful of them. The underlying truth is this—God only is the food of a man's soul. You pick up the skeleton of a bird upon a moor; and if you know anything about osteology, you will see in the very make of its breast-bone and its wing-bones the declaration that its destiny is to soar into the blue. And written on you, as distinctly as flight on the bird, or swimming on the fish, is this, that

you are meant, by your very make, to soar up into the heights of the glory of God, and to plunge deep into the abysses of His infinite love and wisdom. What does your heart want? A perfect, changeless, all-powerful love. And what does your mind want? Reliable, guiding, inexhaustible yet accessible truth. And what does your will want? Commandments which have an authoritative ring in their very utterance, and which will serve for infallible guides for your lives. And what do our weak, sinful natures want? Something that shall free our consciences, and deliver us from the burden of our transgressions, and calm our fears, and quicken and warrant our lofty hopes. And what do men whose nature is to live for ever want but something that shall go with them through all changes of condition? We want a person to be everything to us. No accumulation of things will satisfy a man. God has not so blundered in making the world that He has surrounded us with things that are all lies, but He has so made it that whosoever flies in the face of the gracious commandment which is also an invitation, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," has not only no security that the "other things" shall be "added unto" him, but has the certainty that though they were added to him, in degree beyond his dreams and highest hopes, they would avail nothing to satisfy the hunger of his heart. II. A LIFE WHICH THUS IGNORES GOD IS TRAGICALLY UNAWARE OF ITS OWN EMPTINESS. "A deceived heart hath turned him aside." That explains how the man comes to fancy that ashes are food. His whole nature is perverted, his vision distorted, his power of judgment marred. That explains, too, why men persist in this feeding on ashes after all experience. You will see a dog chasing a sparrow. It has chased hundreds before and never caught one. Yet, when the creature rises from the ground, away it goes after it once more, with eager yelp and rush, to meet the old experience. That is like what a great many of you are doing, and you have not the same excuse that the dog has. And that deceived heart, stronger than experience, is also stronger than conscience. How is it that this hallucination that you have fed full and been satisfied, when all the while your hunger has not been appeased, can continue to act on us? For the very plain reason that every one of us has in himself a higher and a lower self, a set of desires of the grosser, more earthly, and, using the word in its proper sense, worldly sort—that is to say, directed towards material things, and a higher set which look right up to God if they are allowed fair play. And of these two sets—which really are one at bottom, if a man would only see it—the lower gets the upper hand, and suppresses the higher and the nobler. And so in many a man and woman the longing for God is crushed out by the gross delights of sense. III. A LIFE THUS IGNORING GOD NEEDS A POWER FROM WITHOUT TO SET IT FREE. "He cannot deliver his soul." There is nothing more awful in life than the influence of habit. There is something more wanted than yourselves to break this chain. It is the Christ who is "the Bread of God that came down from heaven"; who can deliver any soul from the most obstinate and long-continued grovelling amongst the transitory things of this limited world, and the superficial delights of sense and gratified bodily life; who can bring the forgiveness which is essential, the deliverance from the power of evil which is not less essential, and who can fill our hearts with Himself, the food of the world. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The deceived heart*:—I. THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE ENTIRELY DECEIVED IN THEIR RELIGION. 1. The idolater. 2. The Romanist. 3. Freethinkers. 4. False professors. II. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY PERSONS THUS DECEIVED IN RELIGION, WE ARE NOT TO SUPPOSE THAT ANY OF THEM ARE REALLY CONTENTED IN HEART WITH THEIR RELIGION. III. IT IS A STRANGE THING THAT ALL THESE PEOPLE SEEM VERY WELL CONTENTED WITH THEIR FALSE RELIGIONS. IV. I WANT TO SPEAK TO THOSE WHO ARE PROFESSORS OF RELIGION BUT WHO DO NOT POSSESS IT. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The deceitfulness of the heart in embracing false confidences*:—The heart discovers its deceitfulness—I. BY ITS STRONG PROPENSITY TO RECEIVE ANY ERROR MORE READILY THAN TRUTH. II. BY ITS EXTREME RELUCTANCE TO THE ONLY WAY OF SALVATION, AND BY ITS VIOLENT PROPENSITY TO EVERY LYING REFUGE. More particularly we observe—1. That multitudes betake themselves to the general mercy of God. 2. The heart often disposes one to look into itself for something good. 3. Others found their hope on resolutions of reformation. 4. Partial and outward reformation is the confidence of many. 5. Many confide in a bare profession of religion and observation of the form of duties. 6. Others deceive themselves into a reliance on their Church privileges. 7. Some confide in their gifts, or in their usefulness by means of them. 8. Some may trust to a

work of the law, as if it were in itself saving. 9. This principle of deceit is discovered by the sinner's endeavours to obtain justification by moral duties. 10. Many trust to their sincerity in religion. But what is this sincerity in which you make your boast before God? Do you not confide in it as the ground of your justification? If so, it must be the sincerity of a person who is not yet justified; that is, of one still under the curse of the law. 11. Another false confidence, which many fly to, is the observance of superstitious rites. 12. Some may rest on their sufferings in the cause of Christ. 13. Others may depend on a notional faith. Some are persuaded of the truth of the Gospel. But they prove that their faith is not Divine, because it is unfruitful. 14. The deceitfulness of the heart operates in others, by making them rest upon supposed attainments in holiness. There is a question the solution of which materially affects every one of us before God. If false professors may have so eminent attainments, and so remarkable a resemblance to true holiness, how may we distinguish between such attainments as are the fruit of the Spirit's saving work and those which only flow from natural affections or from a common operation? (1) These attainments, which are saving, have always a humbling tendency. (2) Saving attainments are consistent with a godly jealousy. (3) The fruit of solid Christian attainments is thankfulness to God. (4) The Christian disclaims all his attainments with respect to justification. (5) Saving attainments leave a lasting impression on the heart. (6) The real believer loses not his confidence in God, even under severe afflictions. (7) The real Christian does not wish to stop short in his attainments. (8) The believer is equal, or at least consistent, in his attainments. While he makes progress in duty, in the exercise of grace, in liveliness and spirituality of affections, he at the same time advances in the mortification of sin. (9) All true Christians have a real love to holiness. (*J. Jamieson, M.A.*) *Perverted spiritual appetites*:—Drunkenness is a perverted spiritual appetite, a seeking in the creature what God alone can give, the longing of the soul for higher and purer happiness than the hard round of daily life and the weary sorrowful circle of the world can give. So, too, covetousness, if analysed in the same way, will be found to be a perverted spiritual appetite, a misdirected worship. Covetousness is identified in Scripture with idolatry: "Covetousness which is idolatry," says St. Paul. "No covetous man, who is an idolater, hath an inheritance in the kingdom of God." The love of money, as it has been well said, is the love of God run wild, the diseased action of a spiritual appetite, the aberration of a nature that was made for God. Wealth is the mystic shadow of God, which the soul is unconsciously groping after and craving for. It presents some faint features of resemblance to Him. It seems omnipotent, able to do all things; omnipresent, showing signs of itself everywhere; beneficent, supplying our present wants, providing for our future, procuring for us an endless variety of blessings, and giving us almost all that our hearts can desire. And because it presents these superficial resemblances to God, it becomes a religion to many, a worship loud in praise and aspiration as any that ever filled a church. And so is it with every form of idolatry of which man in these enlightened days can be guilty. It is the soul, in its restless pursuit of happiness, mistaking the true object of which it is in quest. (*H. Macmillan, LL.D.*) *Arsenical poisoning*:—The peasant women of Styria are in the habit of constantly eating a certain quantity of arsenic, in order to enhance their personal charms. It imparts a beautiful bloom to the complexion, and gives a full and rounded appearance to the face and body. For years they persevere in this dangerous practice; but if they intermit it for a single day, they experience all the symptoms of arsenical poisoning. The complexion fades, the features become worn and haggard, and the body loses its plumpness and becomes angular and emaciated. Having once begun, therefore, to use this cosmetic, they must in self-defence go on, constantly increasing the dose in order to keep up the effect. At last the constitution is undermined; the limit of safety is overpassed; and the victim of foolish vanity perishes miserably in the very prime of life. And is it not so with those who feed upon the poison of the world's idolatries? They may seem to thrive upon this insidious and dangerous diet, but all the time it is permanently impairing their spiritual health, and rendering them unfit for spiritual communion. The more they indulge in it, the more they must surrender themselves to it; and the jaded appetite is stimulated on to greater excesses, until at last every lingering vestige of spiritual vitality is destroyed, and the soul becomes a loathsome moral wreck, poisoned by its own food. (*H. Macmillan, LL.D.*) *Unsuitable food*:—There is such a

thing as a wasting of the body from insufficient nutrition, even when the appetite is satisfied and the stomach content. A strange plant, called the nardoo, with clover-like leaves, closely allied to the fern tribe, grows in the deserts of Central Australia. A melancholy interest is connected with it, owing to the fact that its seeds formed for several months almost the sole food of the party of explorers who a few years ago crossed the continent. This nardoo satisfied their hunger; it produced a pleasant feeling of comfort and repletion. The natives were accustomed to eat it in the absence of their usual roots and fruits, not only without injury, but apparently with positive benefit to their health. And yet, day after day, Burke and Wills became weaker and more emaciated upon this diet. Their flesh wasted from their bones, their strength was reduced to an infant's feebleness, and they could only crawl painfully a mile or two in a day. At last, when nearing the bourne of their hopes, the explorers perished one by one of starvation; a solitary survivor being found in the last extremity under a tree, where he had laid him down to die, by a party sent out in search of the missing expedition. When analysed, the nardoo bread was ascertained to be destitute of certain nutritious elements indispensable to the support of a European, though an Australian savage might for a while find it beneficial as an alternative. And thus it happened that these poor unfortunate Englishmen perished of starvation, even while feeding fully day by day upon food that seemed to satisfy their hunger. Now, is it not precisely so in the experience of those who are seeking and finding their portion in earthly things? They are contented with it, and yet their hunger is in reality unappeased. Their desires are crowned, and yet they are actually perishing of want. God gives them their request, but sends leanness to their souls. Is it not far more dreadful to perish by slow degrees of this spiritual atrophy, under the delusive belief that all is well, and therefore seeking no change of food, than to be tortured by the indigestion of feeding on ashes, if by this misery the poor victim can be urged to seek for food convenient for him? (*Ibid.*) "*He feedeth on ashes*":—Is not the very term most significant? What are ashes? They are the last solid products of matter that has been used up—the relics that remain after all that is useful and nutritious has been consumed. You burn a piece of wood or a handful of corn, and its grosser particles fall to the ground, while all its ethereal parts—its carbon and hydrogen—mount to the skies and disappear. It is a sad thing to gaze upon the ashes of the commonest fire; for in them there is an image of utter death and ruin—of something that has been bright and beautiful, and is now but dull, cold, barren dust. And what are earthly, created things, upon which so many are feeding the hunger of their immortal souls, but ashes? They were once bright and beautiful. God's blessing was upon them, and they were very good. But sin has consumed all their goodness and beauty, has burned up all in them that was capable of ministering to the spiritual wants of men, and left nothing behind but dust and ashes. We can apply this truth to all the world, so far as it is made the portion of the soul. In a moral sense, the whole world, which was once capable of ministering to man's spiritual wants, is now a mere heap of cinders. Its beauty has gone with its goodness, and its sufficing power with its holiness. It has become spiritually oxidised by combination with the all-devouring element of sin. The man that loves the world now feeds on ashes; not upon earth, for there is a degree of nourishment in soil, owing to the remains of former life, and the worm and the plant feed upon it; not upon clay, for the clay which the American-Indians eat is found to consist of microscopic plants with silicious envelopes, called diatoms, containing a small portion of organic matter sufficient to sustain existence;—no, but on dry, white, dusty ashes, utterly destitute of any nutritious element whatever, upon which no creature can live, and upon which almost no plant can grow—the refuse of everything that is good. (*Ibid.*) *Unsuitable food*:—Some time ago, I read in the papers of a little boy who for months had been gathering up prune-stones, being fond of the kernel; so, wishing to prepare for himself a great treat, he laid up quite a large store: at last came the day of anticipated enjoyment; he ate them all, and, after hours of agony, died! So I have seen men who have given up their whole life to one aim, to amass wealth; preparing a banquet of enjoyment for the evening of their days; and, when they sat down to the feast, lo! on the table only ashes, ashes! (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) **A deceived heart hath turned him aside.**—*The self-deception of most who affect to be infidels*:—1. Consider seriously, what was the real origin of your unbelief. A father's house forsaken, and a father's instructions soon to be forgotten, you entered on the world. Passions

rose within you. Companions encouraged them; religion checked them. Your belief became irksome to your indulgence; and your faith descended to doubts. It was natural and necessary that it should do so, if you meant to continue in your sins. 2. You have had times, no doubt, when you thought your course somewhat wrong; and, partly sated with such enjoyments, had some idea of turning from them. What, then, was the obstacle? Was it the difficulty which you had in accounting for the truth of revelation? Was it not the voice of pleasure whispering. Will you then renounce the joys which were once so dear to you? Here was the fatal obstacle. Not in the difficulties of revelation, but in the timidity and weakness of the heart. 3. If this be not true, go one step farther. Many have met with calamity; a death unexpected among your friends, some great and sudden change of fortune, which showed you the uncertainty of human happiness. In these cases, what was your resource? Did you go to the tables, whither before you had gone for pleasure? Was it in the society of those who "make a mock at sin" that you expected the gleam of comfort in the hour of sorrow? Your heart will own that, when you were in heaviness, you could think upon God. But religion's truth all the time remained the same. If, therefore, you doubted on it under the former situation, why not under the latter? Your heart deceived you. You did not disbelieve. You wished to do so; and passion blinded you. Affliction removed the veil from your heart. 4. But, living as we do in an age of boasted light, this reasoning will probably be considered as carried too far; and it will be urged by many a young man, that, although the passions may have had some influence in biassing his opinions, yet his doubts of the Gospel have arisen, in some measure, from his judgment. Let us, then, meet him on this ground. We expect, therefore, from you some striking argument that is to set aside at once the authority of ages and destroy the best hopes and resources of the human heart. And what do we find? A few commonplace phrases and objections—doubts, not created by yourselves, but only received from others, and kept up by you, to preserve a kind of watchword of a party against believers. 5. But if you have not searched very deeply into these things yourself, they with whom you are in the habit of associating are adequate to give you sufficient religious instruction, and you have taken, you say, your creed chiefly from them. Let us, then, repair a moment to them. You profess yourselves general believers in a God, and possessed of some amiable virtues. How often in the assemblies of your friends and instructors is the name of God mentioned without irreverence? How seldom have you heard rigid virtue made the subject of discussion except to be ridiculed? Have you often heard beauty and innocence mentioned without some sentiment of an abandoned passion? (*G. Mathew, M.A.*)

Vers. 21, 22. **Remember these, O Jacob and Israel.**—*God's Israel not forgotten:*—This verse, standing in connection with the following, is a call to Jacob and Israel to return to the Lord. Many are the arguments used to induce them to do so. 1. "Remember these" idolaters, their follies, their wickednesses, their wretched and miserable condition, and forget not that you were guilty once as they are. It is well to retrace our past history, often to do it, to be reminded of what we once were in the days of our unregeneracy. 2. Miserable and sad as your present condition is, yet "I know thee by name; thou art Mine, return unto Me." Thou art still "Jacob," still "Israel," still "My servant." Is there one who has been departing from the living God? Can anything be more touching than this call to thee? Surely it is like the look which Jesus gave Peter when he went out and wept bitterly. 3. "I have formed thee," formed thee with new and spiritual workmanship, formed thee a vessel to honour, formed thee for My glory. 4. "Thou shalt not be forgotten of Me." Thou hast forgotten Me, the mighty cost at which I redeemed thee. Thou hast forgotten the way by which I led thee in the wilderness, the miracles I wrought for thee, the manna with which I fed thee, the rock of which I made thee drink, the deliverances out of the hands of thine enemies; thou hast forgotten thy high calling, thy holy profession, thy truest happiness; but "thou shalt not be forgotten of Me." I. THE TRUE ISRAEL SOMETIMES THINK THEMSELVES FORGOTTEN OF GOD. Their utter insignificance and the deep consciousness of it lead to this. Sometimes dark and mysterious providences lead to this. Sometimes apparent delays in answers to prayer. What is the consequence? We loathe ourselves; instead of advancing we seem retrograding; instead of mounting we seem to be sinking.

Here, too, sense takes too often the seat of judgment, and not only decides on what God is doing, but sometimes on God Himself; and is ready to cry out, "My God hath forgotten me." There are seasons too, under a sense of unutterable vileness, when the soul responds to the solemn appeal (Isa. xliii. 22–24), "Thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel," &c. There are times when a man seems as if he stood alone among his fellow-men, as if he were the very chief of sinners. I will mention one more case—when we have by some wilfulness in disobedience grieved the Holy Spirit. II. THE PEOPLE OF GOD NEVER ARE FORGOTTEN BY HIM. Tender are the ties that bind us to one another; the tenderest, the closest, the most indestructible of all ties, friends, brothers, relations, parents, even a mother. It is the instance selected (chap. xlix. 15). There is no tie like this by which Jehovah binds Himself to His people. The ties that bind man to man, in their purest actings, are but the ties of human nature in its feebleness, its fickleness. III. THE MANIFOLD PROOFS THAT GOD HAS CONDESCENDED TO GIVE, THAT HIS ISRAELS SHALL NOT BE FORGOTTEN. We too easily forget that the true basis of faith is the veracity of God. The believer too often acts, thinks, speaks, as if he did not believe God, though he mean not so. Were Jehovah to forget, He would violate every perfection of His nature. He sees all His in His Son; and when He forgets His Son, then and not till then will He forget His Israel. When Jesus forgets to intercede, when Jesus intercedes in vain, when God Himself changes, then will He forget. Look up then, ye Jacobs, ye Israels of God; let the past encourage you. What do thy reasonings say? What do thy humblings say? What thy upholdings in deep and heavy trouble? Thy special interpositions? Thy perseverance in the ways of God? (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Gracious mercy*:—In the midst of idolaters this chapter speaks of a people who worship, love, serve God. Here is—I. AN INVITATION. "Return unto Me." This implies previous distance, wandering, unworthiness. "Return." 1. How? The sinner says, I am bound, sin holds me chained, justly. God answers, I have redeemed thee, paid thy ransom, broken thy chains. 2. To whom? "Unto Me." The sinner says, I am polluted, defiled. God answers, I have blotted out thy sins. Thou hast cleansing in the precious blood. 3. In what way? Not towards Me. Many are satisfied with appearance. But unto—into My very presence—to walk, dwell, commune with Me. All trace of former guilt gone. II. A PRIVILEGE. "Thou art My servant." 1. They serve Him. He fits them for this. "I have formed thee," fitted by indwelling of the Spirit, giving new tastes, desires, &c. We are not made servants by serving; we are made servants that we may serve. 2. They serve acceptably, cheerfully, continually, purely. None are Christians who do not serve. Notice the repetition in text, also verses 1, 2. God dwells lovingly on it. 3. They serve in hope. God's servants have a gracious promise—"Thou shalt not be forgotten of Me." Others may forget, be removed, but God never. We may be in trouble, persecution, danger, weariness, death, never forgotten. III. A CAUTION. "Remember these." God's people rejoice, but with trembling: walk surely, but not securely (1 Cor. x. 12). "Remember these"—the world, careless, backsliders, self-seekers, heathens. "Remember these"—1. That you may be humbled (Tit. iii. 3). 2. That you may honour God before them (Matt. v. 16). 3. That you may do them good (Gal. vi. 1). Are your sins blotted out? If so, serve God; "remember these." If not, return. (*Homilist.*) **O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of Me.**—*God's remembrance of Israel*:—I. If we turn to some of the evidences of this statement, we may first look to the history of Israel, and to that of ourselves in a PROVIDENTIAL ASPECT. 1. As regards the Israelites in their national and personal relations. 2. But the special evidence of the text lies in the heart of Christian experience. 3. The evidence of this Divine declaration may be further shown by a reference to the works of creation. II. Consider some of the REASONS which may be assigned for this Divine utterance. 1. One reason is to be found in the fact of man's redemption. 2. Another in the graciousness, in the love and mercy of the Divine purposes with regard to ourselves. (*W. D. Horwood.*) "*Forget thee, I will not*":—I. THE TITLE WHICH THE LORD GIVES TO HIS PEOPLE. "My servant." 1. Notice what a practical title it is. It has to do with action and service; it has to do with the heart, but also with the hand, with the inner and with the outer life. There is no true Christian but the practical Christian. A servant is not always at work; but a servant is always a servant, and ever ready for work. 2. It is

a personal title—"Thou." 3. It is an exclusive title—"My servant. These other people are servants of Baal or Ashtaroth; but thou art My servant." When a man has a servant, he expects him to serve him, and not to be in the employ of other people. God's servants must serve God; not idols, not the world, not self, not sin, not Satan. 4. It is an honourable title. It must be so, for God uses the title in this verse twice over. "Thou art My servant: I have formed thee; thou art My servant." To serve God, is truly to reign. 5. This is a title of acceptance. As God says, twice over, "Thou art My servant," He means, "I accept thee as My servant; I own thee as such." One reason why we are God's servants is that He has forgiven us our trespasses (ver. 22). II. THE PROMISE WHICH HE MAKES TO US. "Thou shalt not be forgotten of Me." Men forget us. And they turn against us. Those for whom you do the most are often those who will be most unkind, and most bitter against you. But God says, "Thou shalt not be forgotten of Me." What does this promise mean? 1. That God will never cease to love His servants. 2. That the Lord will never cease to think of His servants. The thoughts of God are wonderful. He can think of every individual saint as much as if there were no other saint in the universe. III. SOME REASONS WHICH ASSURE US THAT GOD WILL NOT FORGET THOSE WHO ARE TRULY HIS SERVANTS. 1. The very best reason is that He says he will not forget us. 2. God cannot forget us, since He has made us. The former part of the verse says, "Thou art My servant: I have formed thee." With His own fingers He has made us into vessels of mercy, so He cannot forget us. 3. He has blessed us; He has blessed us so much already that He cannot forget us now. 4. He has loved us so long already. Was there ever a time when the redeemed of the Lord were not written on the heart of Christ? He loved you before the first star began to dart its golden arrows through the darkness of space. Rest you then secure; love so ancient will never die out. 5. We have cost Him so much. 6. He is too good a Lord to cast us off. He is a wretch of a man who casts off an old servant simply because he is old. The Lord does not turn His old servants adrift; but says, "Even to your old age, I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 22. **I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.**—*Sin blotted out:*—The meaning of the verse may be—He who offered his sacrifice aright, was as sure that the sin for which he offered it was blotted out, as that the smoke of the sacrifice was dispersed by the wind, and was no longer discernible. (*E. Thompson, D.D.*) *Blotting out sin: a classical side-light:*—"This decree made the danger then hanging over the city, pass away like a cloud." (*Demosthenes.*) *Clouds and sins:*—Clouds do good; but transgressions and sins never do good. They do no good to the body, no good to the soul, no good to the spirit, no good to our present condition, or to our future circumstances; and, in this respect, clouds are unlike sins. Yet there are points of resemblance between clouds and sins. Clouds veil the sun; and sins hide the loving face of God. Clouds hide the lofty firmament; and sins conceal heaven. Clouds contract the prospect; and sins prevent the sight of all coming good. Clouds drop down in rain; and sins fall in punishment. Clouds are beyond our control; and sins committed are entirely out of our power. Clouds are dispersible only by God; and sins God alone can drive away. This is the point of the analogy instituted in our text. (*S. Martin.*) *Not a cloud to be seen:*—I. THE DIVINENESS OF FORGIVENESS. "I have blotted out," &c. "I, even I." All sin is against God. When you sin against each other you sin against God. And all punishment is in God's hands; and the dispensation of pardon is His prerogative. Blessed be God for keeping it within His own power! Pardon is dispensed faithfully and wisely, for God is light. Pardon is dispensed graciously, for God is love. And pardon is given according to the Divine promise and covenant, for "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." II. THE COMPLETENESS OF PARDON. In the country which Isaiah knew, the clouds were entirely blotted out during four months of the year; so that it was an extraordinary thing from May to September, to see a cloud: and the clearness of the atmosphere enabled the prophet to appreciate this illustration to an extent impossible to us, who are so often under a leaden sky. Still, even here, we do know what it is to stand under a blue sky. In the morning, or in the evening, or late at night, we know what it is to stand under the cloudless heavens, and to say, "There is not a cloud to be seen." And when God pardons a man there is not a sin to be seen. The sins of childhood, and youth, and maturity—the sins of every year, and day, and hour—are blotted out. The sins of the body,

and the sins of the soul—the sins of the tongue, and of the hand, and of every member of the body—the sins of the thought, and of the imagination, and of desire, and of affection, and of volition, are all blotted out. The sins of the heart, and the sins of the home, the sins of the place of business, and the sins of the Church, and the sins committed against brothers and sisters, and kindred of every degree—against husband, and wife, and children, and neighbours, and friends, and the country,—sins against the Saviour, and against the Holy Spirit, and against our Father in Heaven are blotted out. Sins wilful, sins careless, sins repeated, sins aggravated, are all blotted out. Not some sins, but all sins. The least are not overlooked; the worst are not reserved. Pardon is not the mitigation of punishment—it is not the passing by of some transgressions and the bringing forward of others—but an entire remission of future punishment. Sin is not behind following us; sin is not before preventing us; sin is not above falling upon us; sin is not on either hand hemming us in. Pardoned by God, our sins are gone; actually gone for ever. III. THE ASSURANCE WHICH GOD GIVES THE PARDONED THAT THEY ARE FORGIVEN. God might forgive without telling us now that He has pardoned us. He might reserve the communication of this fact until the last great day. But He would have the forgiven know that they are pardoned. Now what profit is there in this? Knowledge of pardon is a particular knowledge of God. A man who is pardoned sees God in the dispensation of Divine forgiveness, as God is not to be seen elsewhere, or in any other dispensation. It is one thing to see God in the general provision He has made for the supply of our wants, and quite another thing for us to see God applying that provision to ourselves. A knowledge of pardon is a source of joy and peace. It is, moreover, a power awakening love. You remember the case of the woman who came to Christ, upon the occasion of the great banquet given to Him by one of the chief of the Pharisees. Then, the knowledge of pardon is a motive to the pursuit of holiness. IV. THE KNOWLEDGE OF PARDON ENCOURAGES US TO BRING OTHERS TO GOD. V. WHO ARE THE ASSURED? 1. Those who confess to Him their sins. 2. The confession is to be accompanied by the forsaking of sin. 3. There is no forsaking sin, without turning to God. (*Ibid.*) *What man can and cannot do:*—Man may divert the course of a river, and fill up the former bed; thus blotting out in certain places the river. Man may pare down portions of the hills; thus blotting out the hills. Man may raise the valley; thus blotting out the valley. Man may drain the lake, and sow it with seed, and raise crops upon the soil of the lake's bed; thus blotting out the lake. Man may, to a small extent, alter the boundaries of the ocean; thus blotting out in some places even the sea. Man may tunnel the earth and make a highway where foot never trod. But man can neither bring clouds into the firmament, nor send them away. Moreover a man may blot out ignorance by teaching, and folly by instruction, and some bad habits by good training, and animal wants by the supply of temporal necessities, and captivity by release, and disease by healing; but no man can forgive sins. The dispensation of pardon is too precious, and too important, to be entrusted to men or to angels. (*Ibid.*) *Pardon not entrusted to men or angels:*—A man, if he were entrusted with the dispensation of forgiveness, might be sleeping, or journeying, or sick, or in various ways out of reach. A man might be angry, or morose, or occupied, or unloving, when the penitent was calling for forgiveness. And an angel might take a hypocrite for a true penitent, or a contrite one for a hypocrite; or he might hesitate to forgive some chief of sinners. God keeps the dispensation of forgiveness in His own kind hand. (*Ibid.*) *Sin and forgiveness:*—There is, at first sight, a little obscurity in this expression. Is the cloud intended to represent the sin, or is it the obscurity with which the sin is to be obliterated? Does the text liken transgressions to a cloud which is to be driven away, or the transgression to be covered and blotted out as if by a cloud? There is a difference in opinion with regard to the matter. But there is no reason for not taking the words literally as they stand, and looking upon sin as likened to a cloud. I. THE FIGURE UNDER WHICH SIN IS REPRESENTED. "A cloud"; "a thick cloud." It affords an apt illustration of human evil. 1. Clouds obscure the beauty of the earth. Sin obscures the prospects of the soul and shuts out the glories of the heavenly horizon! It blurs the outline of truth, it disturbs our views of life, of our fellow-creatures, of our own actions and the actions and motives of others, of the providence and dealings of God, of the true import of existence, of the future and the past. What is evil seems good; what is good seems evil; what is real seems false; and what is false appears true. 2. Clouds intercept the light of heaven. And what hides the full brightness of the face of God, who is the source of all spiritual light and warmth and joy, but sin? "Your

iniquities have separated between Me and you." Our sins have kept the revelation of full light and the manifestation of fullest love from vivifying and rejoicing our hearts. Not that even sin entirely obscures God's mercy and love. The darkest cloud cannot altogether hide the light of day. The sun's rays are so powerful that they penetrate even through the thickest mists. But what a contrast is the feeble light of a November day to that of the genial sunbeam in June! So not even sin can entirely hide the Divine influence of the love of God or prevent it from warming the earth. But how different is its manifestation to what it was amid the glories of Paradise! 3. Clouds cause inconvenience and discomfort. The traveller amid the mountain mists, with his garments soddened and weighted with the moisture, his breathing laboured and his movements hampered, is a fitting representative of the Christian journeying heavenwards amid the many hindrances which check his progress through the uncongenial atmosphere of this sinful world, saturated with the essence, as it were, of iniquity. 4. Clouds are about us everywhere. (1) They overshadow every portion of the globe. Not in the same intensity, not always in the same place, not similar in appearance and density. (2) Does not sin, like the clouds, everywhere compass the spiritual world? It varies, indeed. Some countries are more enlightened, and the clouds not being so dense, more is seen and felt of the light and warmth of the Sun of Righteousness. But there are other countries where mental and spiritual clouds dominate in various degrees of density, till we arrive at those places where the savage reigns supreme and no ray of the light of heaven ever penetrates. (3) Are not the clouds a fitting image of sin in their deceptive beauty? There are occasions when evil shines resplendent with the borrowed glory of heaven. How many noble characters have, in the virtues reflected from Christianity, attracted for a time the admiration and rapture of an astonished and delighted world! For a time! For as soon as the reflection from above, which imparted glory to their characters, was gone, they sank again into their native nature of darkness and gloom. And observe how much the reflection of Divine truth and heavenly law beautifies this world of ours, with all its sin! The philanthropy towards those who are weak and suffering, the courtesy towards the feeble, the hospitals which are provided, the many means which are adopted for exalting the race: all these are the glints of heavenly sunshine reflected upon the clouds of sin. (4) We also see that the clouds resemble sin because of their unreality. There is nothing on which a man can trust or lean or hope. They are unsubstantial, empty, frail. (5) They also are changing, fleeting, driven away by all kinds and by every breath of wind; never the same, unstable, assuming all sorts of guises in the presence of the light. II. THE PROMISE WHICH IS HERE BESTOWED. Although the statement is put in the past—"I have blotted out"—yet it is really a future and a conditional declaration. The early part of this chapter is a description of awful impenitence and apostasy. In purpose, in intention, this is forgiven, but it is not a forgiveness independent of reformation. We have seen the sky when the summer sun has driven away the clouds. It is deep, unfathomable, ethereal, blue. The sun's glory is undimmed. The whole of nature rejoices with unspeakable joy. The heart rebounds with lightness. Not a speck on the surface of the heaven casts a shadow on the earth. Such is the idea of a world without sin. All brightness and no clouds, all joy without a sorrow to dim its glory. And this is the spiritual gist of the promise which the great God has made to His believing people. It is an assurance so certain that it is spoken of as having actually taken place. And how will God blot out the sins of His people? By the same means as physically disperse the clouds of earth. 1. By the tempests of wrath. The tempest of God's wrath, as it fell upon the head of Christ, sent a current of electric justice through the load of sin and rendered it possible for its power to be removed. 2. By the glorious shining of rays of warmth and light. It is the warmth of God's infinite, eternal love that shall disperse the last trace of sin. That love shining from His throne shall drive all the consequences of evil from the heart, from the life. And with the clouds of sin shall go all other clouds—the clouds of suffering, of sorrow, of death. And when sin is driven away, that love shall shine in unceasing glory. It will not be limited to time, or place, or season, or circumstance. It will not come in diminished or lessened degrees, but it will be perfect, pure, and complete. Still, this is but a figure—an incomplete one, too—one which has its deficiencies. But God Himself gave it out. (*J. J. S. Bird, B.A.*) *Forgiveness: its blessings and its duties:*—I. AN IMPORTANT DECLARATION. "I have blotted out," &c. II. A CORRESPONDING DUTY. "Return unto Me." III. AN ALL-CONSTRAINING MOTIVE. "I have redeemed thee." (*S. Bridge, M.A.*) *Sin and grace:*—I. THERE IS RECOGNISED THE EXISTENCE OF SIN.

II. THERE IS AFFIRMED THE EXISTENCE OF MERCY. (*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.*) *Invitation:*—The features of the Divine character, and the blessings of salvation, which are to be manifested in God's dealings with Israel in the latter days, are the very same as are now manifested in God's dealings with all believers. We may consider the text, then, as an exhibition of God's mercy, in which we are ourselves interested. I. With reference to HIS MERCY. 1. The first words of the text denote an act of God's gracious forgiveness. "I have blotted out thy transgressions and thy sins." In the New Testament scriptures, this expression "blotting out" is connected with the atonement (Col. ii. 14). 2. The language of pardoning mercy goes still farther. "As a thick cloud." How is a thick cloud blotted out? When a debt is blotted out from a debt book, the blot remains. It is true there is no evidence against the sinner; the charge against him is at an end; but the remains of what was a debt are to be seen, and the very act of cancelling it shows that there was a debt. But when a cloud is blotted out, it is different. How is that cloud blotted out? Either by the wind dispersing it, or by the sun breaking through it and dispersing it; and when this is done, we say either that the storm is "blown over," or that there is now a clear sky, and all that we can see, if we see anything, with regard to the threatening cloud, is now composed of those beautiful hues which are lighted up by the shining of a bright sun in a clear sky. Well, then, when God says that He will "blot out as a thick cloud our transgressions, and as a cloud our sin," we are to understand that He undertakes to remove all traces of our transgressions and all remains of guilt from the conscience, so that the sinner thus pardoned may look up to God as a Father full of grace and love, and may approach Him with holy boldness, and without any particle of fear. Observe, then, what full forgiveness God assures us of in this language. "Thick clouds," as well as ordinary "clouds,"—two expressions which must be taken in a figurative meaning, as including all kinds of sin—what we call "greater and lesser sins" alike—are what the Lord declares His purpose to do away with, and completely to remove from being a ground of fear to those who approach Him in the name of His dear Son. 3. Now, inasmuch as no one can disperse a thick cloud but the God who can send His bright sun to shine through it, so none but that God who proclaims Himself a pardoning God and Saviour can say, so that the conscience of the sinner shall respond, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." And this is the forgiveness in which God delights—full, complete, and such as only He Himself can bestow. II. But in order that this mercy may be ours, and that we may rejoice in it, IT IS NEEDFUL THAT WE SHOULD RIGHTLY RESPOND to that intimation of God's grace. "I have blotted out thy transgressions. Return unto Me." 1. It is the Redeemer who calls, because it says, "Return, for I have redeemed thee." 2. How different to our natural expectation is this! The Redeemer crying after the sinner, instead of the sinner crying after the Redeemer. 3. Then observe how the language before us manifests the deep concern of God our Saviour. "Return to Me." He would not speak in language like this, if it were not a matter of immense moment to the sinner to return. 4. There is another suggestion: for what purpose is this call of entreaty made? Not that the sinner may receive punishment. God calls thee, O careless one, not to be frowned upon, but smiled upon. 5. Then, after all this intimation of grace on the part of God, there can be no hope of lasting peace or a future glory, except as we return. III. NOTICE THE LOVE IN THE ASSURANCE THAT HE GIVES ABOUT REDEMPTION. "Return, for I have redeemed thee." What return do you make to the call of Him who assures of mercy and redemption, and who graciously says, Return? (*W. Cadman, M.A.*) *The cloud of sin and its dispersion:*—I. A wonderful teaching as to the INMOST NATURE OF SIN. I refer especially to the two words for sin which are employed here. That translated transgression literally means "treachery" or "rebellion," and that translated sin "missing a mark." All iniquity is stamped with this damning characteristic, it is rebellion against a loving will, an infinite King, a tender Father. And all iniquity has this, by the merciful irony of Providence, associated with it, that it is a blunder as well as a crime. II. THE PERMANENT RECORD OF SIN. "I have blotted out." That points, of course, to something that has been written, and which it promises shall be erased. It may be, perhaps, the idea rather of a stain which is covered and removed, but that I think less probable than the other one, that the evil is written down somewhere. A book written; a permanent record of my evil doing. Where is it written? Where, rather, is it not written? Written on character, written to a very large extent even on circumstances, written above all in the calm, perfect memory of the all-judging God. The book is written by ourselves, moment

by moment, and day by day. We write it with invisible ink, and it only needs to be held to the fire to flash up into legibility. III. THE DARKENING POWER OF SIN. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud." When the cloud draws its veil over the heavens, the sunshine and the blue are shut out from a man's eye, and all the flowerets close; and when the heaven is veiled the birds cease to sing. So, like a misty veil drawn across the face of the heavens are man's sins. Our only way of knowing God is by sympathy, by conformity. IV. THE REMOVAL OF THE SIN. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." The erasure implies the making a clean sheet of the blurred page; the cancelling of the whole long formidable column of figures that expresses the debt. The blotting out as a cloud implies the disappearing of the misty vapour, as some thin fleecy film will do in the dry Eastern heavens, melting away as a man looks. So God, in His marvellous patience, shining on the upper side, as it were, of all the mists that wrap and darken our souls, thins these away by the process of self-communication, until they gather themselves up, routed and broken, and disappear, floating in thin fragments beneath the visual horizon. It is to no purpose to ask whether that means pardon or cleansing. It means both. Isaiah could proclaim: "I have blotted out thy transgressions," because Isaiah could also proclaim: "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." Now, mark this, that this removal of sin, in all its aspects and powers, is regarded in my text as a past accomplished fact. It is not set forth as contingent upon the man's return, but as the reason for his return. "I have redeemed thee, therefore come back to Me," not "Come back to Me that I may redeem thee." You have to take your portion of the great blessing by the simple act and exercise of faith in Jesus Christ. Then it becomes yours. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Sin as clouds:*—It is by no means an uncommon circumstance to find in the Bible the very same natural object employed as a symbol of very different and even opposite things. Thus, the lion is used as the emblem both of Christ and of the Prince of Darkness; fire is used as the emblem both of Divine purity and of human suffering; water is used as the emblem both of peace and of trouble; and the cloud is employed as an emblem both of good and evil. Here the Almighty Himself speaks of sin as a "cloud." In order to guard against an abuse of the comparison, notice two striking points of dissimilarity. (1) Clouds are objects of beauty. (2) Clouds are sources of blessing. In what respect, then, is sin like a cloud? I. He blotteth out sin as a cloud which OBSTRUCTS THE GENIAL INFLUENCES OF HEAVEN. It rolls like a thick cloud between God and the soul. It obstructs the rays of His love; it makes life gloomy and sad. II. He blotteth out sins as a cloud which RISES FROM BENEATH. Whence come these clouds? Not from the celestial regions. They are exhalations from the earth. From noxious marshy lands and stagnant pools, as well as from restless seas they rise. So it is with sin. It is an exhalation from the depraved heart. The clouds that roll between the soul and its God are an aggregation of the noxious vapours that have risen from the heart. III. He blotteth out sins as a cloud which EXISTS IN EVERY VARIETY OF FORM. Clouds are endless in their variety. It is so with sin. You have it in the fleeting thought, the transient feeling, the passing word; as well as in the deep plot, the cherished passions, the confirmed habits, the dark, dark life. IV. He blotteth out sins as a cloud which is CHARGED WITH EVIL. Whilst clouds are sources of blessings to the world, they are often filled with elements of destruction. There are forged the thunderbolts that terrify; there are kindled the lightnings that consume; there are the floods that deluge. It is so with sin. The miseries of retribution are all nursed in it as storms in the cloud. V. He blotteth out sins as a cloud WHICH NO FINITE INTELLIGENCE CAN DISPERSE. Who can dispel the smallest cloud from the face of the sky? No skill, no strength, can dispel one cloud. It is so with sin. No finite being can dispel it. No Church, priesthood, &c. VI. He blotteth out sins as a cloud, which ONCE DISPERSED, IS GONE FOR EVER. Sins pardoned, like clouds dispersed, are lost for ever. "In those days, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for and there shall be none, and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found, for I will pardon them." VII. He blotteth out sins as a cloud, which WHEN DISSIPATED BENEFITS THE UNIVERSE. (*Homilist.*) *God's forgiveness:*—I. A DESCRIPTION OF SIN. Man's transgressions are as a thick cloud. 1. In their number. (1) The sins of the wicked—murders, revellings, debaucheries, and the like. (2) The sins of the moral man—intellectual sins, worse than the animal—avarice, pride, ambition, unbelief. (3) The sins of the good. The lives of the best of men may seem, to the natural eye, holy and good; but, seen under the microscope of God's law, these are full of impurities. 2. Because they intervene between God

and man. 3. Because they engloom the earth. 4. Because they contain the consequences which we dread. Out of the cloud the angry lightnings flash, and in the cloud the fury of the tempest sleeps. II. A DESCRIPTION OF FORGIVENESS. "I have blotted out," &c. You have witnessed the dispersion of a storm. This is a symbol of God's forgiveness. 1. It is so because it is the work of God only. It is a transaction in which man has no share. 2. God's forgiveness is a complete forgiveness. 3. May we not learn that all sin is overruled to our good? After the storm has gone over us, have we not found the atmosphere purified? Can we not see that the world is disciplined by the deluge of evils which pours forth from the clouds of sin? 4. This is a symbol of God's forgiveness in respect to the gladness which succeeds the storm. The prophet represents the whole earth as awakening, after the dispersion of the storm, to exultant joy. "Sing, O ye heavens," &c. Such is the joy of the world on account of God's forgiveness. III. A DESCRIPTION OF THE CONDUCT OF THE FORGIVEN. "Return unto Me," &c. (*H. M. Jackson.*) *Departing clouds:*—The bestowment of spiritual blessings is a warrant for the expectation of all needful temporal blessings. This passage is the foundation on which God causes His ancient people to rest. God's forgiving love is the promise of all needful help and grace. I. WE MAKE OUR OWN CLOUDS. As the natural clouds are formed by the vapours drawn up from the sea, so, in a degree, those clouds which darken our skies are the effects of our transgressions. II. GOD MAKES OUR CLOUDS THE MINISTERS OF HIS MERCY. The natural clouds are the ministers of His mercy, the testimonies of His faithful care, of His loving thoughtfulness for the children of men. But how wonderful that the clouds of our sins should be the ministers of His mercy! The clouds lead us to appreciate the glorious sunlight. III. GOD DISPERSES OUR CLOUDS BY THE INTERVENTION OF HIS REDEEMING LOVE AND POWER. Clouds move in obedience to nature's laws; and the clouds of our sins cannot be blotted out in an arbitrary method. Not as a bad debt, not as chalked figures may be obliterated. God is a Father, but He is a moral Governor. Even He has only a right to blot out transgressions, because He has redeemed. IV. GOD DISPERSES OUR CLOUDS IN ORDER THAT WE MAY STAND IN THE CLEAR SUNSHINE. When sin is blotted out, then the soul is started on a career of never-ending fruitfulness. V. GOD MAKES THE DEPARTING CLOUDS HIS PATHETIC PREACHERS. "Return unto Me." Every time we see the clouds sweeping across the heavens, let us listen to their still small voice. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *God's abundant pardon:*—In pardoning His people God freely forgives them all their sins of every description, flowing from corrupt propensities and evil habits, committed through ignorance, infirmity, temptation, or presumption. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Barriers obliterated:*—I. HERE IS AN INTERPOSING AND DIVIDING MEDIUM: a cloud of sins. A vapour, says the Hebrew; and, then, a thick cloud. God's people ought always to dwell in fellowship with their God. There ought to be nothing between the renewed heart and God to prevent joyful and hallowed fellowship; but it is not so. Sometimes a cloud comes between,—a cloud of sin; and, whenever that cloud of sin comes between us and God, it speedily chills us. Our delight in God is no longer manifest; we have little or no zeal in His service, or joy in His worship. Beneath that cloud, we feel like men who are frozen; and, at the same time, darkness comes over us. We get into such a sad state that we hardly know whether we are God's people or not. Besides that, it threatens us. Remember, clouds are earthborn things. Yet, recollect that the sun is not affected by the clouds. II. THE COMPLETE REMOVAL OF THIS BARRIER. "I have blotted out," &c. 1. No known human power can remove the clouds. So it is with your darkness and doubts if you have fallen into sin. 2. But what a mercy it is that God can remove these clouds of sin. 3. When God drives away these clouds from us, though we may see other clouds, we shall never see those black ones any more. When the Lord takes away His people's sins, they are gone, and gone for ever. 4. The glory of it is that the Lord has already done this great work of grace. "I have," &c. III. THE TENDER COMMAND. "'Return unto Me.' The great barrier that separated us, is removed; so let us not be divided from one another any longer." 1. When He says, "Return," He wants you to give up that which has grieved Him. 2. The Lord's gracious invitation also means, "Come back, and love Me. See how I have loved you. I have already forgiven you your sin, you who are, indeed, My child, but whose faith has almost disappeared. Though you have provoked Me, I still love you. Will you not love Me?" After such pleading, can you keep on in this cold-hearted state towards your God? 3. The Lord also means, "Return again to your old joys." IV. THE SACRED CLAIM WHICH BACKS UP THE GRACIOUS INVITATION. "I have redeemed thee." 1. The meaning is this: "I

have loved you so much that I redeemed you with the blood of My dear Son; and, having loved you so much in the ages past, I love you still. Come back to Me. I did not make a mistake when I first loved you, through which I shall have to change the object of My choice. I knew all about you from eternity; all that you ever would be or could be, I knew it; yet I loved you and bought you," &c. 2. You belong to Me. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Return unto Me.**—*The freeness of the gospel scheme, and the universality of God's love*:—I. THE FREENESS OF THE METHOD OF MAN'S ACCEPTANCE. "Return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee." There can be no difficulty in proving that we are bought with a price; there can be no difficulty in showing that it was God Himself to whom the price was paid. But there is something of a difficulty in understanding how purchase can consist with gift; and how that which is dearly bought can be said to be freely bestowed. The difficulty is just what follows. Much is said in the Bible as to our deliverance being perfectly gratuitous: but if God bestows nothing that has not been paid for, what becomes of that gratuitous character of redemption? Certainly it would seem that purchase is so inconsistent with donation, that He of whom forgiveness is bought can lay but slight claim to a surprising liberality. Careful examination, however, will set this in a proper light. "Return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee," is an assertion whose proof lies in the assurance that God is ready to receive the prodigal. A deliverance that has been bought for the world is more illustrative of God's free grace than any other which would have required no satisfaction. For a plan of deliverance in every sense gratuitous is one of those absurd creations of the fancy which it would have been impossible to turn into reality. If it could not have been said to man, Thou art a redeemed thing, and a purchased thing, it must have been said, in opposition to our text, Thou shalt not return; thou shalt continue a ruined thing. It fell not within the power of Deity to grant what men call unconditional forgiveness. It is requiring God to undeify Himself—to cease to be the Just One, the Faithful One. The fact that we may return to the Father only because we are purchased by the blood of His Son, wondrously demonstrates the freeness of the grace. The death of the Son does not, after all, place the Father under the necessity of extending forgiveness to sinners; He need not have said, "Return," even though we were redeemed. We are not merely debtors who have nothing to pay—we are criminals who have punishment to endure. If I were only a debtor, and Christ had discharged the debt, I cease to be a debtor, and God cannot, in justice, refuse to release me; but, if I were a criminal, I do not cease to be a criminal because another might have died in my room. Hence it is free grace, and nothing else, that grants me forgiveness. II. THE EARNEST LONGING THAT GOD HAS THAT SINNERS SHOULD BE SAVED, DISCOVERED IN THE PATHOS OF THE ENTREATY. Men are bid to return because they are redeemed. There are, therefore, two conditions: they must have faith in the Redeemer, and they must have that repentance which includeth forsaking of sin: so precious are you in God's sight that to return is to please God. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) **I have redeemed thee.**—"*I have redeemed thee*":—To redeem is "to buy back"; and our redemption is a buying us out of bondage. We are "sold under sin," and God has bought us back with the precious blood of His well-beloved Son. If you will look at Leviticus xxv. 23, &c., you will find the law by which the land could be redeemed; or those persons who had waxen poor and sold themselves as bondmen—the law of redemption. 1. Christ is born in our midst that He may become a Kinsman, a Brother to us all. He comes bringing our ransom price. But he does not bid the angels bring the gold and pearls for our deliverance. He gives Himself a ransom for all. And now Jesus comes to us, our loving Brother, and He saith, "I have redeemed thee." 2. Now do not let us serve sin any more. Jesus has bought us back from this hard master. He has bought for us the Father's house too. He has put us in possession of heaven and all its joys. And thus from the bondage of sin and evil of our hearts, we can cry to the King for His help. Prayer is the white-winged bird that can bear our message right up to the Father's house. And an answer shall come. (*M. G. Pearse.*)

Ver. 23. **Sing, O ye heavens.**—*A song about redemption*:—The text is a magnificent call to heaven and earth to join in singing the glories of redemption. 1. IN WHAT PARTICULARS REDEMPTION CALLS FOR A SONG. Redemption calls for a song when we remember—1. Its Author. "The Lord hath done it." "The Lord hath redeemed Jacob." Herein is indeed a marvel of grace, demanding the highest anthems ransomed lips can raise. What could man have been to Him? What shadow of an obligation was there on His part to put forth the

slightest effort to save a single one? The Lord hath done it alone. With whom took He counsel in this matter? Who paid part-price with Him? Redemption is no work of the many; it is God's own in plan and execution. 2. Its cost (1 Pet. i. 18, 19). 3. Its completeness. Christ hath so gloriously completed the work of redemption that nothing can possibly be added to it. Unlike the atonement made by the Aaronic priesthood, it lasts for ever. 4. Its comprehensiveness. It will take eternity to reveal all. If we are Christ's, then have we been redeemed from the hand of Satan. From the guilt of sin. With the guilt, away goes the power of sin. We are also redeemed from the consequences of sin. From the power of death (Hos. xiii. 14). Christ hath redeemed the bodies of His saints for the glories of the resurrection morn. 5. The chiefest cause for song is redemption being that in which God has been pleased to glorify Himself the most. "The Lord hath glorified Himself in Israel." All the attributes of God are most gloriously to be seen in redemption work. II. WHO THOSE ARE WHO SHOULD SING THE SONG. 1. Heaven! "Sing, O ye heavens," and well you may, for redemption has shed a fresh lustre on your glories. The highest joy the angels can have, is that which arises from seeing their King glorified. Behold also the redeemed in heaven! Listen to their song, sweeter even than an angel's, "Unto Him that loved us." All heaven unites in this redemption song. 2. Let the ransomed on earth take their part. "Shout, ye lower parts of the earth." Behold your serfdom gone—your bonds broken—your chains snapped—your sins forgiven—your heaven secured, and then sing. 3. Surely who that have loved ones that have been redeemed should join us in the song. 4. The trembling sinner has good cause to join his voice with ours. "The Lord hath done it." If done, then there can be no necessity for any addition of thine. (*A. G. Brown.*) *Praise to God for redemption* :—I. WHAT IS IMPORTED IN GOD'S REDEEMING JACOB. 1. That He pays a ransom for our souls. 2. That He rescues us from captivity. 3. That He takes vengeance on our enemies. 4. That He puts us in possession of our inheritance. II. HOW GOD IS GLORIFIED, WHEN MAN IS REDEEMED. 1. His infinite wisdom was displayed. 2. His power was illustrated. 3. His grace was shown. 4. His truth was vindicated. III. THE PRAISE WHICH OUGHT TO BE ASCRIBED UNTO GOD ON ACCOUNT OF REDEMPTION. The language of the text has a certain grandeur and beauty. Two things seem to be expressed in it. 1. Let every creature rejoice in the event. 2. Let all express their joy in every form. "Sing," "shout," "break forth into singing." Praise Him with the heart. Let "all that is within you bless His holy name." Praise Him with the lips. "Speak of the glory of His kingdom, and talk of His power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts." Praise Him with your life. "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Praise Him in private. "Is anyone merry? Let him sing psalms." Praise Him in public. "O sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the congregation of the saints." (*E. Brown.*) *The joy of redemption* :—There are three redemptions which may well make all hearts rejoice. I. REDEMPTION BY BLOOD. II. REDEMPTION BY POWER. Conversion and regeneration. What sort of people are those whom Christ saves? Some were the very worst of the worst. Think of what these souls are saved from, and of what they are saved to. Some are saved in the teeth of ten thousand obstacles. III. REDEMPTION IN PERFECTION. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The song of songs* :—I. LET US SURVEY THE SCENE. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." So, going forth and returning to their God beneath that clear sky, from which the Sun of Righteousness shone down with beams of love, the forgiven people were filled with rejoicing, and by the mouth of the prophet they cried aloud, "Sing, O heaven, clouds veil thee no longer; shout, ye lower parts of the earth, which have been refreshed with fertilising showers; shout, O ye forest trees, whose every bough has been hung with diamond drops; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel." Thus the scenery of the text is helpful to the full understanding of it. Read the two verses together, and their beauty is seen. When did the joyous event take place which we are bidden to celebrate with song? 1. We may consider it as virtually accomplished in the eternal counsels of God, for our Lord is "the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world." 2. The clouds were actually removed when the atonement was presented. 3. The text also receives an actual fulfilment to each one of God's people in the moment when the eye of faith is first turned to the crucified Saviour. 4. This also comes true not only at first, but

frequently during the Christian life; for there are times when our unbelief makes new clouds, and threatens new storms. 5. The text will obtain its best fulfilment at the day of the Lord's appearing,—that day around which our chief hopes must ever centre. II. LET US CONTEMPLATE THE GLORIOUS SUBJECT FOR JOY. The great subject of joy is redemption—the redemption of God's Israel. 1. This is a stupendous work. 2. Of redemption by price and by power we are bidden to sing, a redemption so pre-eminently desirable that we can never sufficiently value it. 3. The very centre and emphasis of the song seems to me to lie in this: "The Lord hath done it." Whatever God does is the subject of joy to all pure beings. 4. It is sweet to reflect that redemption is an accomplished fact. It is not "The Lord will do it," but "The Lord hath done it." 5. We may lay peculiar force upon the word, the Lord hath "done" it, for He has finished the work. 6. A very important part of the song, however, lies in the fact that what God has done glorifies Himself. III. LET US LISTEN TO THE SONG. The angels sing, for they have deep sympathy with the redemption of man; the redeemed in glory sing, for they have been the recipients of this mighty mercy; the material heavens themselves also ring with the sweet music, and every star takes up the refrain, and with sun and moon praise the Most High. Descending from heaven, the song charms the lower earth, and the prophet calls upon materialism to share in the joy; mountains and valleys, forests and trees, are charged to join the song. Why should they not? This round earth of ours has been o'ershadowed by the curse through sin; she has yet to be unswathed of all the mists which iniquity has cast upon her (Rom. viii. 20, 21). IV. LET US JOIN IN THIS SONG. Consider how we sing this song. We sing it when by faith we see the grand truth that Jesus Christ took His people's sin upon Him, and so redeemed them. You will be still better able to sing this if you every day realise the blessings of redemption and pardon, by drawing near to God, using the privilege of prayer, trusting the Lord for everything, enjoying sonship, and communing with your heavenly Father. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 24. **I am the Lord that maketh all things.**—*The Maker of heaven and earth*:—Our object is, not so much to discover from the creation the truth of the being and character of the Creator, as to see how the Christian belief in Him as Maker must influence us about the world He has made. Trust Him as the Fatherly God, who is indeed Maker of heaven and earth, and what will follow? I. SUCH A TRUST WILL ENSURE YOUR RIGHT ATTITUDE WITH REGARD TO SCIENCE. 1. It will free you from all alarm as to the contradictions between science and the Scripture. 2. But our Christian belief should not only take away all dread of science, it should inspire its earnest pursuit. For it is the study of the work of God; a solution of His problems. The stars gleam with the glory of God, the flowers are fragrant with His sweetness; so that astronomy and botany, as well as all the sciences, have been well called "sections of theology." II. SUCH A TRUST IN GOD AS THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH QUALIFIES YOU FOR RIGHT USE AND ENJOYMENT OF NATURE. He who believes in the Creator with all his heart will be altogether a different man in trade or travel, in manufacture of the earth's productions, search into her secrets, or enjoyment of her scenery, from the man who darkly doubts—not to say from the man who impiously denies. For such a belief excludes the Manichæan heresy, that matter is the creation of evil. It gives to man that vision and voice about nature that were vouchsafed to Peter when he was taught to call nothing "common or unclean." He who has the spirit of Jesus Christ, who is reconciled by Him and taught by Him about God, will cherish Christ's spirit about nature. III. SUCH A TRUST IN GOD INSPIRES WITH HOPE ABOUT THE DESTINY OF CREATION. There is much that is saddening and bewildering in some of the aspects of creation. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain." In the midst of such reflections, a great hope glows in the heart that believes in God as "the maker of heaven and earth." For then He is not only seen as a Redeemer mercifully interposing to alleviate misfortune and to restore some from ruin; but He is known to be the utterly good God, whose goodness is "over all His works," over creation as much as over redemption. He is a "faithful Creator." He will care for His own; will bring it to the destiny for which He made it. IV. SUCH A TRUST IN GOD IS COMPLETELY POSSIBLE THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. Jesus has to do with nature, with us, and with God. He is "the Door" into nature. Connect all with Jesus, and we shall connect all with God. (*U. R. Thomas, B.A.*)

Ver. 28. **That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd.**—*Cyrus, the Lord's shepherd:*—Cyrus was the ideal king of the Persians and Greeks. His is the only name that is mentioned with any detail, I believe, both in the Persian and in the Greek, and also in the Hebrew literature. We speak of the great heroes of the world as Alexander and Cæsar and Napoleon. That list begins too late. We ought to begin instead with Cyrus, who was at first a prince of a small principality at the head of the Gulf of Oman. Later he conquered the Medes and Persians. Later Asia Minor, including Lydia, and at last he captured Babylon. In capturing Babylon he released from captivity the chosen people, and it is because of that fact that he is called in the Scriptures, and that he is known in history by the very unique title of the Lord's shepherd. There is only one other person to whom that phrase has ever been applied, and it is a very singular fact that a heathen king, one entirely out of all line with the chosen people, one so far away from traditions, which we have been in the habit of calling sacred, holy, as if his name had been Confucius or Buddha, in the Scriptures should have been given exactly the same title that was given to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. (*A. H. Bradford, D.D.*) *The unity of history:*—We will observe a few facts in support of my contention that history is the record of a beneficent development. 1. The governments of the world. In the early time government was simply for a few; there was no monarchy but force; there was no place for love. In the present time, in the immortal words of our President, "Government is of the people, by the people, for the people." The word which I best remember of any which I heard spoken in London was by Dr. Bevan, "Of old, government was for the few; to-day, government is for the many." And that is what things have been moving towards as the years have been passing. 2. Take another illustration, and that from the realm of religion. We think of one God; but to those early Hebrews there were many gods. They were not those who believed simply in one God for all the world. They believed in Jehovah as the God able to subdue all the gods of the heathen. They had not reached, except in the person of a few of their leaders, the sublime altitude of modern times of one pervading and all-enduring Unity, one holy, spiritual, true, and loving God. What was their worship? 3. We come to another illustration quite as familiar. We hear very much in our time concerning the social condition of the labouring people. The great dumb multitudes have found a voice; and every now and then, some man, ignorant of history, writes to say the rich were never so rich, and the poor never so poor; the condition of one class was never so luxurious, the condition of the other class was never so mean. He does not know what the condition of the masses was in the time when the pyramids were built, in the time when the Cæsars ruled in Rome and doled out corn to the multitude. He has not read the history of Great Britain, or of France, or of any other nation of Europe, or on the face of the earth. The condition of the world is improving. In the old time the condition of the woman was that of a thing or an animal; she belonged to her husband. She is a woman now, the equal of her husband. In the old time the child was absolutely under the power of the father. If the child was an orphan he was put on the street. Now, to use the phrase of a contemporary writer, "If he hath no father and if he hath no mother, he becomes the child of the public." What mean our charities? Conclusion—(1) Providence is compelling progress and no individual can possibly prevent it. (2) Not all are equally worthy of blessing, of commendation; although all may bear their part in bringing about the glorious consummation. (3) Cyrus shows to us the sweep of the Divine purpose. God's plan includes the nations and the ages. There is a place for Greece, for India, for China, for Rome, for Great Britain, there is a place for every nation as well as for Judah. There is a place for Napoleon, and Confucius, and Buddha, because there was a place for Cyrus. (4) But the other One to whom that glorious name was applied, the Lord's Shepherd, shows us what Cyrus does not show us, namely, the nature of that plan, revealing to us the nature of the One who made the plan. I look upon the face of Jesus Christ, and I see there is a person, and a sacrificial purpose, and a sacrifice which reaches even to the uttermost. (*Ibid.*) *Notables fulfilling God's purpose:*—Rich princes shall do what poor prophets have foretold. (*M. Henry.*)

CHAPTER XLV

VERS. 1-6. **Thus saith the Lord to His anointed.**—*Cyrus* :—The name of Cyrus is written Kuras in Babylonian cuneiform, Kurush in Old Persian. Ctesias stated on the authority of Parysatis, the wife of the Persian king Ochus, that her younger son was named Cyrus from the sun, as the Persians called the sun Κῦρος (*Epit. Phot.* 80; Plut. *Artax.* 1). In Zend, however, the sun is *hvare*, which could not take the form Κῦρος in Old Persian, though in modern Persian it is *khur*, *khir*, and *kher*. . . . The classical writers have given extraordinary accounts of his birth and rise to power. . . . All these versions have been shown to be unhistorical by contemporaneous cuneiform inscriptions. The most important of these are—(1) a cylinder inscription of Nabonidus, the last king of the Babylonian Empire, from Abu Habba (Sippara); (2) an annalistic tablet written shortly after the conquest of Babylonia by Cyrus; (3) a proclamation of Cyrus of the same date. . . . The proclamation of Cyrus shows that he was not a Zoroastrian like Darius and Xerxes, but that as he claimed to be the successor of the Babylonian kings, so also he acknowledged the supremacy of Bel-Merodach the supreme Babylonian god. Hence the restoration of the Jewish exiles was not due to any sympathy with monotheism, but was part of a general policy. Experience had taught him the danger of allowing a disaffected population to exist in a country which might be invaded by an enemy; his own conquest of Babylonia had been assisted by the revolt of a part of its population; and he therefore reversed the policy of deportation and denationalisation which had been attempted by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. The exiles and the images of their gods were sent back to their old homes; only in the case of the Jews, who had no images, it was the sacred vessels of the temple which were restored. (*Prof. A. H. Sayce, LL.D.*) *Cyrus : his character* :—To Greek literature Cyrus was the prince pre-eminent,—set forth as the model for education in childhood, self-restraint in youth, just and powerful government in manhood. Most of what we read of him in Xenophon's *Cyropædia* is, of course, romance; but the very fact that, like our own king Arthur, Cyrus was used as a mirror to flash great ideals down the ages, proves that there was with him native brilliance and width of surface as well as fortunate eminence of position. He owed much to the virtue of his race. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Cyrus, God's tool* :—Cyrus is neither chosen for his character, nor said [in the Isaiah passages] to be endowed with one. But that he is there, and that he does so much, is due simply to this, that God had chosen him. What he is endowed with is force, push, swiftness, irresistibleness. He is, in short, not a character, but a tool; and God makes no apology for using him but this, that he has the qualities of a tool. Now, we cannot help being struck with the contrast of all this, the Hebrew view of Cyrus, with the well-known Greek view of him. To the Greeks he is first and foremost a character. (*Ibid.*) *The victories of Cyrus* :—We have vividly described to us the victories of Cyrus; in his whirlwind career, subduing the nations before him, loosing the loins of kings (that whole troop of vassal empires enumerated by Xenophon), and opening before him the hundred brazen gates of Babylon (also minutely described by Herodotus, as guarding alike the approaches to the river and the temple of Belus), and cutting in sunder the bars of iron. The spoil amassed on that occasion was probably unexampled in the annals of war; for besides the enormous wealth of palatial Babylon itself, it included the fabulous riches of Crœsus, king of Lydia, who brought waggon-load after waggon-load to lay at the feet of the conqueror. The aggregate was computed to be equivalent to upwards of a hundred and twenty-six millions of our money. Well, therefore, might the prophet here chronicle, among the predestined exploits of this mighty prince (ver. 3), "the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places." (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Loosing the loins of kings* :—The monarchs of eastern nations were accustomed to wear girdles about their loins, which were considered as giving strength and firmness to their bodies; and, being richly decorated, served as badges of royal dignity. When, therefore, God declares that He would deprive them of their girdles and loose their loins, the expression imports that He would divest them of their power and majesty, and reduce them to a mean and contemptible condition. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Special Divine instrumentalities in the world's renovation* :—1. For the enlargement of His Church, God often selects special instruments. In setting into motion a whole system of agencies this is almost uniformly the case. We recognise the fact all along

the history of the Church. We see men raised up with peculiar gifts and clothed with peculiar powers to effect certain great works. The text gives us a remarkable illustration of this method of Divine procedure. In the bosom of the Church itself there are two still more remarkable examples of this law; the two men who bore the largest part in the inauguration and establishment of the chief dispensations. Moses and Paul were not indifferent characters; nor were their training and position like that of the multitude. They stand out boldly in history as men of peculiar natural gifts and attainments. Their early discipline exalted their intrinsic power; while their relation to the people among whom their work was to be performed, and to the science of the age in which they lived, imparted special qualifications for their great mission. It is not that the human is thus exalted above the Divine, but simply that the Divine uses that kind and measure of humanity which are best fitted to accomplish its purposes. 2. It is just as certain that the great Sovereign chooses particular nations to effect certain parts of His work in the final triumph of the Gospel, as that He chooses certain individuals for some special operation. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth My praise." His sovereignty reaches back of the immediate work. It chooses according to the character of the nation; it reaches to the antecedent training and the natural characteristics which combine to prepare the nation most fully for the work; nay, this sovereignty in its far-reaching wisdom has been busy all along the history of the people in so ordering the moulding influences under which characters and position are attained, that when the time comes for them to enter into His special work, they will be found all ripe for His purpose. This nation, to whom the passage before us refers, is a marked illustration of this thought. The Jew was designed to be the conservator of the Word of God. He was chosen for this purpose. The object was not propagation, but conservation. The race by nature and education had just those qualities which fitted it for this work. Its wonderful tenacity of impression, its power to hold what once had fairly been forced into it by Divine energy, like the rock hardened around the crystal, belongs to its nature, reveals itself after Providence had shattered the nation, in that granite character which, under the fire of eighteen centuries, remains unchanged. At every step of the progress of Christianity since, illustrations multiply of the truth that God forms nations to His work, and chooses them because of their fitness to accomplish certain parts of that work. The Greek with his high mental culture and his glorious language—fit instrument through which the Divine Word breathed His life-giving truth; the Roman sceptred in power over the whole realm of civilisation, and undesignedly constructing the great highway for the Church of Jesus; the German, with his innate freedom of spirit, nourishing the thoughtful souls whose lofty utterances awoke, whose wondrous power disenthralled a sleeping and captive Church. (*S. W. Fisher, D.D.*)

Vers. 2, 3. **I will go before thee.**—*God going before*:—Man must go. Each man is accomplishing a journey, going through a process. The only question is, How? Man may go, either with God or without Him. Whether we go with God or without Him, we shall find crooked places. I. We should regard the text as A WARNING. There are crooked places. II. The text is also A PROMISE. "I will go before thee." God does not say where He will straighten our path; He does not say how; the great thing for us to believe is that there is a special promise for us, and to wait in devout hope for its fulfilment. He who waits for God is not misspending his time. Such waiting is true living—such tarrying is the truest speed. III. The text is also A PLAN. It is in the word "before" that I find the plan, and it is in that word "before" that I find the difficulty on the human side. God does not say, I will go alongside thee; we shall go step by step: He says, I will go before thee. Sometimes it may be a long way before us, so that we cannot see Him; and sometimes it may be just in front of us. But whether beyond, far away, or here close at hand, the great idea we have to live upon is that God goes before us. 1. Let us beware of regarding the text as a mere matter of course. There is an essential question of character to be settled. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." 2. Let us beware of regarding this text as a licence for carelessness. Let us not say, "If God goes before me, and makes all places straight, why need I care?" To the good man all life is holy; there is no step of indifference; no subject that does not bring out his best desires. "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground" is the expression of every man who knows what it is to have God going before him. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Treasures of*

darkness :—If we be Zion's pilgrims, heavenward bound, we shall find the need of such promises, in their spiritual fulfilment, as God here gave to Cyrus. I. GOD'S PRELIMINARY WORK in "going before His people, making for them crooked places straight, breaking in pieces gates of brass, and cutting in sunder bars of iron." 1. The first promise lays a foundation for all the rest; "I will go before thee." How great must those difficulties be which need God Himself to go before us in order to overcome them! Surely they must be insuperable by any human strength. If we are rightly taught, we shall feel a need for the Lord to go before us, not only now and then, but every step of the way, for unless led and guided by Him, we are sure to go astray. How strikingly was this the case with the children of Israel. You may apply this promise to a variety of things. (1) It is applicable not only to spiritual, but to temporal trials and perplexities—to His going before us both in providence and grace. (2) But the words apply to the manifestation of His holy and sacred will. (3) It is especially in the removal of obstructions that the Lord fulfils this part of the promise. 2. "And make crooked things straight." This promise springs out of the former, and is closely connected with it; for it is only by the Lord's going before that things really crooked can be straightened. But what is meant by crooked places, and whence come they? (1) Some are inherently crooked, that is, it is in their very nature to be so. Thus crooked tempers, dispositions, desires, wills, lusts are in themselves inherently crooked, because being bent out of their original state by sin, they do not now lie level with God's holy will and Word. (2) But there are crooked places in the path of God's family, which are not inherently crooked as being sinful in themselves, but are crooked as made so by the hand of God to us. Of this kind are afflictions in body and mind, poverty in circumstances, trials in the family, persecution from superiors or ungodly relatives, heavy losses in business, bereavement of children, and, in short, a vast variety of circumstances curved into their shape by the hand of God, and so made "crooked things" to us. Now, the Lord has promised to make "crooked things straight." Taken in its fullest extent, the promise positively declares that from whatever source they come, or of whatsoever nature they be, the Lord will surely straighten them. By this He manifests His power, wisdom, and faithfulness. But how does He straighten them? In two ways, and this according to their nature. Sometimes by removing them out of the way; and sometimes by reconciling our minds to them. 3. But the Lord also promised Cyrus that He would, by going before him, "break in pieces the gates of brass," &c. Cyrus longed to enter the city of Babylon; but when he took a survey of the only possible mode of entrance, he saw it firmly closed against him with gates of brass and iron. Can we not find something in our experience which corresponds to this feeling in Cyrus? There is a longing in the soul after a certain object. We press forward to obtain it, but what do we find in the road? Gates of brass and bars of iron. Look, for instance, at our very prayers. Are not the heavens sometimes brass over our heads, so that, as Jeremiah complains, "they cannot pass through"? Nay, is not your very heart itself sometimes a gate of brass, as hard, as stubborn, and as inflexible? So the justice, majesty, and holiness of God, when we view these dread perfections of Jehovah with a trembling eye under the guilt of sin, stand before the soul as so many gates of brass. The various enemies, too, which beset the soul; the hindrances and obstacles without and within that stand in the path; the opposition of sin, Satan, self, and the world against all that is good and godlike—may not all these be considered "gates of brass," barring out the wished-for access into the city? 4. But there are also "bars of iron." These strengthen the gates of brass and prevent them from being broken down or burst open, the stronger and harder metal giving firmness and solidity to the softer and weaker one. An unbelieving heart; the secret infidelity of the carnal mind; guilt of conscience produced by a sense of our innumerable wanderings from the Lord; doubts and fears often springing out of our own want of consistency and devotedness; apprehensions of being altogether deceived, from finding so few marks of grace and so much neglect of watchfulness and prayer—all these may be mentioned as bars of iron strengthening the gates of brass. Now, can you break to pieces these gates of brass, or cut in sunder the bars of iron? Here, then, when so deeply wanted, comes in the promise, "I will break," &c. II. THE GIFTS WHICH THE LORD BESTOWS UPON THEM, when He has broken to pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron, here called "treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places." 1. "Treasures of darkness." But is not this a strange expression? How can there be darkness in the city of Salvation

of which the Lord, the Lamb, is the eternal light? The expression does not mean that the treasures themselves are darkness, but that they were hidden in darkness till they were brought to light. The treasures of Belshazzar, like the Bank bullion, were buried in darkness till they were broken up and given to Cyrus. It is so in a spiritual sense. Are there not treasures in the Lord Jesus? Yet, all these are "treasures of darkness," so far as they are hidden from our eyes and hearts, till we are brought by His special power into the city of Salvation. 2. But the Lord promised also to give to Cyrus "the hidden riches of secret places," that is, literally, the riches of the city which were stored up in its secret places. But has not this also a spiritual meaning? Yes. Many are "the hidden riches of secret places" with which the God of all grace enriches His believing family. Look, for instance, at the Word of God. But observe, how the promises are connected with "crooked places," "brazen gates," and "iron bars," and the going before of the Lord to remove them out of the way. Without this previous work we should be ignorant to our dying day of "the treasures of darkness"; we should never see nor handle "the hidden riches of secret places." III. THE BLESSED EFFECTS PRODUCED by what the Lord thus does and thus gives—a spiritual and experimental knowledge, that "He who has called them by their name is the God of Israel." Observe the expression, "I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name." What an individuality it stamps on the person addressed! How it makes religion a personal thing! But what is produced by this special, individual, and personal calling? Knowledge. What knowledge? Spiritual, heartfelt, and experimental. Of what? "That the Lord who called them by name is the God of Israel." It is as "the God of Israel" that He manifests mercy and grace; that He never leaves nor forsakes the objects of His choice; that He fulfils every promise, defeats every enemy, appears in every difficulty, richly pardons every sin, graciously heals every backsliding, and eventually lands them in eternal bliss. Now, perhaps, we can see why God's people have so many gates of brass and bars of iron, so many trials and severe temptations. This is to bring them into personal acquaintance with God, the covenant God of Israel; to make religion a reality. (*J. C. Philpot.*)

Ver. 3. **And I will give thee the treasures of darkness.**—*Spiritual mineralogy*:—There is a whole library of sacred philosophy in the words of the Psalmist on the relation subsisting between God and His creatures. "That Thou givest them, they gather. Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good." Perhaps one is hardly ever reminded more strongly of this fellowship of Providence and industry than when passing through a district seamed and bored and blackened by the mining operations in search of the metals which yield the wealth of a country, or of the hardly less precious coal, by the aid of which the iron, the copper, or the silver is smelted into useful forms. The ore, it is beyond the miner's province to fashion; God makes it to him a free present; but the digging, and the hoisting, and the smelting, and the moulding, and the chasing, and the carving, and the coining into currency, these things God no more does for man than man, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth. Let us learn to be grateful without being indolent. Let us equally take care to be diligent without being proud. There is a high moral and spiritual mineralogy, wherein we may become rich, "not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold." There are caverns of unimaginable wealth, every grain of which comes from God's free bounty, but not one grain of which man can touch, except he do it "in the sweat of his brow." Bring to the text not only faith in God's promise, but strong hands and swift feet to do according to God's commandment. We are now ready to follow on into the figure we have borrowed, and show how frequently God blesses His people, as He provides for the workers or the owners of mineral quarries, fetching "treasures" out of "darkness," and "hidden riches" out of "secret places." I. St. Paul represents THE CHRISTIAN FAITH as a secret which is now for the first time discovered and made known, and the implication of the apostle, whenever he employs the term, is that the great blessing which prophecies and types had contained, but, containing, had concealed, was now in Christ Jesus brought out as into open daylight for all men to behold and possess. It has never been questioned that this truth was the real meaning of the rending of the veil in the Temple at the moment of our Lord's giving up of the ghost. For three hours there had been suspended over Mount Calvary a thick curtain of darkness; but at the ninth hour that veil, like the other close by, was "rent" also "in twain, from the top to the bottom." I

find in that darkness the awful symbol of the misery, and the ignorance, and the confusion whereof the world itself had been the victim all through the ages preceding the Advent. But the very same fact which tore down the rich drapery in the building dispelled the dense blackness on the mountain, and declared the very same doctrine that "Christ Jesus was the Saviour of all men, and specially of them that believe." Learn to ascribe your redemption to the clouds of misery behind which your Surety laid down His life. II. Somewhat in this way it would not, perhaps, be extravagant to represent any one of ourselves, at the crisis of his CONVERSION, as looking towards the Saviour much as one of those spectators literally did when the darkness was beginning to clear off from the crucifixion. When the veil is rent, and the power of faith scatters the clouds, and the soul peering through catches the first glimpse of a Saviour, the rapture of being forgiven has, so to speak, been quarried and hewn out of the black deep pit of conviction and remorse. III. It will be far less difficult to show that all along the journey of the Christian he digs his BEST AND BRIGHTEST MERCIES out of thick, and often terrible, gloom. I find some of you shut up in the deep pit of constant bodily pain, or infirmity. I find others of you wandering through the pitch dark avenues of a recent family funeral. There is a time for the digging of the gold. That is yours now. And there is a time for the burnishing and the chasing, and the putting on of the gold. That is not yet come. There is a place, says Solomon, for the sapphires in the stones of the earth; but the men who take the sapphires first out of the stones need all their skill and practice to tell which is which, and you would not thank the miner for the jewellery just left as he gets it. You must allow a fair time for the lapidary or the goldsmith to take up the business where the rough black denizens of the pit leave off—and "no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby." (*H. Christopherson.*) *Treasures of darkness:*—As Cyrus, as a deliverer, was but a type of the Messiah, this promise has been, and is being, fulfilled in Christ in His great triumph over the powers of darkness. These words present a special phase of His triumphs. The preceding words have already found striking fulfilment, "I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight," &c. But to Christ God has also given the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places. I. In one sense, THIS IS TYPICAL OF ALL GOD'S DISCLOSURES. Those things which men discover to-day are treasures which have been in darkness for countless generations, jewels which have been concealed in hidden places during millenniums. II. This is supremely true of THE ADVENT AND REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST. Look at the manner of His coming. See the poverty which surrounded His birth. Look at the nature of His life—"Without a place to lay His head"; "a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He was, moreover, "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." There is nothing very bright in that record. When Christ, in the hour of utter loneliness, uttered that piercing cry, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and darkness covered earth and heaven, then out of that dense gloom He who in the beginning made light to shine out of darkness, made the most glorious light to shine; so that from the Cross to-day there streams the greatest revelation with which God has ever enriched our race. Again, how graciously true this is of Christ's redemptive work in view of the spiritual darkness of the world which He came to save! What a revelation of the world's night we find in the advent of our Lord. Until then men knew not how dark this world was. These words only gain their full significance in the story of Christ's redemption. When He came the world was hopeless and undone. It had exhausted its energies in its numberless attempts to save and ennoble itself, and down deep in recesses of darkness and iniquity were buried the brightest talents with which humanity had been enriched—so many glorious impulses and high capacities prostituted to the vilest uses, or paralysed in the dark and made utterly useless. Oh, the countless lost pieces of silver, and the priceless jewels which He has rescued since then from hopeless degradation and sin! III. This is gloriously true in THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHO ACCEPT CHRIST AS THEIR SAVIOUR. 1. Was not the first hour of our spiritual enlightenment and enrichment a fulfilment of the same Divine promise? 2. Then, again, you have had your doubts and fears. They were terrible to bear at the time; yet out of them you were at length permitted to snatch a new wealth of assurance and joy. 3. This is true also, in the life of every one who has accepted Christ, of that other experience which darkens

our vision, namely, that of sorrow in its many and varied forms. It is in darkness, too, that we learn trustfulness and faith. (*D. Davies.*) *Treasures of darkness:*—We cannot hear of the "treasures of darkness" without finding our interest quickened. We seem suddenly made aware of treasures we had never dreamed of; and aware, too, that what we had deemed empty, and even repellent, may be made to yield up most surprising wealth, not that merely of a temporal, perishable kind, such as some would call "treasures," but what the wisest and most spiritual men would call such, under the blessed teaching of the Master (Matt. vi. 19). 1. It ought not to be difficult for us to believe that there are spiritual treasures that we have never even got a glimpse of yet. Christ spoke of treasure "hid in a field." That surely must have been among the treasures of darkness. And the Apostle Paul, long after, spoke of the "unsearchable riches of Christ." What he had himself freely taken from this store made him feel himself rich indeed; so rich, that he had not the least inclination for anything that the world could give. One of the saddest and most mournful of all things for us would be to settle down contentedly with the notion that God had no treasures to bestow but what we see all about us with the utterly inexperienced eye! To think the common experience of life, to think our own experience, the limit of all things, would be to make life a very poor thing indeed. 2. God must have infinite treasures and pleasures which He does not want to keep in darkness unused. That ought to be an axiom with us. If we should never dream of speaking of ourselves as spiritually rich, it cannot be because either God has nothing better to bestow, or that He grudges to bestow it. 3. We seem to believe readily enough that the future may reveal to us glories that we cannot forecast. But why be content to postpone to a future state the higher degrees of true blessedness? Why not possess some of the treasures now? 4. The phrase suggests to us that what we deem empty, void, and even repellent as darkness, may contain things unspeakably precious. We speak of the "night of sorrow." But it only requires a very moderate faith in God to believe that He is too good and kind ever to let a single sensitive being pass through such trials as are the lot of not a few, unless it were that only so can they be prepared for, and put in possession of, choicer good. But there is a darkness far blacker than the night of affliction and sorrow. It is this awful gloom, this darkness that may be felt, which we all feel at times to involve the moral world. This is a world of tremendous mystery to the morally sensitive soul. Let a man ever come to see that a world which he cannot but feel to be evil to the core, is nevertheless the very best possible school for man in the early stage of his training for immortality; that this discipline of evil is absolutely essential for a while; that he would clearly be a poorer creature without it; that it is the conflict with evil which brings out some of the most precious qualities of the soul; that without evil, good itself could not be known; that God Himself could not be so gloriously revealed to the heart as He is through the occasion that every man's sin affords; that the greatest proof that God is Love must have been for ever wanting, had He, by restraint and force, mechanically prevented the entrance of evil into the universe. Only let one—this one—little ray of light fall upon the darkness, and you will feel how priceless are the treasures of darkness! 5. But the darkness can be made to yield up treasures only to those who will listen for the voice Divine. To the upright there will arise light in darkness. It is only the children of light who can go into the darkness, and from it fetch out the hid treasures. "God is light: in Him is no darkness at all." Christ is the Light of the World: whoso walketh with Him shall have the Light of Life. (*H. H. Dobney.*) *Did Cyrus acknowledge Jehovah?*—The prophet apparently expects that Cyrus will come to acknowledge Jehovah as the true God and the author of his success. Whether this hope was actually realised is more than ever doubtful since the discovery of cuneiform inscriptions, in which Cyrus uses the language of crude polytheism. (*Records of the Past.*)

Vers. 4, 5. **For Jacob My servant's sake.**—*Great men the servants of God:*—It appears from this prediction, taken in connection with its wonderful accomplishment, that God justly claims a sovereign right to make great men the instruments of executing His wise and benevolent designs. God claims a supreme right to the services of great men, in almost every page of His Word. How often do we hear Him saying of this, of that, and of the other great character, He is My servant! How often do we meet with this sovereign language, My servant Moses; My servant Job; My servant Jacob; My servant Israel; My servant Isaiah;

My servant Nebuchadnezzar! But He more fully displays this prerogative by publishing to the world what great men shall do, before they are brought into being. He claimed the services of Solomon, the wisest of men, and appointed the business of his life, before he was born (1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10). In the prediction concerning Nebuchadnezzar, God claimed a sovereign right to employ him as the minister of His vengeance, in punishing the people of His wrath. He asserted His absolute Divinity and sovereignty, in His prophetic address to Cyrus. And He displayed the same sovereign right to the powers and influence of great men, in His predictions of Alexander the Great, of Augustus Cæsar, of John the Baptist, of Constantine the Great, of Mohammed, and of the Man of Sin. 1. He gives men their superior natural capacity for doing good. 2. He presides over their education, and gives them the means of improving their superior talents, and forming themselves for eminent usefulness. 3. God gives them the disposition, which they at any time have, to employ their superior abilities in promoting the happiness of mankind. 4. God gives great men the opportunity of employing all their power and influence in executing His wise and benevolent designs. 5. It is God who succeeds their exertions for the benefit of the world. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. **I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.**—*Cyrus girded by God:*—The contrast to "loose the loins of kings" (ver. 1). (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *The girdings of Jehovah:*—I. GOD'S PLAN, AS IT AFFECTS SOCIETY. 1. It is comprehensive, sweeping from age to age, threading millenniums, building its structure from the dust of earth's earliest age to the emergence of the new heavens and earth at the close of time. But it is minute and particular. 2. He works through individuals. The story of man is for the most part told in the biographies of men. It is through human instruments that God executes His beneficent purposes, His righteous judgments. Through Columbus, He draws aside the veil from the coast-line of America. Through a Watt and a Stephenson, He endows men with the co-operation of steam; through a Galvani and an Edison, with the ministry of electricity. Through a De Lesseps, He unites the waters of the eastern and western seas, and brings the Orient and Occident together. Through a Napoleon He shatters the temporal power of the Pope; and by a Wilberforce strikes the fetters from the slave. Men do not know the purpose of God in what they are doing. 3. God's use of men does not interfere with their free action. This is clearly taught in more than one significant passage in Scripture—Joseph's brethren. Herod, Pilate, and the religious leaders of the Jews, were swept before a cyclone of passion and jealousy; and it was with wicked hands that they crucified and slew the Lord of glory: but they were accomplishing the determinate counsel of God. II. GOD'S PLAN, AS IT AFFECTS INDIVIDUALS. We are all conscious of an element in life that we cannot account for. Other men have started life under better auspices, and with larger advantages than we, but somehow they have dropped behind in the race, and are nowhere to be seen. Our health has never been robust, but we have had more working days in our lives than those who were the athletes of our school. We have been in perpetual peril, travelling incessantly, and never involved in a single accident; whilst others were shattered in their first journey from their doorstep. Why have we escaped, where so many have fallen? Why have we climbed to positions of usefulness and influence, which so many more capable ones have missed? Why has our reputation been maintained, when better men than ourselves have lost their footing and fallen beyond recovery? There is not one of us who cannot see points in the past where we had almost gone, and our footsteps had well-nigh slipped: precipices along the brink of which we went at nightfall, horrified in the morning to see how near our footprints had been to the edge. Repeatedly we have been within a hair-breadth of taking some fatal step. How strangely we were plucked out of that companionship! How marvellously we were saved from that marriage, from that investment, from embarking in that ship, travelling by that train, taking shares in that company! It is God who has girded us, though we did not know Him. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The girding of the Almighty*:—Christ Himself testifies to the girding of the Almighty when He says, "To this end was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world." Abraham was girded for a particular work and mission, in what is otherwise denominated his call. Joseph, in Egypt, distinguishes the girding of God's hand, when he comforts his guilty brothers in the assurance, "So it was not you that sent me hither, but God." Moses and Samuel were even called by name, and set to their great life-work in the same manner. And what is Paul endeavouring in all the stress and pressure of his mighty apostle-

ship, but to perform the work for which God's Spirit girded him at his call, and to apprehend that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus? (*H. Bushnell, D.D.*) *Every man's life a plan of God*:—God has a definite life-plan for every human person, girding him, visibly or invisibly, for some exact thing, which it will be the true significance and glory of his life to have accomplished. 1. The Holy Scriptures not only show us explicitly that God has a definite purpose in the lives of men already great, but they show us how frequently, in the conditions of obscurity and depression, preparations of counsel are going on, by which the commonest offices are to become the necessary first chapter of a great and powerful history. David among the sheep; Elisha following after the plough; Nehemiah bearing the cup; Hannah, who can say nothing less common than that she is the wife of Elkanah and a woman of a sorrowful spirit,—who, that looks on these humble people, at their humble post of service, and discovers, at last, how dear a purpose God was cherishing in them, can be justified in thinking that God has no particular plan for him, because he is not signalised by any kind of distinction? 2. Besides, what do the Scriptures show us, but that God has a particular care for every man, a personal interest in him, and a sympathy with him and his trials, watching for the uses of his one talent as attentively and kindly, and approving him as heartily, in the right employment of it, as if He had given him ten; and what is the giving out of the talents itself, but an exhibition of the fact that God has a definite purpose, charge, and work for every man? 3. They also make it the privilege of every man to live in the secret guidance of God; which is plainly nugatory, unless there is some chosen work, or sphere, into which he may be guided. 4. God also professes in His Word to have purposes prearranged for all events; to govern by a plan which is from eternity even, and which, in some proper sense, comprehends everything. And what is this but another way of conceiving that God has a definite place and plan adjusted for every human being? 5. Turning now from the Scriptures to the works of God, how constantly are we met here by the fact, everywhere visible, that ends and uses are the regulative reasons of all existing things? 6. But there is a single but very important and even fearful qualification. Things all serve their uses, and never break out of their place. They have no power to do it. Not so with us. We are able, as free beings, to refuse the place and the duties God appoints; which, if we do, then we sink into something lower and less worthy of us. That highest and best condition for which God designed us is no more possible. And yet, as that was the best thing possible for us in the reach of God's original counsel, so there is a place designed for us now, which is the next best possible. God calls us now to the best thing left, and will do so till all good possibility is narrowed down and spent. And then, when He cannot use us any more for our own good, He will use us for the good of others—an example of the misery and horrible desperation to which any soul must come, when all the good ends, and all the holy callings of God's friendly and fatherly purpose are exhausted. Or it may be now that, remitting all other plans and purposes in our behalf, He will henceforth use us, wholly against our will, to be the demonstration of His justice and avenging power before the eyes of mankind; saying over us, as He did over Pharaoh in the day of His judgments, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." (*Ibid.*) *Finding God's life-plan*:—But the inquiry will be made, supposing all this to be true, how can we ever get hold of this life-plan God has made for us, or find our way into it? 1. Observe some negatives that are important, and must be avoided. (1) You will never come into God's plan if you study singularity; for if God has a design or plan for every man's life, then it is exactly appropriate to his nature; and, as every man's nature is singular and peculiar to himself,—as peculiar as his face or look,—then it follows that God will lead every man into a singular, and peculiar life, without any study of singularity on his part. (2) As little will he seek to copy the life of another. No man is ever called to be another. (3) In this view, also, you are never to complain of your birth, your training, your employments, your hardships; never to fancy that you could be something if only you had a different lot and sphere assigned you. God understands His own plan, and He knows what you want, a great deal better than you do. (4) Another mistake is that, while you surrender and renounce all thought of making up a plan, or choosing out a plan, for yourself, as one that you set by your own will, you also give up the hope or expectation that God will set you in any scheme of life, where the whole course of it will be known, or set down beforehand. If you go to Him to be guided, He will guide you; but He will not comfort your distrust, or half-trust of Him, by

showing you the chart of all His purposes concerning you. He will only show you into a way where, if you go cheerfully and trustfully forward, He will show you on still further. 2. But we must not stop in negatives. How, then, or by what more positive directions can a man, who really desires to do it, come into the plan God lays for him, so as to live it and rationally believe that he does? (1) Consider the character of God, and you will draw a large deduction from that; for all that God designs for you will be in harmony with His character. He is a being infinitely good, just, true. Therefore, you are to know that He cannot really seek anything contrary to this in you. (2) Consider your relation to Him as a creature. All created wills have their natural centre and rest in God's will. (3) You have a conscience, which is given to be an interpreter of His will, and thus of your duty, and, in both, of what you are to become. (4) God's law and His written Word are guides to present duty, which, if faithfully accepted, will help to set you in accordance with the mind of God and the plan He has laid for you. "I am a stranger in the earth," said one; "hide not Thy commandments from me"; knowing that God's commandments would give him a clue to the true meaning and business of his life. (5) Be an observer of providence. Study your trials, your talents, the world's wants, and stand ready to serve God now, in whatever He brings to your hand. (6) Consult your friends, and especially those who are most in the teaching of God. (7) Go to God Himself, and ask for the calling of God; for, as certainly as He has a plan for you, He will somehow guide you into it. This is the proper work of His Spirit. Young man, or woman! this is the day of hope to you. All your best opportunities are still before you. And what shall I say to the older man, who is further on in his course and is still without God in the world? The best end, the next best, and the next are gone, and nothing but the dregs of opportunity are left. And still Christ calls even you. There is a place still left for you; not the best and brightest, but a humble and good one. (*Ibid.*) *Cyrus directed, equipped, and prospered by God, though not one of God's enlightened worshippers*:—Idolatry in its grosser forms was unknown in Persia. The religion of Persia recognised one God, beneficent in character and work and purpose, revealed under the symbol of light. This one God, however, was not clothed with infinite attributes. His dominion was limited by the existence and activity of a rival spirit of evil, equally great and unbegotten with Himself. It was in this imperfect faith that the great and noble Cyrus was trained. Till after his contact with the Jews, he did not know God in His essential nature as spirit without symbol, supreme in His sovereignty, and infinite in the attributes that clothed Him. And yet in his temper there was a ready answerableness to the unseen touch of God's hand, an unconscious obedience to sacred purposes he but dimly discerned, and a providential sanctification for the fulfilment of God's counsels, in spite of his imperfect conceptions of God. (*T. G. Selby.*) *Irresponsible ignorance*:—Ignorance that is inseparable from the circumstances in which men are cradled, ignorance that is entirely involuntary, does not disqualify men from being the instruments of God's will, and receiving some of the most lustrous honours dispensed by His hand. (*Ibid.*) *The worth of our several ministries* cannot always be tested by the degree of knowledge that informs them. Some men, like the bees, do much of their work in the sunshine. They fulfil the tasks of life in the light of a clear illumination. For them the knowledge of God always precedes a vocation from God. There are men also who are like the coral insect, which works a fathom or two below the surface of the sea, and dies when the reef upon which it has laboured is just beginning to tower into the sunlight. (*Ibid.*) *The characteristic distinction between inspiration and providential equipment*:—Providential equipment consists in being girded by a God who may be more or less unknown. Inspiration implies that God's chosen agent has all his faculties filled with God's presence as He girds. (*Ibid.*) *The providence of the unknown*:—I. Is it not A REASONABLE AND A CONSISTENT THOUGHT, that the providential equipment, vocation, and sovereignty in a man's life should transcend his knowledge of God and God's purpose? 1. God may sometimes use a man who seems half a heathen, to remind His people that His providential sovereignty is larger than all finite thought. In the early days of the British rule in India, the old Mogul at Delhi, and the mediatised native sovereigns in other cities, were allowed independent rights within their own palace precincts. The British rule did not intrude there. Now and again half-clad slave girls and palace dependents, in terror for their lives, and wretches waled and trembling with recent chastisements, would escape the palace precincts and seek protection under the humane governments that had been planted in the surrounding cities. These spacious palaces were like little islands of the old despotisms, cruelties, and oppres-

sions bristling above the tide of constitutional right and privilege and liberty that was rising far and near. In God's empire there are no spots of organised diabolism of that sort, that are separated from the control, direction, and over-rule of providential law. Alas! it is only too easy to find signs of individual and collective resistance to God's law; but there are no indrawn spheres or reservations, dominated by pagan ignorance, from which His power, sovereignty, and prerogative are shut out. He rules where He is not worshipped, directs where He is not recognised, girds where He is not known. 2. In going beyond the circle of the elect nations to choose an instrument for the fulfilment of His counsels, God seems to remind us that the motive of His providential activity is altogether Divine. He uses the imperfectly taught Gentile, and puts upon him honour that might seem to belong to the Jew, to illustrate the sovereignty of His grace. 3. Partial ignorance of God may be an appointed condition for the test and development of faith. It is not only the virtuous heathen who is girded by an unrecognised Hand and made the agent in providential plans and purposes he cannot fathom. The distinction between Isaiah and Cyrus, between Cyrus and ourselves, is one of degree. On its intellectual side, at least, our religious knowledge is still imperfect, fragmentary, hesitating. God suffers it to be so, possibly that we may be the better disciplined in that humility which is the basis of faith. I have sometimes thought that so long as heathen darkness does not involve a gross and demoralising misrepresentation of God, but only a partial privation of knowledge, it offers the occasion for the exercise of a higher faith than that which is possible amidst the breaking twilights of Christian knowledge. The devout and pure-minded pagan, like Cyrus, who trusts his moral instincts without any adequate knowledge of their Divine origin, who with touching fidelity follows an unsyllabled vocation from heavens that have not yet opened themselves in revelation and definite testimony, who accepts an equipment from a Hand that has touched and guided him out of the darkness, is perhaps a more splendid example of faith than the man who manifests the same trust and loyalty and obedience in the midst of clearer intellectual conceptions of God. The puzzle of the long pagan centuries is not so painful and oppressive if we look at it from this standpoint. II. EXAMPLES OF THIS PROVIDENTIAL GIRDING BY AN UNKNOWN GOD will readily occur to us that seem to conform to the type represented by Cyrus. 1. If we think of the men, the tradition of whose teaching and example is intertwined with all that is highest and best in the life of the nations outside the range of Christendom, we shall see that these men have been girded for their moral conquests and guided to their ascendencies over their fellow-men by the same unrecognised Hand that guided and girded this elect Persian. It is, perhaps, impossible to recall the name of a great and permanently honoured teacher in the past history of India, China, Persia, Egypt, Greece or Rome, whose influence rested upon an immoral doctrine or a contradiction of conscience. There must have been such leaders in the insignificant races that relapsed into cannibalism, scalp-hunting, and animal debasement. But no such names appear in the histories of the great civilised empires. 2. We must not judge the issues of the social and political movements of the present and past times by the measure of Divine knowledge they exhibit. Some of these movements, however little they seem to recognise God, are empowered by His mysterious hand, and minister to the accomplishment of His secret purpose. The dark despotisms enthroned over the ancient world annealed men into stable communities. And there are doubtless providential issues of the highest value in the democratic movements that are agitating Europe to-day, however reluctant those movements may be to recognise God. 3. Does not the fact that the theology of the modern scientist is sometimes very dim and defective tempt us to deny the Divine authority of his vocation and to discredit the providential issue in the special work he is called to do? Some of the schools of research and experiment and invention to which we are most deeply indebted are indifferent and even hostile to the claims of religion. And yet God calls the man of science to his work, vouchsafes the needful equipment for success, and guides all the far-off issues to which that work may tend. 4. And all this is true for ourselves. The knowledge possessed by those of us who know God best is, after all, infinitesimal in amount and degree. It is nothing in comparison with what remains to be known. It seems we can scarcely be the true servants of God and doing Divine work unless we have broader and brighter and more penetrating views of God's nature. We are crushed by the inevitable secularisms of our life, and cannot believe that we are breathing the sacred atmosphere that encircles God's priests and kings. It seems, at times, as though God, and providence, and supernatural vocation, and the high sanctions under which we seek to bring ourselves, were dreams. We

are haunted by the thought that there is some subtle curse of ineradicable atheism cleaving to our inmost souls. In spite of the limit in our vision and the miserable failure in the spirit of our service, He is guiding us to beneficent conquests, and strengthening us to achieve holy emancipations, and fitting us for eternal honours. He was making us ready for service of some sort, when we knew far less about Him than we know to-day. And it is so still. And even after God seems to have been revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, how often do we find God becoming a hidden and an unknown God to us in His providential relations! At times it may seem rather as though some malignant demon were presiding over our lives, or at least sharing the sovereignty. But beyond the widest bound of our faith and knowledge there is providential guiding and girding and victory. And these words seem to suggest solemn comfort to us in view of the final conflict to which we shall all one day be brought. We shall enter the world to come as conquerors girded for our triumph by an unseen Hand. God's elect servants sometimes die in circumstances that make thoughts of God impossible. Perhaps they are snatched away by unexpected accident. They leave life in a struggle that petrifies thought and feeling. In that solemn hour of darkness and humiliation and mental inaptitude, God, unknown and unrecognised, girds for the victory still. Let us not forget that, though the girding is often in darkness, the motive of this girding in shadows is the inbringing of the perfect life. (*Ibid.*) *The light of God's love seen in pagan darkness*:—It is when the sun is in eclipse that the astronomer is able to see the fountains of glowing hydrogen that rise out of the inner substance of the sun and project their splendour for thousands and tens of thousands of miles beyond its surface. The strange and superb spectacle is visible only on the margin that lies between the incandescent body and the sphere of less luminous space that surrounds it. And so there are sublime illustrations of God's providential love and care that can be most nobly seen in contrast with pagan darkness. (*Ibid.*) *Pagan teachers enlightened by God*:—Confucius was the instrument for keeping alive in China a morality that was almost as pure as the morality of the decalogue. He stamped out all traces of Moloch worship. He can be quoted with commanding effect against many of the cruelties and superstitions of the present day. Gautama Buddha taught a morality equally pure, and so emphasised the demerit of sin as to make his teaching the best available basis that can be found for the evangelical doctrine of the atonement. The well-considered and dispassionate and reverent scepticism of Socrates acted as a solvent of Greek superstition, and prepared the way for the thoughtful Christianity of Alexandria. Mohammed gave form and force to a system which, in spite of its excesses and fanaticisms, has been a useful protest against idolatry, and has gathered together into a simple civilisation and worship tribes that would otherwise have been incurably degraded by fetich worship. Now, are we to suppose that it was without any supreme direction or control that these famous teachers conspired together to support these high theories of life and conduct? They were not prophets, because they had not the light which brought into view the mysterious Person who guided, equipped, and succoured them. But they were providential instruments, instruments that in spite of their defective discernments were plastic to God's controlling purpose. (*Ibid.*) *God's beneficent agency in the lives of those who ignore Him*:—"Man cannot exclude Me from his little universe; even though he deny My existence and denounce My claim—I am still there. I water the garden of the atheist, and bring his flowers to summer bloom and his fruits to autumnal glory. Men deny Me, curse Me, flee from Me—I am still round about them, and their life is more precious to Me than is their blasphemy detestable, and until the very last I will work for them and with them, and if they go to perdition it shall be through the very centre of My heart's tenderest grace." "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A God-girded life*:—Who is that boy sitting on the steps there? He has a hat on that was made for any head but his own; and his coat, who made it? His mother, very likely—rough spun, not too well fitting. What is he waiting for? To get the job of sweeping the steps he sits on? Perhaps. Years pass by, and a portly man comes down those steps. Broad his face, a great round shining blessing, kindness in his eye, power in the uplifting of his hand. Who is he? That is the boy, grown now fully, physically, intellectually and socially. The boy and the man are both Horace Greeley, an editorial prince, a man whose writings no one among his countrymen can afford to decline to read. "I girded thee, I brought thee to those steps, I set thee down upon them, I appointed an angel to watch thee all the time: it was My way of nursing and caring for thee, and training thee." He bringeth the blind by a way that they know not. (*Ibid.*) *God in*

national life:—Nations are not cards, with which politicians play at gambling: they may think they do, they may seem to do so, but the Lord reigneth. (*Ibid.*) *The unknown influence of God*:—Cyrus is now proved to have been a polytheist. Yet even he was girded by the unknown God of heaven and earth. Let us consider this unknown influence of God. I. IT SPRINGS FROM THE ALMIGHTY POWER OF GOD. God is not merely a passive object of worship. He exerts active influence. He did not only work in the past in creating the world. He is a living, active God now. Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto." Perhaps the poorest definition of God ever framed is that of "A power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." Still, even this meagre description of Divinity recognises the fact of an active Divine influence. God's power is not limited by our confession of it, nor by our willingness to submit to it. It inspired the eye of the Greek artist and the tongue of the Greek orator as truly as those of a Christian Chrysostom and Fra Angelico. II. IT IS DIRECTED BY THE INFINITE GOODNESS OF GOD. We circumscribe this goodness to a pale of grace and a day of grace; but it overflows our boundaries and breaks out, free as the air and broad as the sunlight. God does not wait to be called. He is the first to awaken His slumbering children. God thinks of the heathen, and gives strength to those who know Him not. Then no doubt if a Chinese Mandarin pronounces a just sentence, or a Hindu Pundit utters a true thought, or an African chief vindicates the rights of an oppressed tribe, the goodness of these heathen men is an outcome of God's goodness to them. Let us take heart: there is more grace in the world than we know of. III. IT AIMS AT THE EXECUTION OF THE WILL OF GOD. Cyrus is called God's shepherd (chap. xliv. 28). So even Nebuchadnezzar, a man of a very different character, is called by God "My servant" (Jer. xliii. 10). 1. Some serve God when they think to oppose Him. As the gale that seems to be tearing the ship to pieces may be driving her the faster to her haven, so Satan, in Job, aiming at opposition to the right, occasioned the most glorious vindication of it. Persecutors often help the cause they hate. 2. Many, like Cyrus, serve God unconsciously. As the corn ministers to our sustenance unwittingly, and as science reveals the glory of God, even when the naturalists who pursue it are agnostics. Lessons—(1) The unknown influence of God should lead to our knowing God. We have not to search the heavens for the unseen God. He is nigh us. Our own experience and the blessings of our own life should open our eyes to the goodness of God. (2) This influence, once recognised, should lead us to trust God. If God girded Cyrus the heathen, will He not gird Israel His people? (3) This influence should warn us against neglecting the recognition of God. We cannot escape from God. To do so would be our own undoing. But the hand which girds can ungird! (4) This influence should prompt us to greater zeal in mission work. For God claims the heathen by His present influence on them. He has begun the work and will help His servants in it. It is sad that millions should be left in ignorance of the hand that girds them. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Vers. 6-13. **I am the Lord, and there is none else.**—*The beneficent sovereignty of God*:—The key-thought to all the intricacies of the whole of this passage is that God is the absolute Author of all that exists and the infinite Supreme Ruler of all events; and the implied, though not expressed inference from this claim is, that He is to be absolutely trusted in the matter and manner of Israel's redemption from Babylon. In the 7th verse, the attitude which the prophet makes the Almighty assume is most absolute. Why summon Cyrus, a heathen prince? Why not one of their own nation, a prince of their own people? The answer to this implied objection is contained in verses 9, 10, 11. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker," &c. Will Israel be more wise than God who made him and the world and rules them in His own manner? The question in the 11th verse means, "Will ye take the disposition of things out of My hands, and direct Me how I am to deal with My own chosen people?" The 12th and 13th verses are intended to calm the anxieties of the exiles in reference to Cyrus. He who created all things had also raised up Cyrus, whose victorious career had awakened the fears of the exiles; but Jehovah had in righteousness summoned him to the work, and this was to be the guarantee that Cyrus would build up Jerusalem again, and set the captives free, and that without redemption of money. This whole passage may have its drift and meaning summed up in a single sentence. It is an appeal of God to His people to leave the whole management of their redemption in His hands, and to let His power, wisdom, and righteousness reassure their minds under any difficulties or fears that may trouble them. (*C. Short, M.A.*)

Ver. 7. **I form the light, and create darkness.**—*Evil in the Old Testament*:—There is no thought in the Old Testament of reducing all evil, moral and physical, to a single principle. Moral evil proceeds from the will of man, physical evil from the will of God, who sends it as the punishment of sin. The expression "create evil" implies nothing more than that. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Evil and God*:—Certainly evil as an act is not God's immediate work, but the possibility of evil is, its self-punishment, and therefore the sense of guilt and the evil of punishment in the broadest sense. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *God's relation to evil*:—Soften it down as we will, it is a tremendous claim, a claim which plunges our thoughts into impenetrable mysteries, and suggests problems we cannot solve. And yet, it must also be admitted, that it meets and satisfies the cravings both of intellect and heart as no easier, no dualistic, theory does or can do. The universe is so obviously one that the intellect demands unity, and will be satisfied with nothing short of one Sovereign Lord, one Supreme Governor of the universe. And how can our hearts be at rest until we know and are sure that God rules over the kingdom of darkness as well as in the kingdom of light; that the evils which befall us are under His control no less than the blessings which enrich and gladden us; that wherever we wander, and through whatever sorrowful changes we pass, we are never for a single moment out of His hand? These mysteries will never become credible to us except as the mysteries of Energy, Life, Thought become credible to us, by patient and steadfast mental toil. On these terms, though on no other, the mystery here announced by Isaiah—that darkness as well as light, evil as well as good, are under the control of God, and must therefore be consistent both with His power and His goodness—will, I believe, become credible to us. And in considering this question it will be well for us to determine, first of all, what, and how much, of the evil that exists we ourselves can honestly attribute immediately to God our Maker. 1. For, obviously, much of the evil within and around us is of our own making. 2. Much has also been of our neighbours' making. We inherited, with much that was good, some evil bias from our fathers. We have often had to breathe an atmosphere charged with moral infections which sprang from the corrupt habits of the world around us. Our education was not good, or was not wholly good and wise. We have had to live and trade, to work and play, with men whose influence on us, if often beneficial, has also been often injurious. The laws, maxims, customs of the little world in which we have moved have done much to blunt and lower our moral tone, to encourage us in self-seeking or self-indulgence, to countenance us in yielding to our baser passions and desires. As we look back and think of all that we have lost and suffered, it is probable that we attribute far more of the evils which have fallen on us to men than to God. 3. Much that seems evil to us is not really evil, or is not necessarily evil, or is not altogether evil. Cyrus and his Persians had such evils as noxious plants and animals, excessive heat and cold, famine, drought, earthquake, storms, disease, and sudden death in their minds mainly when they spoke of the works of Ahriman, the eternal and malignant antagonist of God. But, as we know, these apparent ills are not necessarily ills at all, or they are the products of causes which work for good on the whole, or they carry with them compensations so large that the world would be the poorer for their loss. To take but a few illustrations. The storms, that wreck a few ships and destroy a few lives, clear and revivify the air of a whole continent, and carry new health to the millions in populous cities pent. The constant struggle for existence among plants and animals is a necessary condition of the evolution of their higher and more perfect species. To variations of heat and cold, and even to excessive variations, we owe the immense variety of the climates and conditions under which we live; and to these variations of climate the immense variety and abundance of the harvests by which the world is fed. Is adversity an evil? It is to the struggle with adversity that we owe many of our highest virtues. And as we are driven to toil by the sting of want, and trained to courage by the assaults of adversity, so also we are moved to thought by the perplexities of life, and to trust and patience by its sorrows and losses and cares. We should not realise how much of good there is in our lives if the current of our days were never vexed by ill winds. (*S. Cox, D.D.*) *Evil: its origin, function, and end*:—There is a hypothesis, a theory of the origin, and function, and end of evil suggested by Scripture which seems an eminently reasonable one; a theory which confirms the claim of God to be the Creator and Lord of evil, and disposes of that dualistic hypothesis which recognises two rival and opposed Powers at work in the world around us and in the mind of man. 1. When we contemplate the universe of which we form part, the first impression made on us is of its immense

variety; but, as we continue to study it, the final and deepest impression it makes upon us is that, under this immense and beautiful variety, there lies an all-pervading unity. As it is with us, so it has been with the race at large. At first men were so profoundly impressed by the variety of the universe that they split it up into endless provinces, assigned to each its ruling spirit, and worshipped gods of heaven and of earth, gods of mountains and plains, of sea and land, of air and water, of rivers and springs, of fields and woods, trees and flowers, of hearth and home, of the individual, the clan, the nation, the empire. Yet even then there hung in the dark background of their thoughts some conviction of the underlying unity of the universe, as was proved by their conception of an inscrutable Destiny or Fate, to which gods and men were alike subject, and by which all the ages of time were controlled. This conviction grew and deepened as the world went spinning down the grooves of change, until now Science herself admits that, by a thousand different paths of investigation and thought, it is led to the conclusion that, if there be a God at all, there can be but one God; that, if the universe had a Maker, it could have had but one Maker; that if human life is under rule, there can be but one ruler over all. There may be one God,—that to Science is still an open question; but there cannot be more than one,—that question is closed, and Science herself stands to guard the way to it as with a sword in her hand. But if there be only one Supreme Lord, there cannot, of course, be any rival Power to His, any Power that introduces alien forces or works by other laws. There may be subordinate powers; and at times these may seem to oppose Him, to contend against Him. But one Power or Will is supreme; for, as the very word itself suggests, the universe is an unity,—a vast complex of many forces perhaps and many laws, but still a single and organised whole. In reverting to the Persian hypothesis of two antagonistic Powers, therefore, Mill sinned against the most settled conclusion of modern thought. Now, if we either believe in one supreme Creator and Lord, or, following Mill's advice, lean to that conclusion as hard as we can, our next step is to conceive, as best we may, what this great first Cause, this creative and ruling Power, is like. Accordingly, we look around us to find that which is highest in the universe, sure that in that which is highest we shall find that which most resembles the Most High. And in the whole visible creation we find nothing so high as man, no force of so Divine a quality and temper as the will of man, when once that will is guided by wisdom and impelled by love. To him alone of all visible creatures is the strange power accorded of consciously and intentionally arresting or modifying the action of the great physical forces, of conquering Nature by obeying her, of changing her course by a skilful application of her own laws. So that, even though the Bible did not assure us that man was made in the image of God, reason would compel us to conclude that, since the Creator of all things must include in Himself all the forces displayed in the work of His hands, and since we must see most of Him in the highest of His works, we must see most of Him in man, and in that which is highest in man,—namely, thought, will, affection. Reason has reached this conclusion in that ancient oracle: "Would you know God? Look within." 2. Now we are prepared to take our next step, and ask: How evil came to be? and how, if God is responsible for it, we can reconcile it both with His perfect goodness and His perfect power? (1) For the origin of evil we must go back to the creation of all things, and be content to use words which, though quite inadequate to the subject, may nevertheless convey true impressions of it. If the conception of God we have just framed be a true one, then there must have been a time when the Great Creative Spirit dwelt alone. And in that Divine solitude the question arose whether a creation, an universe, should be called into being, and of what kind it should be. Or, perhaps, we may rather say, that, just as the intelligent and creative spirit of man must work and act, so the creative Spirit of God urged Him to commence "the works of His hands." However we may conceive or phrase it, let us suppose the physical universe determined upon as the stage on which active intelligences were to play their part; and then ask yourselves what is implied in the very nature of active intelligent creatures such as we are, and whether anything less than such creatures could satisfy the Maker and Lord of all. Would you have God surround Himself with a merely inanimate world, or tenant that world with mere automata, mere puppets, with no will of their own, capable, indeed, of reflecting His own glory back on Him, but incapable of a voluntary affection, a spontaneous and unforced obedience? Why, even you yourselves cannot gain full scope for your powers until you are surrounded, or surround yourselves, with beings capable of loving you freely, and obeying you with a cheerful and unforced accord, beings whose wills

are their own and who yet make them yours. How much less, then, can you imagine that God should be content with a purely mechanical obedience, with anything short of a voluntary obedience and affection? But if you admit so much as this, consider, next, what is implied in the very nature of creatures such as these. If free to think truly, must they not be free to think untruly? if free to love, must they not be free not to love? if free to obey, must they not be free to disobey? The very creation of beings in themselves good involves the tremendous risk of their becoming evil. Nay, if we consider the matter a little more closely we shall find that there was more to be confronted than the mere risk of the introduction of evil. To me it seems a dead certainty, a certainty which must have been foreseen and provided for in the eternal counsels of the Almighty, that in the lapse of ages, with a vast hierarchy of creatures possessed of freewill, some among them would assert and prove their freedom by disobedience. How else could man, for instance, assure himself that he was free, that his will was in very deed his own? Are we not impatient of any law even by which we are bound, or suspect that we are bound, however good the law may be in itself? Free creatures, again, creatures with intelligence, will, passion, are active creatures: and there is something, as all observers are agreed, in the very nature of activity which blunts and weakens our sense of inferiority, dependence, accountability. The Bible affirms that what reason might have anticipated actually took place. It tells us that both in heaven and on earth the creatures God had made did thus fall away from Him, doing their own will instead of His, taking their own course instead of the course marked out and hedged in for them by His pure and kindly laws. And it moreover asserts, in full accordance with the teachings of philosophy and science, that, by their disobedience to the laws of their being and happiness, they jarred themselves into a false and sinister relation to the material universe; that, by introducing moral evil into the creation, they exposed themselves to those physical ills from which we suffer to this day. It must be obvious to every reflective mind that if the whole physical universe was created by the Word of God, if it is animated by His Spirit and ruled by His will, then as many as disobey that high will must put themselves out of harmony with all that obey it, must find the very forces which once worked for them turned against them. They are at war with the will which pervades and controls the universe: how, then, can the universe be at peace with them? If, then, we now repeat the question: In what sense may we reverently attribute evil to God? in what sense can we concede His claim to be responsible for evil as well as for good? our reply must be that, in creating beings capable of loving and serving Him of their own choice, He created the possibility of evil, ran the risk of its existence, and even knew beforehand that it would certainly enter in and mar the work of His hands. (2) How, then, can we justify evil? how can we reconcile it at once with His perfect goodness and unbounded power? On our hypothesis we reconcile it with His power by the plain and obvious argument that even Omnipotence cannot at once create freewill and not create it; that, when once He has created it, even the Almighty cannot interfere with it without destroying it. But if we would reconcile the existence of evil with the goodness of God—and this is by far the more difficult achievement—we must take the whole theory of human life and destiny taught by the Bible, and not merely a part of it. As I read it, then, the Bible teaches what human reason had conjectured and hoped apart from the Bible,—that the lines of human life and destiny are to be produced beyond the grave, and wrought out to their final result in other worlds than this. (*Ibid.*) *God's love in relation to evil*:—The Bible goes on to teach us that, in His pity, the great Father of our spirits came down to us His sinful children, virtually saying to us: "I might much more reasonably attribute the evils from which you suffer to you than you to Me; for you owe them to your disobedience and self-will. But, see, I freely take them all on Myself. I claim to be responsible for them all. And since you cannot drive it away, I take away the sin of the world by a sacrifice so great and so far-reaching, by an atonement so potent, so Divine, that you can but apprehend it afar off, and must not hope to fathom its full virtue and extent. To brace you for your daily strife with evil, I foretell a final and complete victory over it; I promise you that in the end I will sweep the evil that harasses and afflicts you clean out of the universe it has marred and defiled. And, meantime, it shall have no power to hurt or harm you if you will but put your trust in Me. All that is painful in it, all the sting of it, I take on Myself. For you, if you will but meet it wisely and trustfully, it shall be nothing but a helpful discipline, a training in vigour, in holiness, in charity." (*Ibid.*) *Pain and death co-existent with animal life*:—There is the strongest indirect evidence,

and not a little direct, that predacious animals have existed from a very early period in the world's history. The struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest mean the suffering and the extinction of the weaker. Read the great stone book of nature, that truth is sculptured deep in its pages in no illegible hieroglyphics. Pain and death, then, if evils, must have been present in the world from the date when organic life, or at any rate animal life, began. The inorganic world being as it is, pain seems to be correlative with sensation, and death is but the end of each individual paragraph in the history; and if this came by either injury or violence, we cannot believe it at any rate to have been altogether painless. Nay, we may go further, and assert that unless we suppose the laws of Nature to have been wholly different from those which now prevail, we cannot understand how organised beings could live without at any rate occasional sensations of discomfort; they must have felt extremes of heat and cold; they must have known hunger and thirst; and what are these but minor degrees of pain? Perfection through suffering is a more general law of nature than we commonly think. At the same time, I fully believe that to the majority of living creatures life brings far more pleasure than pain; indeed, I think there is much reason to suppose that the acuteness with which the latter is felt, and the duration of its memory, is proportional to its possible disciplinary effect. (*T. G. Bonney, D.Sc., LL.D.*) *Evil* :—A vast moral gulf is fixed between what are popularly held to be evils, things which have no deleterious effect on the spirit life, and those which are called evils in revelation; the things which are fatal ultimately to the spirit life. (*Ibid.*) *The real evils* :—The sins and wickedness of the world are the real evils, and it is to these that the works of the spirit are opposed. But these—sensuality, lust, selfishness, cruelty, injustice, oppression—whence are they? what are they? St. Paul calls these the works of the flesh, and the more we ponder his words the more far-reaching we shall usually find them. When we investigate these evils, we can trace them back till we find they originate in yielding to promptings of the nature which we have in common with the animal kingdom. A member of this does what the organism of sensation demands, and we do not designate the action as evil unless, either in earnest or in figurative speech, we attribute to the creature some kind of moral consciousness, to which the action is repugnant. The law of the animal would appear to be "gratify the various desires of the body." The only limitation is "abstain from excess," which seems more easily observed in its case perhaps because there is so little opportunity of revolt against laws of a straiter character. Man, as sharing the animal nature, is liable to a greater or less degree to each animal impulse, but as possessing another and a higher nature he is called upon to control these impulses, and if he do not obey this call, if he prefer to follow the lower nature, he fails to accomplish the purpose and attain the goal set before him, and thus his deeds are evil, his life is sinful. (*Ibid.*) *Evil in relation to good* :—In an order of things where choice exists and where there is a scheme of progress, evil is as inevitable an antithesis to good as a shadow is to light, because each time that the person either remains inactive where he should have obeyed the call of the higher law, or where, if two definite impulses are in conflict, he follows the lower, he does an evil act. Evil, then, in the present state of things is as necessary a correlative to good as decay is to growth, for good is obedience to the promptings of the spirit life, and evil is the refusal to submit to this, and consequent yielding to the animal. This view appears to me to be distinctly maintained by St. Paul in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, a passage universally regarded as very difficult, but one which I think becomes comparatively clear when considered in this light. In it the apostle depicts the conflict between the animal life and the spirit life. (*Ibid.*) *Evil*, in this world, lies not so much in the deed as in the doer. (*Ibid.*) *The origin and prevalence of evil* :—I. THE QUANTITY OF EXISTING EVIL IS NOT SO GREAT AS, AT FIRST VIEW, IT MAY APPEAR TO BE. 1. By a wise appointment of Providence, scenes of distress are made to strike our minds more forcibly, and to awaken a far livelier fellow-feeling in our breasts than any species of felicity which we witness; and for this obvious reason, that distress stands in need of that active consolation and relief which our compassion will naturally prompt, while happiness is more independent of sympathy. Add to this, that misery, in consequence of the same occasion for the participation of social natures in its feelings, is much more clamorous, and therefore more noticed, than satisfaction. And the sum of evil has been still further exaggerated by writers who were aware that the tale of woe would find a chord more responsive to it in the human heart, than any which vibrates in unison with the voice of joy; as well as by many mistaken devotees, who have esteemed a gloomy

discontent with the present life as essential to piety. 2. To any calm and unprejudiced observer, however, the latent, but multiplied, satisfactions of mankind will not fail to discover themselves: and he will learn to look up with confidence to that all-gracious Being, who, although He suffers, for wise ends, the existence of darkness and evil, creates more of light than of darkness, and more of peace than of evil. To nearly all natural evils, indeed, a compensation may be discovered. After all, however, it cannot be denied that the world contains much real distress. II. ITS ORIGIN. Whatever evil afflicts the human race, is all, in one way or other, of their own procuring. God "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." When He first called the human race into existence, He designed them to be happy, and He made them so. "By one man's disobedience sin came into the world," and misery and death by sin. With respect to every species of evil, man may be pronounced the author of his own tribulation. III. By the gracious interference of providence, IT TENDS TO A HAPPY ISSUE; to an issue which, to say the least of it, counterbalances the previous evil. Let us learn to improve our confidence in the Divine goodness; to redress, as far as lies within our capacity, the multiform evils that exist around us; and to convert to wise and beneficial purposes such of these evils as affect ourselves. (*J. Grant, M.A.*) *The mystery of evil*:—In the hour of pain, sickness, sorrow, death, our anguished nerves and bleeding hearts make us cry out, "Why should we be smitten? Whose hand has smitten us?" It is natural, as many of the heathen creeds show, to attribute our suffering to some wrathful or malignant power. Many of our neighbours so attribute it, either to an angry God, or to a malicious devil. The Bible unhesitatingly attributes it to God, but is careful to remind us that "the Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." There are two points, a right view of which is essential to our getting at the truth of the matter. 1. Death itself is not an evil. Simply because it is as common and as natural to us as sleep, death is no more evil in itself than sleep. Continual birth makes continual death necessary, if there is to be any such thing as equal opportunities in the world. And what is death but a birth into another life? Even in the case of the wicked, whom it introduces to evil beyond, death is not in itself an evil, any more than the door is evil through which any wrong-doer passes to trial or to imprisonment. Dying is simply going through the door between two worlds. 2. Suffering is evil, but is worked by goodness to good ends. But, we ask, couldn't the good ends have been accomplished without the evil of suffering? Well, put the question home. Could you have been made free from faults and follies without suffering? Experience, both of ourselves and others, answers, No. What the Bible affirms, in a certain point, of Jesus, must be much more broadly affirmed of every man—"perfect through suffering" only. The only conceivable way of dispensing with suffering is to dispense with imperfection. But a creation in which there is nothing imperfect, but everything is finished, is inconceivable. We cannot conceive what that state of things would be, in which there was not only no infancy and childhood, but no growth of anything; nothing to learn, because everything is known; and nothing to do, because everything is done. But it is staggering to think of the amount of suffering that this involves. Perhaps we may think that it might have been largely prevented, if God had provided better instruction, had had guide-boards set up to show the right way, and thorn-hedges to close up wrong ways. Well, has He not done so? Have we never known people to take the wrong way in spite of wise counsel, and to take it again and again in spite of bitter experience? What we have to admit, then, is that suffering, though evil in itself, is a means to good, and is an instrument in the hands of goodness. Our difficulty is, that while we see this to be true to a certain extent, we do not see it in every case. Nevertheless, it appears true, as far as we are able to trace the connection of cause and effect. What is the most reasonable conclusion from that? Simply this, that we should see the same if we were able to see further. The great mystery of the evil in God's world requires for its solution a right answer to the supreme question, What is it that we are to be intent on as our first aim? Not happiness, surely. Happiness for the imperfect means content with imperfection. Perfection, rather than happiness, this is first; in order to this, suffering; then, in proportion to the perfection attained thereby, resulting blessedness. Nor is this a mere opinion. History, observation, and experience point that way. It was in the intuition of this great truth that one appointed to more hardship than is common to the lot of man bore his testimony to the ages thus: "Our light affliction, which is for the moment," &c. (*J. M. Whiton.*) *Good out of evil*:—Here the familiar story of the Pilgrim Fathers of New England is in point. They arrived

on the American coast in the most unseasonable time, at the setting in of winter. Their exposures and hardships consequently brought on a fatal sickness. Before their first corn was planted half of them had been buried. Seldom has a more pathetic tale been told than that of these poor, pious exiles—

A screen of leafless branches
Betwixt them and the blast.

But had it better not have been so? Is heroism worth so little that there had better be no occasion made for it by the presence of great evils calling out all the strength of spirit that man is capable of? Who can tell how much that terrible suffering, met with such loftiness of spirit, has been worth to the world, in kindling the same unquenchable fire of heroism in multitudes of admiring beholders? (*Ibid.*) *Man and sin; the problem of moral evil* (with 1 John iii. 4, R.V.):—The proper order in which to investigate our experience of the subject is to begin with the existence of moral evil, and from that standing-ground look out upon the larger question of cosmical evil. I. THE PRESENCE OF MORAL EVIL IN HUMAN NATURE—THE SENSE OF SIN. By far the greatest amount of the suffering of life is owing to the depravity of human nature. If men were good and kind there would be little left to mourn over. Speaking generally, we may say that human experience of this great fact runs from the crude and selfish perception of the faults of other people up to the self-humiliation of the saint in whom the sense of sin is strongly developed. To take the lower ground first—there are some who are smarting under a sense of injury. It may be that life is altogether sadder than it once was, because of the heart-breaking conduct of some from whom a very different course of action might have been expected. To such as these the fact that human nature is vitiated, and that the world is made wretched in consequence, needs no complete demonstration. Or again, there may be some who remember with pain and regret certain of their own mistakes which have brought evil results in their train. Self-reproach, however, does not put things right again. It is not only that the mistakes are beyond recall, but that the character itself is intractable. No man who is true to himself can escape the necessity of self-blame. This self-blame may be perfunctory and imperfect, or it may be radical and strong. It may be only a form of self-pity, or it may be a deep experience of guilt. Let me state a few things about this sense of guilt. In the first place, we may recognise that it is not universal, though in some form or other it is one of the most general of experiences. Some of the great religions in the world are deficient in it: Confucianism. Confucius, like so many of the world's prophets, died a disappointed man. He had aimed at something higher than the nature of his countrymen was prepared for. He had to put up with opposition, slander, persecution, and poverty. We might think that the problem of human sinfulness would have suggested itself to him, but we have no such indication in his teachings. In these there is an utter absence of any cognisance of sin as such. What is true of this religion is true of others. Their recognition of faultiness is not a recognition of sinfulness. Even in our own day, and amongst our circle of acquaintance, there are, no doubt, some who are without the sense of sin, and who evince no consciousness of the need of forgiveness. Men may be aware in a general way that things are not right in their own dispositions or in those of their fellows, and yet be strangers to the mood of contrition. Censoriousness and the sense of sin do not usually go together. We come to another and higher order of experience when we enter the ranks of those in whom perception of personal unworthiness is vivid. Especially has this been the case where the idea of a righteous God has been powerfully presented. It is within the circle of Christianity, however, that this conviction has been quickened and deepened to the greatest degree. It has been held that the sense of sin is a morbid development of religious life. We are not better, but worse, than we think we are. The mood of contrition is a note of awakening nobility. An accompaniment of the sense of sin is the depressing discovery of our helplessness to escape it. To conclude this first point, then, we may say that we are sadly aware of the presence of moral evil in human nature, and we are also aware that it "ought not to be." II. ATTEMPTS TO ACCOUNT FOR THE ORIGIN OF MORAL EVIL. That men should have been exercised in their minds about the presence of moral evil in the world is not to be wondered at, and it is instructive to notice some of the attempts that have been made to account for it. In stating certain of the theories which have been projected to explain human depravity, we may take them in the order of their relative importance. 1. Let us note that sin has often been held to be a delusion, that it is simply a form of mental experience, and no more real than a

torturing dream. Culpability is only a fancy; no one is to blame for anything; and if the soul is to persist, and self-consciousness be continued in a higher state, man will then discover that all his agony and tears and self-reproach had no sterner cause than a little child's dread of the dark. This explanation we can soon dismiss. Self-blame is no fancy. Sin is not something negative, it is positive—an enemy that we have to fight. 2. Further, right through human history a tendency is observable to account for the presence of moral evil by a dualistic theory of existence. Darkness has been represented as the foe of light, matter of spirit, and Satan of God. The variations of these dualistic theories are manifold. Platonists, Gnostics, Manichæans are a great family who regarded matter as being in some degree independent of God, and imperfectly under His control. All these movements had something in common, and that something was the tendency to place matter in opposition to spirit, and regard evil as resident in matter. Thoroughgoing belief in such positions has, as a rule, run into the two extremes of asceticism and license. Although Plato's dualism was a very different thing from the Gnostic heresies, the latter really sprang from it. It has sometimes been thought that Scripture lends some countenance to the theory here indicated. "The world," for instance, is presented as antithetic to "the kingdom," and "the flesh" as antithetic to "the spirit." This is undoubtedly the case, but we must be warned against thinking that the New Testament writings should be construed to mean that evil has its seat in the flesh, and that the spirit only needs the liberation of death in order to be holy at a bound. 3. Positivism, and all allied modes of belief, effect a practical, though not theoretical, division of the universe. Humanity and the moral order are represented as an entity apart from the hard background of nature, and we are bidden to do our best to further the advance of everything that makes for human good without seeking sanctions in nature or the supernatural. It is curious to note that the advocates of this principle are usually the strongest in the assertion that the universe is one and indivisible. One power is observed to be at work within it, and not two powers pitted against each other. 4. This brings us to the consideration of the theory, which is Christian as well as non-Christian, that in the universe we have a personal dualism represented in the familiar names, God and Satan. We need not deny the existence of a personal captain of the host of evil, but we are not prepared to admit that there is room in the universe for a power whom God cannot overthrow. This is a cursory summary of theories which have occupied the attention of men from age to age. We may say of them all—(1) They fail in that they limit the omnipotence of Deity. (2) They fail in that they deny human responsibility. (3) The truth common to all these theories appears to be, that good is only known by the background of evil, righteousness only achieved in opposition to unrighteousness. 5. Allied with, but independent of, the foregoing, is the Christian doctrine of the fall. It is remarkable that this doctrine is also extra-Christian. It has a place, for instance, in the old Teutonic mythology. The doctrine is also pre-Christian. It has a place in the Old Testament, though not a large place. It is within the field of Christianity, however, that the theory of a fall of the race from original purity has had its greatest vogue. About this Prof. Orr says: "I do not enter into the question of how we are to interpret Gen. iii.—whether as history or allegory or myth, or, most probable of all, as old tradition clothed in Oriental allegorical dress; but the truth embodied in that narrative, namely, the fall of man from an original state of purity, I take to be vital to the Christian view." Upon this point, however, science is in direct conflict with received theology, and in recent years the attempt to reconcile the doctrine of the fall with the accepted theory of evolution has been felt as a considerable difficulty. The way in which it has been sought to solve that difficulty may be illustrated from a sermon preached by a friend of my own. "The fact of the fall is simply in effect the statement of these biological facts in the spiritual region. It is that there came, at the beginning of human history, when man was physically complete, and had reached a stable equilibrium, where his moral and spiritual development was to begin,—there came, how we do not know, a backward step, and that backward step has been perpetuated in the history of the race because of the scientific fact of the solidarity of the race. What St. Paul would call the fall of man is simply the statement of a spiritual fact which has its precise analogy in the very doctrine of evolution that is supposed to contradict it." The same preacher goes on to say that through the entrance of sin into the world, by man's fault and in opposition to the purpose of God, there has come into the world, not the fact of death, for death was here before, but the horror of it of which humanity is conscious, and that the misery of humanity has only been

alleviated by second creation, as it were—the entrance of Christ into the world and the proclamation of the good news of redemption. To these statements the one sweeping objection may be taken that if they presume the historicity of the story of Genesis and the theory of a fall in time, through man's own fault and against the intention of God, they are in direct contradiction to the judgings of modern science, and no hypothesis about "a backward step" or "a new creation" can get over the difficulty. Our theology must be in harmony with the rest of our knowledge. We are on safer ground if we appeal once more to experience, and say that the fall ought not to be regarded as an historical event, but a psychological fact. In this connection we may observe that Jesus never says a word about an historical fall of the race. The parable of the Prodigal Son has been quoted as the analogue of the story in Genesis, but, on the face of it, it is meant to be interpreted psychologically rather than historically. In addition to this we must say that the theory of a fall in time is surrounded by other and graver difficulties, which lead us to a view of the character of God inconsistent with our Lord's revelation of the nature of the Father. That God should have made man so that he was not only liable but certain to fall, and should then have visited the whole race with disastrous consequences, is altogether incomprehensible. But, further, it is unthinkable that unbiassed human nature would ever voluntarily choose evil. Speaking in all reverence, we may say that as it is unthinkable that God should fall, so is it unthinkable that man should fall, unless he were so made as to desire evil without knowing good. To sum up this point, therefore, we may say that the presence of moral evil cannot be accounted for either as a delusion, or by a dualistic theory of the universe, or even by a fall in time. The explanation must be sought elsewhere. III. THE HYPOTHESIS THAT THE ORIGIN OF MORAL EVIL IS IN GOD. We come, then, to the consideration of a theory which, like the foregoing, is both Christian and non-Christian, namely, that moral evil has its origin in the good purpose of God. This has been held by some of the greatest of the teachers of the Christian Church, from Augustine to the Reformation Fathers. Even later Roman Catholic theology has lingered around it in the song, "*O felix culpa*," "which by so great a fall has secured a greater redemption." Evil is an experience necessary for the sake of good, and it must disappear when its work is done. For what is good? No man knows save by the struggle to realise it. Every man is conscious not only of the desire to choose evil, but of the obligation to choose good. To sin is to follow the lower in presence of the higher; it is yielding to that which is easy in opposition to that which is right. If evil within the disposition supplies the tendency, sin is in yielding to that tendency. This relieves no man of moral responsibility. Sin is real, and we are to blame for it, but we are not qualified to judge one another. God, and God only, can disentangle the threads of human motive, and estimate the amount of individual culpability. Without Christ there would be but a feeble light on this world problem. From what we know of Him we can look forward and upward. Primordial evil is the appointment of our God and Father, who shares in every experience of His children. Salvation is escape from sin; atonement escape from guilt; God provides both. There is no longer room for despair, but only for solemn gladness. "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c. (*R. J. Campbell, M.A.*) *The Divine use of pain* (Hospital Sunday):—I. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN RELATION TO DISEASE AND PAIN. What the apostle wrote in the spirit of prophecy is confirmed by the page of history. "Of Him, and to Him, and through Him are all things; to whom be glory for ever." We do not find it difficult to assent to this doctrine when all things go well with us. It is when He says: "I create darkness, I create evil," that we feel it strange and shrink back from a full hearty assent. It has been suggested that this truth of the text was given as a correction of the old Eastern myth of two gods, one opposed to the other, and creating evil in opposition to the work of the good god. The modern form of this theory, and one which prevails in certain circles of Christian people, is that all disease and physical evil is by the work and machination of Satan. This is equally contrary to the teaching of the text and the whole of Scripture. These things perplex our thoughts and try our faith; but it only increases the perplexity and trial to attribute them to Satan. We are still in God's hand. II. THE USE THESE THINGS SERVE IN THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. The question of the use which anything serves, which God in His providence sends or permits, must ever be asked with the humble consciousness that the thing may be too deep for us to understand. Yet God does not leave us without some knowledge of His will, and of the use which He makes of this suffering and pain. 1. For one thing is clear, pain and disease bade men to respect Divine law. 2. This evil

often leads to the fuller manifestation of His power. When the disciples asked concerning one born blind, "Who did sin, this man or his parents?" our Lord replies that the man had the misfortune "that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Not merely or chiefly the opening of the bodily eye, but the works of God to which our Lord referred were those changes and that spiritual enlightenment which came to the man through intercourse with Christ. So that the ignorant and poor blind beggar saw what the well-instructed and self-righteous Pharisee did not see, and could answer calmly the cavils of Christ's opponents, and endure persecution for His sake. These works of God have often been manifested through the instrumentality of fiery pain and disease. Days of sickness have been days when the wandering soul has heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, and returned from its wanderings, and has learned to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." 3. Sometimes, also, pain and disease have been in God's hand a protection against sin. The curb which physical weakness puts upon us may be the very check that is needed to keep us within the bounds of true moderation, beyond which the path is strewn thick with temptations frequent and great, so that escape were almost impossible. 4. In the same way these things are essential in the purifying process which is being now carried on. 5. Beside all this, the pain and sorrow which sometimes nearly overwhelm us, call out sympathy and compassion which unite men in this closest of bonds. III. OUR DUTY in view of these truths. 1. There ought to be in connection with these things the distinct recognition of His hand, which should extend to the whole circumstances of the case. It is only a partial and untrue view that regards God's hand in permitting suffering, and refuses to acknowledge His goodness in the alleviations and remedies which He provides, and the medical skill with which He endows men. 2. But most of all we need to cultivate tender sympathy for those who suffer, and as far as may be to help them by kindly patient service. (*W. Page, B.A.*) *Light and darkness in the universe*:—Interwoven with the texture of the revelation there is an element of mystery to prove and humble and solemnise. I shall not soon forget a visit I once paid in the dead of night to the Colosseum. The moon was just rising behind the gigantic walls. Its light was almost golden in depth and richness. The towering battlements cast shadows dense as a thundercloud. The vast circle of masonry was all but filled with gloom and darkness. By and by the light of the rising moon fell in quivering bars through the rents in the walls and the doorways in the galleries. At last the whole place looked like a colossal wheel with spokes of burnished metal divided off from each other by intervals of ebony. In that vast, fan-like figure, quivering light and unbroken shadow, cast by the piles of masonry, lay side by side with each other with an alternation that was almost mathematical. Was not that a figure of the universe? Dazzling light and impenetrable shadow, clear revelation and dim mystery, the comprehensible and the incomprehensible things of God's love lie side by side with each other, throughout the whole of the wonderful circle. "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." (*T. G. Selby.*) *Sorrow a shadow of the Divine love*:—I remember on a glorious day of all but cloudless sunshine passing in view of a well-known line of bare and majestic downs, then basking in the full beams of noon. But on one face of the hill rested a mass of deep and gloomy shadow. On searching for its cause I at length discovered one little speck of cloud, bright as light, floating in the clear blue above. This it was which cast on the hillside that ample track of gloom. And what I saw was an image of Christian sorrow. Dark and cheerless often as it is, and unaccountably as it passes over our earthly path, in heaven its tokens shall be found, and it shall be known to have been but a shadow of this brightness whose name is Love. (*Dean Alford.*) **I make peace.**—*God the Author of peace*:—The same power which placed the sun in the heavens, gives to the nations of the earth the light and comfort of peace; and He who made the night before the day, when darkness lay upon the face of the deep, creates the evil of war. I. THE CAUSES OF WAR. Let but God leave men to themselves, and they fall into discord and anarchy, as the elements of the world would sink into confusion without His support, and return to their primitive chaos. As soon as two men appeared upon earth in a state of equality and competition, war arose between them, and the one slew the other. 1. No wonder there are wars without in the world, when there is an inward war in the mind of man; a restlessness of appetite which breaks out into acts of violence, and can never be satisfied. 2. But there is another principle in the world, which, if possible, is productive of more mischief than all the rest; this is, false religion. These are the principal causes of war on the part of man. 3. But war has another cause on the part of

God. It is sent by Him for the punishment of sin, and has never failed to chastise and reduce a people when fallen into pride or disobedience. II. THE EFFECTS OF WAR. The words of the text are remarkable; for here war, as opposed to peace, is called by the name of "evil": and a dreadful evil it is, comprehending all the evils that are to be found in the world, whether we consider it as a sin or a punishment. III. THE USE WE OUGHT TO MAKE OF THE BLESSINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES AFFORDED US BY A TIME OF PEACE. (*W. Jones, M.A.*) **I, the Lord, do all these things.**—*The agency of God universal*:—I. IN WHAT THE AGENCY OF GOD CONSISTS. The agency of God consists in His will, His choice or volition. God is a perfectly free agent. God is a moral agent. He perfectly knows and loves moral good, and as perfectly knows and hates moral evil. II. HIS AGENCY IS UNIVERSAL. God claims to be the universal agent. 1. God has made all things. 2. This further appears from His upholding all things. God did not and could not make any creature or object independent, and give it the power of self-preservation. 3. God must extend His agency to all created objects in the universe, because He has made all things for Himself. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **Drop down, ye heavens.**—*Salvation comes of man's response to God*:—To the eye of the seer the earth lies open to heaven as a wide corn-land over which the clouds of heaven hang, the air breathes, and the sun sheds sheets of light. Those clouds are big with righteousness, the special term used throughout this book of the faithfulness of Jehovah. At the call of prayer the skies pour down their precious treasure, and the earth opens every pore to receive the plentiful rain; presently every acre brings forth salvation, and righteousness springs up in the hearts of men, as their answer to the descent of the righteousness of God. It is the bridal of heaven and earth, a fulfilment of the prediction of the psalm: "Truth springeth out of the earth; and righteousness hath looked down from heaven." The conception is one of surpassing beauty. The brooding of heaven; the response of earth. Deep calling unto deep. The nature of God originating and inspiring; the nature of man responding. And when the descending grace of God is thus received by the believing yearning heart of man, the result is salvation. As the margin of R.V. reads: "Let the skies be fruitful in salvation, and let the earth cause righteousness to spring up together." The whole paragraph to the close of the chapter rings with salvation as its keynote. Does God hide Himself? He is the God of Israel, the Saviour. Are the makers of idols ashamed and confounded? Yet Israel is saved with an everlasting salvation. Are graven images held up to contempt? It is because they are gods that cannot save. Does God assert His unrivalled Deity? It is because He is a just God, and a Saviour. Are men bidden to look to Him, though they be far removed as the ends of the earth? It is that they may be saved. Primarily, no doubt, this salvation concerns the emancipation of the chosen people from the thraldom of Babylon, and their restoration to Jerusalem. "He shall build My city; he shall let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts." This deliverance, which is a type of the greater deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, was, in the fixed purpose of God, sure as the creation of the earth and man; guaranteed by the hands that stretched out the heavens, and by the word that commanded all their host. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 9. **Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!**—*Striving with God*:—The strong word "strive," and the emphatic reassertion of the mission of Cyrus (ver. 13), as well as the connection with vers. 1–8, show that deliberate opposition to the Divine purpose, and not mere faint-hearted unbelief (as in chaps. xl. 27, li. 13), is here referred to. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Opposing the Divine purpose*:—Those who were primarily addressed were at variance with God their Creator on two accounts—1. Because He permitted His people to be led captive by their enemies into a distant country, where they were oppressed. 2. Because, notwithstanding the servants of the Lord spoke much concerning their liberation, the event seemed altogether improbable, and beyond even the power of God to effect. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Contending with God*:—I. BY MURMURING AT HIS DISPENSATIONS. II. BY RESISTING HIS AUTHORITY. III. BY CONTEMNING HIS INSTRUCTIONS. (*Ibid.*) *Striving with our Maker*:—If we duly consider the life of man since the fall, we shall find it to be one continued struggle. In the great and most momentous affair of religion, upon which our whole happiness

depends, what a domestic war do we find within our own breasts! Happy are they who are successful in this spiritual conflict; and are so wise as vigorously to join forces with the Lord of hosts! But woe be to him who is of a party with the enemy, and "striveth with his Maker." I. We will consider WHAT IT IS TO STRIVE WITH OUR MAKER. In general it is to resist His will, and oppose ourselves to His government, to struggle against the dispensations of His providence. II. THE EXTREME VILENESS AND FOLLY OF SO DOING. 1. In general, if the height of ingratitude be a vile thing, and if to oppose and contend with our best Friend, who is infinitely wiser than we are, and loves us better than we do ourselves, and whose power too is so irresistible, that after all our strugglings His pleasure shall be accomplished one way or other, if not to our happiness, as He at first intended, then to our ruin, since we are resolved to have it so,—if this be a foolish thing, then to "strive with our Maker" does imply all the folly and baseness that a man can possibly be guilty of. 2. But more particularly, to strive with our Maker is a most vile and foolish thing, as it signifies—(1) Our denying obedience to His commands; for what can be more base than to refuse even our utmost services to that infinitely glorious and good Being who made us what we are! (2) Our murmuring at His disposal of us, and restless discontent at the circumstances He thinks fit to place us in. (3) Our being stubborn and refractory to the conduct of His Divine Spirit, and the guidance of His ministers, in things relating to His service and our own eternal salvation. III. THE MISERABLE CONSEQUENCE of thus striving with our Maker. "Woe unto him." 1. As it signifies disobedience to His commands. For who can imagine but that a Governor so wise, and so powerful, and so just as God is, will in due time assert His authority, and secure His laws and government from contempt, by the condign punishment of those who have been so hardy as to resist and rebel against Him, and made no account of the plainest and most express declarations of His will? And when the Almighty shall proceed to do justice, who can withstand Him, or hope to avoid the stroke, but must sink under the weight of it for ever! 2. Nor will our discontents and murmurings at the Divine disposals escape without due punishment. For suppose that God should be so far provoked by our repinings as to throw us off from His care and protection, and leave us to ourselves, and in His anger comply with our foolish desires, and give us what we are so fond of, and which He sees will be our ruin, how sadly sensible shall we then soon be of the vast difference between God's government and our own! 3. And so for impatience under troubles and afflictions, suppose our outcries and strugglings and resistance should make God withhold His paternal chastisements, and suffer sin upon us without correction, and disregard us as desperate and incorrigible; what woe on earth could befall us greater than this? 4. What but the extremest of all woes can be expected from our rejecting those proposals of reconciliation to God, which are not only offered but pressed upon us daily by the ministers of Christ, and to which we are constantly moved by the workings of the Spirit of God within, upon our souls! (*W. Bragge.*) *The misery of contending with God*:—I. SPECIFY SOME INSTANCES IN WHICH THE SINNER MAY BE CONSIDERED AS STRIVING WITH GOD. I hardly think it worth while to mention atheism, which opposes His very being, and tries to banish Him from the world which He has made. Some, indeed, have supposed that a speculative atheist is an impossibility. How far God may give up a man "to strong delusion to believe a lie," who has despised and rejected the advantages of revelation, it is not for us to determine,—but "if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" It is undeniable, however, that we have a multitude of practical atheists. That is, we have thousands who live precisely as they would do if they believed there was no God. They strive with Him —1. By transgressing His holy and righteous law. 2. By opposing the Gospel. 3. By violating the dictates of conscience. 4. By refusing to resign themselves to the dispensations of His providence. 5. By the persecution of His people. 6. By trying to hinder the spread of His cause. II. CONSIDER THE "WOE" WHICH HIS OPPOSITION NECESSARILY ENTAILS UPON HIM. This striving with God is— 1. A practice the most shameful and ungrateful. What would you think of a child who should strive with his father, reproach his character, counteract all his designs, and endeavour to injure his concerns? But such is your conduct towards God. 2. A practice the most unreasonable and absurd. For observe —in all the instances in which you oppose Him He is aiming to promote your good: His design is to make you wise, to make you holy, to make you happy; and the advantages of compliance will be all your own. Besides, can you do

without Him? In life? In death? 3. Therefore nothing can be more injurious and ruinous. In striving with Him, you only resemble the wave that dashes against the rock, and is driven back in foam; or the ox that kicks against the goad, and only wounds himself; or the thorns and briers that should set themselves in battle array against the fire. To improve this awful subject let me ask —Whether you are for God or against Him? There is no neutrality here. We have been speaking of a striving with God which is unlawful and destructive —but there is a striving with Him which is allowable and necessary. It is by prayer and supplication. (*W. Jay.*) *The indelicacy of criticising God* (ver. 10): —That a child should so speak of father or mother is unthinkably unnatural and impious. And such are they who criticise God's method of saving His people through Cyrus. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **Thus saith the Lord . . . Ask Me.**—*Prayer and criticism* :— "Ask Me, but do not criticise Me." "Command Me" must mean "leave to My care." (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Encouragement to pray from the names of God* :—"The Lord"—that is, God in His everlasting redemptive purpose; "the Holy One of Israel"—that is, the moral perfections of Israel's God, as contrasted with the abominations perpetrated under the sanction of heathen religions; "his Maker"—suggesting the purpose which from the clay gathered in Abraham's time from the highlands of Mesopotamia, was fashioning a fair vessel meet for His use. This threefold description of God introduces the august command which bade the people seek by prayer the fulfilment of the purpose on which the Divine heart was set. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Putting forth of God's power dependent on prayer* :—In launching an ironclad, the pressure of a baby's finger is not infrequently required to put in operation the ponderous machinery by which the iron leviathan glides evenly and majestically on to the ocean wave. So, if we may dare to say it, all the purposes of God, and the providential machinery by which they were to be executed, stood in suspense until the chosen people had asked for the things which He had promised, and had even commanded Him concerning the work on which His heart was set. (*Ibid.*) *Asking and commanding* :—I. PRAYER IS A NECESSARY LINK IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE DIVINE PROMISES. "Ask Me of things to come." Even to the Son, Jehovah says," "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen," &c. And to the chosen people, at the end of a paragraph beginning with "I will," and unfolding the work which He is prepared to do, not for their sakes, but for His own—He says, "For this, moreover, will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Our Lord is unremitting in the stress He lays on prayer, and pledges Himself to do only whatsoever is asked in His name. 1. Prayer is part of the system of co-operation between God and man which pervades nature and life. 2. Prayer, when genuine, indicates the presence of a disposition to which God can entrust His best gifts without injury to the recipient. To bless some men, apart from humility and submission, and weanedness of soul from creature aid, would only injure. And so, in His dear love, God withholds His choicest gifts until the heart is sore broken, and cries to Him. That cry is the blessed symptom of soul-health. 3. Prayer is also in its essence, when inspired by faith, an openness towards God, a receptiveness, a faculty of apprehending with open hand what He would impart. Let us pray—(1) Unitedly. God would be inquired of by the "house" of Israel. (2) Sympathetically. A prayer offered in the presence of others should receive their endorsement. (3) Earnestly. The Divine gauge of the worth of prayer is its pressure on the heart of God. (4) In the name of Jesus. II. THE IMPERATIVE ACCENT IN FAITH. "Concerning My sons, and concerning the work of My hands, command ye Me." Our Lord spoke in this tone when He said, "Father, I will." Joshua used it when in the supreme moment of triumph he lifted up his spear towards the setting sun, and cried, "Sun, stand thou still!" Elijah used it when he shut the heavens for three years and six months, and again opened them. Luther used it when, kneeling by the dying Melanchthon, he forbade death to take his prey. It is a marvellous relationship into which God bids us enter. We are accustomed to obey Him. But with the single limitation that our biddings must concern His sons, and the work of His hands, and must be included in His word of promise, Jehovah says to us, His redeemed children in Jesus Christ, "Command ye Me!" The world is full of mighty forces which are labouring for our weal. How is it that these great natural forces—which are manifestations of the power of God—so absolutely obey man? Is it not because, since the days

of Bacon, man has so diligently studied, and so absolutely obeyed, the conditions under which they work? "Obey the law of a force, and the force will obey you," is almost an axiom in physics. So God gives the Holy Spirit to them that obey Him. All the resources of God dwell bodily in the risen and glorified Lord. Obey Him, and He pours such mighty energy into and through the spirit that men are amazed at the prodigality of its supply; resist or thwart Him, and He retires from the spirit, leaving it to struggle as best it may with its difficulties and trials. But after our greatest deeds of prayer and faith we shall ever lie low before God; as Elijah did, who, after calling fire from heaven, prostrated himself on the ground, with his face between his knees. (*Ibid.*) *Counsel for God's people in trouble* (vers. 11–15):—I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN CAPTIVITY ARE INVITED TO INQUIRE CONCERNING THE ISSUE OF THEIR TROUBLES (ver. 11). The Holy One of Israel, though He doth not allow them to strive with Him, yet encourageth them—1. To consult His Word. "Ask Me of things to come." 2. To seek unto Him by prayer. "Command ye Me." II. THEY ARE ENCOURAGED TO DEPEND ON THE POWER OF GOD WHEN THEY WERE BROUGHT VERY LOW, AND WERE UTTERLY INCAPABLE OF HELPING THEMSELVES (ver. 12). III. THEY ARE PARTICULARLY TOLD WHAT GOD WOULD DO FOR THEM, THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW WHAT TO DEPEND UPON (vers. 13, 14). IV. THEY ARE TAUGHT TO TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN THEY CAN SEE HIM (ver. 15). (*M. Henry.*) *God's abounding liberality*:—I am told that, in the olden times, on Christmas Day, it was the custom in country villages for the squire always to fill with good things whatever vessels the poor people brought up to the hall, that they might have a Christmas dinner. It was strange how big the basins grew year after year. Whenever the man came round with the crockery cart, every good housewife would look all over his stock to see if there was not a still larger basin. It was a rule that the squire's servants should always fill the bowl, whatever size it was, and thus the bowls grew bigger and bigger. God will fill your bowl, however large it is! Get as big a bowl as you can; and when you bring it, if ever there comes a whisper in your ear, "Now you have presumed upon God's benevolence, you have brought too big a bowl," smile at yourself, and say, "This is as nothing to His overflowing fulness." If I said, "O poor sea, poor sea, now thou wilt be drained dry, for they bring such big bowls to be filled with thy waters"; the sea, tossing its mighty billows far and wide, would laugh at my folly. Come, then, and bring your largest conceptions of God, and multiply them ten thousandfold, and believe in Him as this Book would make you believe in Him. Open thy mouth wide, and He will fill it. He bids you even to command Him. He says, "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons, and concerning the work of My hands command ye Me." That is a wonderful expression; rise to the sublimity of faith, and be daring with your God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 12. **I have made the earth.**—*Nature and Scripture* (with ver. 22):—The study of Nature reveals a Creator. This is the order: God, creation, fishes, animals, men, women, the human race, the culture of the soil, the building of cities, the navigation of the sea, and, in course of ages, the formation of society as we know it. But man as a moral agent required moral laws; having also a capacity for religion, he needed spiritual light. This made revelation from above necessary. Mankind have had both vocal and written messages from God. Creation tells of His power, and the Scripture tells of His salvation—the two books together revealing His perfect glory. I. A careful study of nature and man will bring vividly before you THE LAW OF DEPENDENCE. The man who would attempt to be independent of Nature would soon die of hunger and thirst, and the soul that is arrogant enough to deem itself independent of Christ will soon find that saying true, "He that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." II. In nature you see also THE LAW OF CULTIVATION. Every living thing needs cultivation, and is improved, beautified, and perpetuated by it. Man, the "living soul," is under the same law. In a higher sense the soul of man is subject to this law of cultivation. The fruits and flowers found in a cultivated soul are faith, prayer, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. III. Nature conspicuously displays and relentlessly enforces THE LAW OF DEPRIVATION. In the great caves of Kentucky there are dark waters where the light never comes. Eyeless fishes swim there. Their ancestors had eyes that could see; but their descendants, choosing to dwell in lightless waters, have only rims and specks in their heads where eyes might have been. Use well a sense, a faculty, a power, and you increase

it; neglect it, and it will die. That is the law of Nature. Scripture teaches you the same lesson as to the spiritual world. IV. Nature does also undoubtedly embrace THE LAW OF TERMINATION. "The grass withereth and the flower fadeth." The bones of leviathan whiten the deep places of the sea. And what of man? To him also the law of termination applies. Shall nature, man, life as we know it, continue as they are for ever? No, for both Nature and Scripture proclaim the law of termination (2 Pet. iii. 10). V. But both Scripture and Nature point us to another law—THAT OF CONTINUITY. And this eternal law of continuity will be in existence after the present world is left behind. Consider, then, these natural and spiritual truths. Let Nature teach you how great the Creator is: let Scripture teach you that His salvation and love and righteousness are for ever and ever. (*G. W. M'Cree.*)

Ver. 14. **Surely God is in thee.**—*Jehovah Himself present in His Church:*—I. THE DIGNITY OF THE CHURCH. One cannot wonder that Solomon should have been overwhelmed with astonishment when Jehovah promised His presence in the temple that had just been erected for His worship and glory. But there is a nobler temple building for God—even that Church which is composed of living stones. It is to the presence of God therein that the text refers, and in vouchsafing His presence we may remark that Jehovah is—1. Doing honour to His own truth. 2. Exalting His own Son. 3. Imparting His own graces. II. THE CONSEQUENT SPIRITUALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH. By no phrase could you more accurately describe the real Christian than by the text—"Surely God is in thee." True religion is not an opinion merely of the understanding, nor external decorum merely of life, nor ecstatic raptures merely of affection. But it is nothing less than a union of our soul with God—a real participation of the Divine nature. III. Our text, however, not only intimates the dignity of the Christian and the spirituality of his experience, but also THE HOLINESS OF HIS CONDUCT. And unless there be this there is nothing. (*R. C. Dillon, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. **Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself.**—*The mystery of God's ways:*—1. Isaiah's mind is impressed with the fact that if God is "the God of Israel" "and the Saviour," He does some things scarcely in apparent consistency with that character. How many times did He abandon His people Israel to their enemies! And how was He about to suffer them to be led captive into Babylon for a long threescore years and ten! And even when His ways to them were evidently merciful and kind, God's acts of kindness came at times, under circumstances, in ways, by persons, that could not have been looked for; making His very mercies as surprising on the one hand as His judgments might have been on the other. "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself"—that hidest Thy counsels, Thy purposes, Thy mercies, Thy methods of operation. 2. A reflection of this sort might, with full as much justice, arise from a contemplation of the ways of God towards His spiritual Israel—a people to whom He is attached by still stronger ties than those which bound Him to Israel of old. Precious is His mercy; and yet how severe some of His dealings appear! And His mercies too!—how strangely they come; as though He would choose the unlikeliest of all circumstances, the darkest of all seasons, the most improbable of all means, for communicating them; as though He would make us have mercies when we expect trials, and find out of the darkest cloud there proceeds the brightest sunshine. And He works strange things—things not apparently congruous or reconcilable with His character of covenant friendship and love. 3. Nor is this any peculiarity at all, attaching itself to this part of the ways and administration of God. The same feature of the Divine conduct may be seen wherever else we look, whether at home or taking a wider circle. (1) If we look at the works of nature there is the same thing. About one half the animal world prey upon the other half. (2) Or look at man. Look at the body of man; made in marvellous wisdom, with a thousand adaptations for action; and yet this very body of man is seized upon by several thousand diseases, that inflame and torment, as though it were their domain and home. Look at the mind of man; made to be, adapted to be, a source of innumerable delights; and yet to what a vast extent it is the prey of ignorance, pride, anger, jealousy, rage, and impure and tormenting passions. (3) Look at human society. You see social affections at play, and the various circumstances in which men are placed adapted and prepared for their most delightful exercise, so that even trying circumstances are fitted for calling into exercise the liveliest and happiest affections;

but yet what is human society? You may call it Aceldama—a field of blood; a sphere in which the weak are trampled upon by the strong; in which violence, fraud, rapine, gain, plunder, the sword, and all instruments of moral and physical mischief are brought to bear upon the destruction of the happiness and the life of men. (4) And God's providence. God's providence is to be taken to be a system of wise and holy and beneficent administration; and yet what is it, when you look at it? There are many appearances, indeed, of its being so; but many dark things in it that one cannot at all understand. (5) Or if you contemplate the works of God in the state of this world—in the condition in which it becomes the theatre for the interposition of God in redemption, and affords scope for the great work of redeeming love through His dear Son—what a mystery is here! God made man upright—made a world for holiness, for happiness, for virtue, for religion; but into what a condition the world is come before it affords Him opportunity for redemption! Why, the whole world is contaminated; the world becomes a theatre of rebellion; and God, with all His love, is obliged to come forth with a curse, and reveal wrath from heaven against the universal impiety and injustice of men. Now, views of this sort are painful in two ways. 1. They give occasion to men of sceptical minds to think and to say hard things; they feed and nourish the enmity of their hearts against God. 2. They give occasion to many painful thoughts in the children of God. (*J. H. Hinton, M.A.*) *Relief in contemplating the mystery of God's ways*:—There are considerations by which the painfulness of such views may be diminished and taken away. I. TAKING THE CASE AT THE VERY WORST, IT IS NOTHING BUT A CASE OF DIFFICULTY. It is not that the ways of God are in any case such as yield demonstration of ill. It is admitted that these difficulties may, for aught that appears, admit of a wise and happy solution. II. WE HAVE NO REASON AT ALL TO COMPLAIN OF THE DIFFICULTIES, THE KIND AND DEGREE OF MYSTERY, THAT NOW ATTACHES TO THE WAYS OF GOD, NOR ANY REASON TO EXPECT IT SHOULD BE OTHERWISE. 1. The mystery which attaches to the ways of God arises in part from physical, from natural causes. In fact, there is an impossibility of its being removed. And this arises out of the great diversity of knowledge and understanding that there is betwixt God and ourselves. 2. Then this mystery arises in part from the unfavourableness of our position even for making use of what faculties we have. We do not stand so in relation to God and His ways as to take the most clear and favourable view of them. We are looking upon the ways of God from the earth; let us wait till we get to a better position. 3. Then we have no reason to complain of this mystery, because God, as the Governor of the world, has a right to work in darkness. The Foreign Secretary of the English Government works in mystery. How the world would laugh at him if he did not!—if he let all men, friends or foes, know what he was about! And is the Governor of all things to have no mysteries? "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing"; and that He can form designs and work them out, and defy the whole universe to penetrate them, or to know what He means to do till He sees fit to disclose His plan in all its completeness, and lay bare the beauty in the eyes of all—there is His glory as a Governor. And there is not any one of His friendly subjects that will ever complain of this. 4. The provision of God's government, as respecting ourselves, has a probationary and disciplinary design. III. THE WISDOM, HOLINESS, AND GOODNESS OF GOD ARE IN POINT OF FACT ESTABLISHED SO FIRMLY BY SOLID PROOFS AND ARGUMENTS THAT NOT ALL THE MYSTERY WHICH ATTACHES TO THE WAYS OF GOD AT PRESENT CAN EVER DISTURB THE TRUTH OF THEM. IV. WHEN WE LOOK AT SUCH PARTS OF GOD'S WAYS AS ARE ALREADY FINISHED WE SEE THE MYSTERY DISAPPEAR FROM THEM; and however, if they had been looked at in their progress, they would have seemed very mysterious and difficult to be understood, when they are finished they appear wise and kind and good. For some parts of God's ways, though small comparatively, are finished. Look at the history of Joseph, for example, from the time when he provoked the jealousy of his brethren. Look at the case of Job; the apostle notices it in this way—"Ye have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Now from one, judge all the ways of God. V. THE MYSTERY WHICH NOW ATTACHES TO THE WAYS OF GOD MUST BE EFFECTUALLY AND COMPLETELY DONE AWAY HEREAFTER, because God Himself (if one may speak it reverently) stands as a candidate for the applause of the universe. He is working out His designs in the presence of beings whom He has made capable of understanding them in part; ourselves, for example, and the devils, and the angels in heaven. He is working out His designs in the presence of critical judges. Not that it is of

any consequence to God, one may say, what we think of His ways; but yet, inasmuch as God has made us capable of appreciating His ways, and of deriving emotions from understanding them, there can be no question but that God means to stand well in the judgment of creatures whom He has thus made capable of judging. Practical improvement—1. One may learn hence the infinite importance of a spirit of friendship with God. (1) Because it is only in the spirit of a friend that His character can be justly viewed. (2) Because of the very fact of the mystery of His ways. God's ways to yourself will be mysterious; and how can you bear to be in the hands of a mysterious Being, a Being whose ways are mysterious, without being sure that He is your friend? 2. The friends of God should learn to trust Him with unshaken confidence. We have grounds for confidence—security that God's character is all that it should be. 3. Let us anticipate with joy the world that is to come. The world to come will be the time (so to speak) for God's turning towards us the tapestry which He is working. (*Ibid.*) *God hiding Himself*:—1. God hid Himself when He brought them into the trouble, hid Himself, and was wroth (chap. lvii. 17). 2. He hid Himself when He was bringing them out of the trouble (Psa. lxxvii. 19). (*M. Henry.*) *The Lord a God that hideth Himself*:—When the Holy Scriptures represent the Lord to us, or describe any of the more splendid manifestations of Himself, we find united together the fire and the cloud, light and darkness. It is this union which Isaiah exhibits: "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." The phrase denotes the incomprehensibility of Providence, the obscurity of God's ways and dealings with the children of men. I. GOD, THE SAVIOUR OF ISRAEL, IS A GOD THAT HIDETH HIMSELF. That His dispensations, though wise and merciful, are often mysterious—1. Would be supposed by reason. 2. Is proved by experience. II. THOUGH HE HIDETH HIMSELF HE IS ALWAYS THE SAVIOUR OF HIS PEOPLE. Though the dispensations of Providence towards them are inscrutable, they have a certain connection with their salvation. (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *The hidden God*:—In all times and circumstances this tendency of God to hide Himself has been forced upon men. God hid Himself in the burning bush, in the cloud of glory that rested over the tabernacle. He shined forth from Mount Paran, and Sinai, and Seir, but no man beheld Him. Often were the tones of His voice heard, but no form was seen. Often was His glory made manifest, but His face concealed. Men like Enoch and Noah and Elijah walked with God and communed with Him; yet upon the Almighty they gazed not. Often did God speak to men in dreams and visions of the night, but none ever saw the face or distinguished the form of the Eternal. Moses could sing his grand song, but God must put into his mouth, "I will hide My face from them; I will see what their end shall be." Job inquires—and how pathetic is the question on this man's lips!—"Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face?" Even Isaiah, who enjoyed a clearer vision of God than most men, makes Him out to be the Great Mystery of all things, and yet says: "I will wait upon the Lord that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him." Truly "no man can see God"; no man can see anything that is really great. The invisible things are the greatest, and God is in them all. He is nearer to you than your hands and feet, and closer to you than your breathing; yet you cannot see Him. (*G. Felix Williams.*) *God hiding Himself*:—I. NATURE is a house of concealment for God. II. PROVIDENCE is also a house of concealment for God. III. God was hidden in JESUS CHRIST. (*Ibid.*) *God hidden from the sinner*:—There is a hiding of Himself mentioned in the Scripture—God's spiritual withdrawal of Himself from our souls, which, far from being His voluntary purpose concerning us, is a dire misfortune which we entail upon ourselves,—a correcting punishment in all cases—a tremendous judgment in some. It is most important, therefore, that we should consider the different instances in which God may be said to be spiritually hidden from us, in order that we may learn how to avoid falling into so heavy a calamity, as well as how best to profit by it when God's chastening hand so visits us. 1. God is often hidden from us in prayer. 2. He must be hidden from us whenever we presumptuously sin against Him. 3. He is also hidden when we feel a want of reliance on Him, and comfort in Him, under the ordinary trials and sufferings of the present life. (*A. Gatty, M.A.*) *The hidings of Deity*:—The inspired writers dwell frequently and earnestly on the inaccessible splendour that surrounds the Creator. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him"; "touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out"; "He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies." It was a cloud which conducted the wanderings of Israel; it was

a cloud which filled the tabernacle of the Lord. The symbols of God's greatness wear the robes of concealment, and He demands homage, not so much by what He has revealed as by what the revelation itself pronounces obscure. And it should be observed that all this proceeded not from unwillingness to disclose His brightness, but rather from the fact that since this brightness was Divine it could not be endured by human vision. To this He Himself referred when discoursing with Moses as His own friend. "Thou canst not see My face, for there shall no man see Me and live"; and although He "made all His goodness to pass before him," as being that which the creatures of earth might behold and yet breathe, when the august train of His glory swept by, He hid His servant in the cleft of the rock, lest he should be withered to nothing by the unearthly blaze. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *God hiding Himself*:—If we pass from the days of ancient Israel to our own, it is to be remarked that we think much and speak much of the mysteries which undeniably exist in the nature of God, and in His operations whether in providence or in grace; but after all, it may be that we scarcely regard those mysteries in their most important point of view,—that we rather consider them as secrets which oppose our ingenuity than as fields which yield a rich harvest of honour to the Creator and of advantage to ourselves. There is a likelihood of our not regarding these mysteries as necessary portions of the dealings between finite beings and the Infinite; as forced, so to speak, into God's dispensations by His unmeasured superiority over the work of His own hands. Nay, we are well aware that many go even so far as to denounce and decry revelation altogether, just because it contains truths too big for human comprehension; forgetting or overlooking that, since it is probably essential to the very nature of God that He should hide Himself, their ground of rejection is virtually a ground of belief and acceptance. Thus our text seems to breathe the language of admiration and praise. I. THAT OF GOD HIDING HIMSELF IN REGARD OF HIS OWN NATURE AND PROPERTIES. In real truth, we know nothing of God in Himself; we know Him only in His attributes, and His attributes only as written in His Word and His works. Let it only be remembered that we are a mystery to ourselves; that every object around us baffles our penetration; that there is not an insect, nor a leaf, nor an atom, which does not master us if we attempt to apprehend its nature and its growth, and we must admit that there is a presumption which outbraves language in expecting that we may ascertain what God is, and how God subsists. Even when God makes announcements of His nature, they are such as quite baffle our reason! 1. Look at the doctrine of the Trinity. 2. So soon as God has been addressed as a "God that hideth Himself" He is addressed as "the Saviour." And we are free to own, in respect of the scheme of our salvation, that whilst everything is disclosed which has reference to ourselves, there is much hidden which has reference to God. We can form no adequate notion of the Incarnation: how the Godhead could tabernacle in flesh; how Divinity and humanity could coalesce to make a Mediator; how there could be a bearing of sin and yet freedom from sinfulness; the impossibility of being overcome by temptation, and yet such a capacity of being tempted as should ensure sympathy to ourselves. It lies beyond human power, at least with the present amount of revelation, to scan the wonders of the Person, and to unravel the intricacies of the work of redemption. "Verily Thou art a God that hideth Thyself" is what we are forced to exclaim even when contemplating God as "the God of Israel, the Saviour." But in what tone should we make the exclamation? The points to which we have referred are not points which it concerns men accurately to understand, though it is at their own peril not to believe; and there is nothing by which God is so much honoured, and the soul so much advantaged, as by our taking Him at His word. 3. We observe in reference to the Bible, as before in reference to the Divine nature, that it is the sublimity which produces the obscurity. 4. And if God, when discovering Himself as the Saviour, hide much in regard of the mysteries of redemption, does He not also hide much of its individual application? How secretly the Holy Spirit enters into the heart of man! II. THAT OF HIS HIDING HIMSELF IN REGARD OF HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS CREATURES. 1. God conceals much in the dispensations of His providence. He does not lay open the reasons of His appointments; He does not explain why prosperity should be allotted to one man and adversity to another. 2. God hides from His creatures the day of their death. 3. God has hidden much from us with regard to a future state. (*Ibid.*) *God a mystery*:—God is a mystery, unsearchable, unfathomable, inscrutable. So am I; so is everything. In his poem, "Flower in the crannied wall," Tennyson stored one of his profoundest thoughts: If I could explain God He would cease to be God.

An infinite subject can never come within the limitations of a finite mind. It matters not whether we surround God with clouds and darkness, or "light inaccessible"—He is equally hidden by either. Since the prophet uttered the text, men have advanced no further into the sanctuary that veils from sight the Deity. Science has made many discoveries, solved many mysteries, but upon one subject sheds no light, and in the presence of God is "dumb with silence." I. GOD HIDES HIMSELF IN NATURE. "In Him we live and move and have our being," yet where is He? Worlds move in their orbits and "stars in their courses," because an unseen hand upholds and guides. The telescope brings distant worlds in view and reveals everywhere His presence and power, but no telescope is so powerful as to bring God within range of our vision. Study the origin of life, and with aid of the microscope gaze upon the simplest germs fresh from the hand of God, and that hand seems almost in sight, but still He eludes our sight. II. THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE HIDES HIMSELF. "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy footsteps are not known." His providences stagger human reason, and His purposes and ways are past finding out (Psa. lxxiii.). We look on the wrong side of the pattern, but God is behind the curtain. His hand holds the shuttle, His foot is on the treadle, He will weave the web of our life into a pattern beautiful and glorious according to His Divine design. History is the unfolding of His providence on a large scale, which "almost reveals, but does not quite conceal," the finger that writes its records. III. THE GOD OF GRACE HIDES BEHIND HIS PURPOSES OF GRACE. The analogy between nature and grace is very striking. IV. WILL GOD HIDE HIMSELF IN HEAVEN ALSO; OR WILL HE COME FORTH TO VIEW IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY? "No man shall see Me and live" seems to imply a possibility after death. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." But do not the pure of earth see God in that sense? In a certain sense we will "see His face," but in all probability He will even in eternity be a God that hideth Himself, in order that eternity may be a continual revelation more and more of His beauty and glory. V. GOD HIDES HIMSELF, BUT NOT HIS MERCY. His love shines on every page of the Scriptures, and "His mercy is in the heavens," above the brightness of the sun. Whatever else may be dark, the way of life is plain. (*S. L. Morris, D.D.*) *Mysteries in religion*:—Verily, God hideth Himself. I. AS REGARDS HIS PERSONAL EXISTENCE. II. AS REGARDS THE SOVEREIGNTY OF ALL HIS WORKS IN CREATION AND PROVIDENCE. III. IN THE RICHES OF HIS ATONING LOVE IN JESUS CHRIST. IV. IN THE ENERGY OF HIS SAVING POWER BY THE HOLY GHOST. (*H. M'Neile, M.A.*) *God hides to reveal Himself*:—If the chapter is examined it will be seen that God's hiding Himself is regarded but as a preparation of manifestation, and as a means of it. He hid Himself in employing Cyrus, but it was that He might be better known, that His control over men and nations might be recognised. We have then to consider the truth that God's hiding of Himself is in order that He may be better known, and that His great end in all is that all the ends of the earth may look to Him and be saved. I. THIS IS TRUE OF THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE. 1. Think of an infinite Being, a perfect and eternal One, and of dependent spirits created and sustained by Him. Should we not have expected that this great and glorious Being would make Himself known to His creatures in some direct, clear, unmistakable way? Instead of such a visible, unmistakable appearance of God we have only a vast expanse of matter. Matter everywhere; God nowhere to be seen. There are great forces moving around us; but they are not God. We cannot see a face. We believe, we feel, we know that behind all a great Will is working, but we cannot see or touch that Will. Matter in its dulness and insensibility hides God. Its crassness and opacity keep the thought of God out of our minds. We lose God in the multitudinousness of the forms He presents to us. Beauty and grandeur even enchain our souls. We are delighted with the picture, and never rise beyond. 2. Yet this matter, so often felt as a concealing of God, is truly a revealing, a manifestation of qualities in God which otherwise would have been hidden from us. How could God's almighty power have been made plain to us except through matter? The variety, which may seem to hide God, reveals the inexhaustibleness of His resources. Minuteness reveals the greatness of His care. And though God remains hidden, the fact of His existence is made clear and certain to the practical reason of man. The marks of adaptation, purpose, and design are so multiplied, so direct and obvious in some cases, and so elaborate and complex in others, that conviction comes irresistibly on the general mind. The destruction and pain that are found in some parts of nature form a contrast needful to the setting off of the beneficence displayed in the enjoyment that abounds. Would not the beauty of the world be tame and unappreciated if it were confronted with

no opposite? The very inexplicableness of some parts of the universe, their apparent contradiction to the goodness of God, are part of the lesson, and a most important part. They give us a sense of the mystery of God. They are the very things that waken up certain classes of minds. They serve, above all, to impress us with the thought that nature is no sufficient manifestation of God. They render necessary a lofty faith in God, and make welcome that higher revelation which is its nutriment. II. IT IS TRUE OF LAW, which is found everywhere in the material universe, that while it seems to hide God it yet manifests Him in a higher way. 1. A system of law everywhere prevails. Each separate existence has its own law, and all are bound together by general laws. The thought of this all-pervading invariable law has something in it pleasing to the intellect of man. It even gives him delight to contemplate the unvarying order, and to trace regularity and harmony where at first there appeared only confusion. But the human heart does not take kindly to this idea of law. It feels as if it were imprisoned, and God put far away and deprived of power to help. It seems even, at times, as if God were put out of the universe, and scarcely even the name of Him left. 2. But it is a groundless alarm. The belief in law neither takes away God, nor deprives Him of His freedom and power to help. To show that God's working is regular is not to make it less His working. Order is not force. The channel in which power operates is not the power. The existence of law, then, does not really hide God. It reveals Him in a grand and elevating way. What lessons it teaches of the Divine love for order, of the unity of God's mind, and His unchangeableness. What an impression it gives of the entire absence of caprice in His nature, and His absolute reliableness. How grandly it shows the subordination of all things, even the minutest, to one vast purpose. III. IT IS TRUE OF THE MEANS AND AGENTS EMPLOYED BY GOD that in them He hides Himself, and yet reveals Himself in a higher way. 1. God's great channels of power in the moral world are two—truth and men. The truth of God is so perfectly adapted to its purpose that it seems to be doing all the work. So also is it with the human agency that God employs. The influence of men appears to depend so entirely on the energy they put forth, upon their adaptation to particular classes of men, upon their intellectual and moral incisiveness, upon a certain shining through of conviction, and a contagiousness of nature, that it seems as if it were a thing wholly in the human sphere. God is thoroughly hidden behind man. 2. But look what a grand revelation of Himself God gives by this arrangement. What a regard He shows to the souls He has made in using such an array of truth upon them. It is one of the greatest displays of God that He condescends to win by truth, that He stoops to reason and plead. And what noble qualities God shows in using human agents as He does. Does He not show His desire to bring out of each creature all its capabilities, His desire to give to the children the highest possible honour, to make them dear and honourable to each other, by making them the channels of the very highest blessing? IV. GOD HIDES HIMSELF BEHIND DELAY AND DISASTER, AND YET REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH THESE IN A HIGHER WAY. It is an old cause of perplexity to men that one event happens to the evil and the good, and that God's work moves with such incredible slowness. And yet, in all this God is revealing Himself. He reveals His grand purpose and determination that men shall walk by faith. Would it be a benefit to men to be freed from the necessity of walking by faith? It would be stopping the channel between us and all God's blessings. God makes the world so full of contradiction and disaster, makes it so incalculable and mysterious, just because He loves us and does not wish us to stray away from Himself. What wealth of consolation He spreads abroad in hearts through the occasion and opportunity of sorrow. (*J. Leckie, D.D.*) *The Divine invisibility*:—We have in us from babyhood an irrepressible desire to know the unknown. The unknown is the awful. And so in heathen religions there is always some mysterious place into which only a high priest enters, some inner sanctuary veiled from mortal eyes where the Divine presence is more perceptible than elsewhere. Even Judaism had it, and its veil of the temple was not rent in twain till Christ came. Sacerdotal churches maintain the idea till this day. Idolatry—what is it? What but the effort to make the invisible visible? When Jesus the Christ came into this world's life, He came to answer the longing of the human heart after some such expression of Deity as should satisfy that desire to make the invisible visible. In our noblest moments it must seem to us that the demand for a full and perfect revelation of Deity is unreasonable, not to use the stronger word, absurd. Reasonable enough is the demand, let us know the heart of Deity. And so, while it is still true that the eternal One is a God that hideth Himself it is also true that the

prayer of man's heart, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," has been answered. But can we not see that the Divine invisibility has its uses in the development of this nature of ours? 1. One use is to train us to reverence. 2. God's hiding of Himself is necessary to our freedom. Our great Teacher puts this thought, as is His wont, into the parable of an Eastern lord going into a far country and delivering his goods into the custody of his servants, that, in his absence, they may so use them as to increase them. In order to the development of every human life a certain amount of freedom is necessary. The over-awing sensible presence of God would completely destroy our freedom. It would paralyse our activities. 3. It is necessary to our perfectness of nature. But perfectness in man is not simply a matter of outward condition, it implies internal correspondence with an environment in itself perfect. In order to perfectness of inward condition there must be the ability of faith in a Power outside ourselves, and of faith in all around us, the ability of perpetual hope, the ability of undying love. And it is not possible, so far as we can see, to develop these virtues unless we have room for their growth. The invisibility of God is necessary to their growth. (*R. Thomas, D.D.*) *Withholding the law of revealing:*—I. SEE HOW CONTINUOUS HAS BEEN THIS LAW. 1. The records of the world before the flood, scanty as they are, show us that it was ever present in that earliest dispensation. Through that darkness we can see man under the dispensation of an incomplete revelation; God, ever present and yet ever hidden, and restraining His manifestation of Himself even as He gives it. What an expression it is, "God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt." That looking on it, His revelation; that turning aside from it, His hiding of His face, because He could not endure its corruption and its violence. 2. After the flood it is still the same; as to the world at large most evidently so. How soon does the knowledge of God die out, even in the family of Noah! Then the Lord calls Abraham, and reveals Himself to that one chosen witness. What a hiding of Himself, even in His revelation, does this imply. Even more remarkable yet is the presence of this law amongst those to whom the light was given. Marvellous communications of Himself were made by God to Abraham. When the three mysterious strangers stood suddenly before him as he sat in his tent-door in the heat of the day, how near he is to the knowledge of the Divine Trinity; and when the men vanish out of his sight, and he is left alone "before the Lord," how is the Trinity gathered up again into the unity of the Godhead. So again, when the assurance of his own acceptance is vouchsafed to him as the lamp of God moves between the divided pieces of his sacrifice, a horror of great darkness falls upon the spirit of the favoured man. In the revelation of Himself God still hides Himself, even from the opened eye of Abraham. So it continues all along the line. 3. So it was throughout the whole prophetic dispensation. What growing light,—what remaining darkness meet us everywhere. 4. How plainly is the same feature to be traced in the personal ministry of our Lord Himself! This is everywhere discernible in His conduct to the scribes and Pharisees, and even to the multitude. What else were those charges to one and another not to make known His miraculous works of healing; what else the wrapping up of His words in parables; that "seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand"? And even with His own disciples He acted to a great degree on the same rule. How plainly do their words and acts convey to us the idea of men living under a sense of mystery which they could not fathom. 5. Is not the same law marked even upon the open revelation of the dispensation of the Spirit? God's sovereignty and man's free agency; the co-working of His almighty grace and our own personal responsibility; the infinite love and power of God, and the origin and being of evil; who can explain the co-existence of these wonders? 6. Nor is it otherwise, if from these unsolved difficulties of thought we turn to the direct appointments of the Church of Christ. Do not the blessed sacraments of the Gospel at once reveal and hide the Divine Presence? 7. Most signally, too, is this true as to God's dealings with individual souls in the Church of the redeemed. 8. We may trace it in the Church at large. Bright as is the light, where is it without the shadow following it? II. ITS OBJECT. Here, then, is the dispensation. Why we are put under it the fewest words may safest tell. Evidently it is of God's love for us, and of His pity for our weakness. It is because we cannot now bear more; and that we may be led on to more. III. ITS CONSEQUENCES. What especially we should learn from His having placed us under such a dispensation seems to be—1. That if we would know Him we must follow hard after Him. 2. The need of reverence in seeking. 3. The true mode of treating these mysteries is neither to deny their existence nor to fear their presence,

still less to let them minister to the production of doubt or unbelief, but to look at them as men look at the clouds which fleck the heavens; which, though for the time they hide the sun, yet do not make it the less present in the firmament, but which may themselves become so full of its light as to give back its radiance with a beauty which, if its burning brightness had not been broken by them into the infinity of light and shade, it could not have possessed. (*Bp. S. Wilberforce, D.D.*) *The knowledge of a triune God*:—In this short verse there is contained the description of God in two characters, as known and yet unknown, as revealed and yet a mystery, as showing and yet hiding Himself. This comprehensive idea of God had been gained from experience. The names "God of Israel" and "Saviour" embody the remembrance of the many occasions when He had shown Himself identified with the nation's life and safety, as He had guided or protected them. And yet, running all through that same history had been the feature of unexpectedness and strangeness in His mode of working; so that at last the people felt that they knew Him and yet did not know Him. Each new proof of His power and presence only introduced a new point at which the mystery of His being and His ways was felt. Our experience cannot be said to be greatly different from the prophet's. We go over the life of Christ, and each point of it is a revelation of our God; and then we complete our thoughts with an expression of God's being full of hard thoughts and mystery. 1. Christ as the revelation of God leads to the doctrine of the Trinity. Happy shall we be if we can feel the unity of the two aspects of mystery and revelation as the prophet did, and join them, as he did, without any sense of hostility between them. 2. If men would only see that the doctrine of a Trinity has its first ground in the longing of God to get near to man, it would not so often be pronounced hard, cold, and useless. We should all see how to use it. When life and the world seemed cruel and disappointing, seemed to be discouraging us from any attempt to find God, then we would turn to our doctrine of God and, gathering re-assurance from the announcement that there is in the Godhead not only the power of sitting afar off in mysterious grandeur, but also the power of coming near to each one of us, and being one with us, we should take up our life again with new courage, and go back to the world with new confidence, feeling sure that God is in it, and is not beyond meeting us there. 3. Another characteristic of our search for God is, that we want Him to be like us in character and feeling. If He is not, we do not see how we can form any estimate of Him, and know Him at all. And yet that desire to have Him like us has led to such evil results that men often distrust it. It has so generally resulted in making a man's God only an unnaturally magnified reflection of his own character that the pictures thus produced have been anything but attractive. They have so often had cruelty, hatred, and narrowness in them that men, rejecting such representations, have said, "We cannot know God, He is so different from us; He is a God that hideth Himself." 4. We turn again to that revealed picture of our God as it is given in the thought of a Trinity, and we find that it contains the very central idea of human life,—mutual feeling and relation. (*A. Brooks, D.D.*) *God hides Himself*:—It is supposed by some, that after Cyrus took possession of the city he was shown this prophecy, probably by Daniel, and he was so impressed with it that he resolved still further to fulfil it, by allowing the Jewish captives to return to their own land; and the way in which God would accomplish the work without openly appearing in it led the prophet to exclaim: "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself," &c. This sentiment is often expressed in God's Word, and is still more frequently justified by His ways and works. I. THE FACT HERE STATED, that God hides Himself. This is a fact that none will dispute; for—1. He is unseen. (1) In the works of nature. We do not see Him engaged in them as we see men engaged in what they do. (2) In the dispensations of providence. The word "providence" means God, foreseeing, arranging, and controlling events that happen. We are often so staggered by what takes place, it is so contrary to what we expected, that we have no answer to the question, "Where is thy God?" (3) In His spiritual operations. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." &c. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, but no one saw Him do it. 2. God hides Himself, in that He has not revealed Himself to us in such a way as to render doubt and unbelief impossible. He has not left Himself without witnesses. God may be known by His works, not must be. God has revealed Himself in His Word. God Has revealed Himself in His Son. But the incarnation is a concealment of God, as well as a manifestation. II. REASONS WHY GOD THUS HIDES HIMSELF. There must be some very sufficient reason for this conduct on the part of God. There is a very deep sense in which God hides Himself from us on account of our

sins; that is, withdraws from us the sense of His spiritual presence and the tokens of His favour (chap. lix. 2). But that is not the hiding to which the prophet here refers. He hides Himself because this is necessary for our moral probation and discipline. He was not always visible to our first parents in the garden; for when they heard His voice, after they sinned, they hid themselves. They would scarcely have eaten of the forbidden fruit while conscious that His eye was upon them. In like manner it is necessary for our probation that God should not be seen. He hides Himself—1. To try our faith. Jesus said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Faith has reason and a sufficient revelation on which to rest; but if a man does not wish to retain the knowledge of God, he may find room for doubt and unbelief even in regions where the pure in heart see God. 2. To test our love. We must have a high and intelligent appreciation of the character of a being, and our love to him must have its roots deep down in our moral nature, if we are to continue to love him during a long absence, even though at one time we have seen him; but how high must be our appreciation of his character and work if we can say of him, "Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." If we so love Christ when we do not see Him, how shall we love Him when we see Him as He is! 3. To test the strength of our principles. A master wishes to know how his servant does when he is absent; a father wishes to know how his son conducts himself when from home. If he hears that his son is as pure and upright and loving as he ever was when the eyes of his parents were upon him, it fills his heart with satisfaction and delight; so God wishes to know what we will do when we seem to be left to ourselves. It is then that our principles are tested. God hides Himself to see what we will do. He sees us, though we cannot see Him. No dispensation could be better than the one under which we live, to develop our principles and form our character; it is a dispensation of faith, not sight, in which we are being trained to do right because it is right, even though we cannot at the time see the consequences that will follow right or wrong. 4. To test our confidence in His arrangements, whether we will trust Him even when we cannot trace Him. There are many who think that they could bear the ills of life if they were sure that God appointed them, but their trials seem to come so entirely from human sources that it seems to them as though they were just left to be the victims of human caprice. But we must endure as seeing the invisible, and say of man as Jesus said to Pilate: "Thou couldest have no power against Me except it were given thee from above" (John xix. 11). 5. In order that we may seek Him. We spare no pains in seeking that which we highly value, and God will be appreciated. He seeks us, but we must also seek Him. Lessons—(1) This subject ought to rebuke ostentation when engaged in works of benevolence. God hides Himself even when He does good. How, then, ought we to hide ourselves even when doing good! (2) This also rebukes those who hide their talents because they are few, and do nothing because they cannot do great things. They think that the little they can do will never be noticed or seen, and therefore they neglect to do it. We are to hide ourselves, but not our talents. We are to do the good we can, however small it be, and even though it should never be known that we did anything. (3) The fact that God hides Himself is no excuse for our not knowing Him. He has never said, "Seek ye Me in vain." He has said, "Seek ye My face," and "They that seek Me shall find Me" (chap. lv. 6, 7). (*A. Clark.*)

Ver. 17. **But Israel shall be saved in the Lord.**—*A forecast of the Messianic age:*—As is usual in the prophets, the perfect dispensation, or what is called the Messianic age, is conceived as issuing immediately from the historical crisis which is the subject of the prophecy—in this case, the deliverance from Babylon. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Israel saved in the Lord:*—I. THE GLORIOUS OBJECT. Everlasting salvation in the Lord. 1. Includes deliverance from ignorance, guilt, &c., and the possession of light, peace, &c.; and this state continued and increased for ever. It is grace consummated in eternal glory. 2. This salvation is "in the Lord"—the Lord Messiah. (1) As a possession, purchased by His own blood, in whose right only we can obtain it. (2) As an inheritance, kept in trust, and to be conveyed by Him to the appointed heirs of it. (3) As in a grand exemplar, in His human nature, of the complete and final happiness of the saints (Rom. viii. 29; Phil. iii. 21). It is in Him both as a beatific object and a perpetual medium, through which the blessed will see and enjoy God for ever. II. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS TO WHOM EVERLASTING SALVATION

IS PROMISED. "Israel." 1. A name of great distinction in Scripture The Israelites, to whom everlasting salvation is promised, are such as are so in a spiritual sense. 2. True Israelites are such as have given their unfeigned consent to be God's people, subjects, and servants; such as have "joined themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." 3. True Israelites are such as live in an unreserved subjection to the laws and government of God and the Redeemer (Rom. vii. 22). Through faith in Christ they are vitally united to Him, and from Him receive those hourly supplies of grace that qualify men for every good word and work. III. THE GROUNDS OF THE CERTAINTY OF THEIR SALVATION. 1. The possession Christ has taken of it in the name and nature of all true believers in Him (Heb. vi. 20; John xiv. 2, 3). 2. Christ's intercession, which He ever lives in heaven to make for them (Heb. vii. 25). 3. His mighty power which is engaged for them (1 Pet. i. 4, 5). 4. God's promise (Titus i. 2; Heb. vi. 17, 18). (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Saved in the Lord:*—That is, through Him (Rom. v. 9). The elect of God dispersed over the earth shall be saved through the powerful operation of His glorious excellences, and in virtue of the perfect righteousness of the great Messiah. They shall be saved—1. Through the love of God (John iii. 16). 2. In His infinite wisdom, which He hath wonderfully displayed in devising and executing the astonishing plan of salvation. 3. Through His almighty power. 4. In His consummate righteousness; the rectitude of His nature, the equity of His providence, and the faithfulness of His promises, being clearly demonstrated by the accomplishment of this salvation. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Isaiah's far-reaching glance:*—He foresaw the redemption of suffering Israel by the hand of Cyrus, but uses terms that it would be a misleading and inexcusable blunder to employ if they are intended to be restricted to those small bands of immigrants returning under Ezra and Nehemiah, whose descendants rejected the Christ, and went forth into the great and long-ending dispersion after the Romans had destroyed the rebuilt city. Standing once, at sunrise, on a lower height of the Himalayas—lower, though still 10,000 feet above the plains—we saw beneath us, stretching away into the blue distance, leagues upon leagues of rolling country clothed with evergreen forests of tree ferns, tree rhododendrons and magnolias, till the view was lost in cloudland. But, behold! even as we watched, the clouds broke and scattered, trooping away into the vault of heaven like hosts of white-robed angels. Between their ranks were revealed, one after another, the mighty flanks of Kinchinjunga and her sister mountains; then their snow-peaks and glaciers. Another few minutes, and the last cloud had vanished, and the glittering crest of Mount Everest, the loftiest summit in the world—we know not how many hundreds of miles afield—flashed upon the horizon. The lower and nearer landscape was not lost, it was there still, in all its beauty and verdure, but we had no longer any eyes for it because of the glory that exceeded. Something like that would have been the prospect unfolded to the "rapt Isaiah's" spiritual eyesight, could he have understood all that was involved in his prophecies. He must have had at least a partial understanding of their meaning, for we read that "these things said Isaiah because he saw [Christ's] glory, and he spake of Him." Nevertheless, it is reserved for us to see most distinctly the full extent of the prophetic landscape, because from before our eyes even the remotest clouds that linger on the horizon have been lifted by the sunrising of New Testament teaching. (*F. Sessions.*) *"World without end":*—"To eternal eternities." (*F. Delitzsch.*) The expression does not occur again. (*J Skinner.*)

Vers. 18-25. **For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens.**—*How God reveals Himself:*—The main current of the section may be thus expressed—I. GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF IS OPEN AND TRUTHFUL. He has not spoken in secret; and He has not bid men seek Him in vain. II. GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF IS IN REFERENCE TO THE HIGHEST PRACTICAL OBJECTS. "Seek ye My face; look unto Me, and be ye saved; He is a just God and a Saviour." III. GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF IS TO ISSUE IN THE SALVATION OF THE WHOLE EARTH. "Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess to Him." (*C. Short, M.A.*) *The reasonableness of God's procedure:*—We have here the repetition of that deep, strong note which Isaiah himself so often sounded to the comfort of men in perplexity or despair, that God is at least reasonable, not working for nothing, nor beginning only to leave off, nor creating in order to destroy. The same God, says our prophet, who formed the earth in order to see it inhabited,

must surely be believed to be consistent enough to carry to the end also His spiritual work among men. Our prophet's idea of God's righteousness, therefore, includes the idea of reasonableness; implies rational, as well as moral consistency, practical sense as well as good faith; the conscience of a reasonable plan, and, perhaps, also the power to carry it through. (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. **I have not spoken in secret.**—"*In a dark place of the earth,*" is an expression used for the purpose of pointing out the contrast between the prophecies of Jehovah and the heathen cave, oracles and spirit-voices of the necromancers, which seemed to rise up from the interior of the earth. (*C. Short, M.A.*) *God's speech to men*:—Two thoughts branch off—1. Prophecy, proceeding from Him is a thing of the light, no black art, essentially different from heathen divination. 2. The same love of Jehovah which is revealed already in creation, is also shown in His relation to Israel; He did not point Israel to Himself as chaos ("I said not to the seed of Jacob; seek Me as chaos!"), even as He did not create the earth a chaos ("He has not created it a chaos," ver. 18). (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) **I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain.**—"*Seek ye Me in vain,*" literally, in a waste, *i.e.* where there are no ways or indications how He is to be found. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Comfort to seekers from what the Lord has not said*:—We might gain much solace by considering what God has not said. We have an assurance that God will answer prayer, because He hath not said unto the seed of Israel, Seek ye My face in vain. The proposition is this: that those who seek God, in God's own appointed way, cannot, by any possibility seek Him in vain; that earnest, penitent, prayerful hearts, though they may be delayed for a time, can never be sent away with a final denial (Rom. x. 13; Matt. vii. 8). I. I SHALL PROVE THIS BY THE NEGATIVE, as our text has it. 1. Suppose that sincere prayer could be fruitless, then the question arises, Why are men exhorted to pray at all? Would it not be a piece of heartless tyranny if the Queen should wait upon a man in his condemned cell, and encourage him to petition her favour, nay, command him to do it, saying to him, be importunate, and you will prevail; and yet, all the while, should intend never to pardon the man, but had determined in her heart that his death-warrant should be signed and sealed, and that on the execution morning he should be launched into eternity? Would this be consistent with royal bounty—fit conduct for a gracious monarch? Can you for a moment suppose that God would bid you come to Him through Jesus Christ, and yet intend never to be gracious at the voice of your cry? 2. If prayer could be offered continuously, and God could be sought earnestly, but no mercy found, then he who prays would be worse off than he who does not pray, and supplications would be an ingenious invention for increasing the ills of mankind. For a man who does not pray has less woes than a man who does pray, if God be not the answerer of prayer. He who has been taught to pray has great desires and wants; his heart is an aching void which the world can never fill; but he that never prays has no longings and pinings after God. If, then, a man may have these vehement longings, and yet God will never grant them, then assuredly the man who prays is in a worse position than he who prays not. How can this be? 3. If God do not hear prayer, since it is clear that in that case the praying man would be more wretched than the careless sinner, then it would follow that God would be the author of unnecessary misery. This is inconsistent with the character of God. 4. Should there still be some desponding ones, who think that God would invite them to pray and yet reject them, I would put it on another ground. Would men do so? Would you? Can God be less generous than men? 5. This is God's memorial by which He is distinguished from the false gods (comp. Psa. cxv. 6 and lxv. 2). One of the standing proofs of the Deity of Jehovah is, that He does answer the supplications of His people. 6. If God do not hear prayer what is the meaning of His promises? 7. What is the meaning of all the provisions which He has already made for hearing prayer? Why a mediator, an intercessor? &c. 8. If God hear not prayer, what Gospel have I to preach? 9. Where, then, were the believer's hope? 10. What would they say in hell, if a soul could really seek the Lord and be refused? There are some who, when under conviction of sin, still cleave to this dark delusion, that God will not hear them. Therefore, I have tried, by blow after blow, to smite this fear dead. II. THAT THE LORD DOES HEAR PRAYER MAY BE POSITIVELY SUBSTANTIATED. 1. For the Lord to hear prayer is consistent with His nature. 2. It is harmonious with all His past actions (Psa. cvii. 3). Conclusion—Try for yourself. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's praying people*:—1. The seed of Jacob are a praying people; it is the generation of them that seek Him (Psa. xxiv. 6). 2. As He

has invited them to seek Him, so He never denied their believing prayers, nor disappointed their believing expectations. 3. If He did not think fit to give them the particular thing they prayed for, yet He gave them that grace sufficient and that comfort and satisfaction of soul which was equivalent. (*M. Henry.*) *God's straightforwardness:*—"I, the Lord, speak righteousness." The word is used in its ethical sense of "trustworthiness," or straightforwardness,—perfect correspondence between deeds and words. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*)

Vers. 21, 22. **A just God and a Saviour.**—*The just God and the Saviour:*—To human apprehension, light and darkness are not more opposed than justice and mercy. We cannot conceive how they possibly can meet together. But God's ways are not our ways; He is "a just God," leaving not the smallest possibility of escape for the smallest sin; and He is "a Saviour," freely and completely pardoning the most atrocious sinner. I. GOD IS A JUST GOD. The law of God is holy, and just, and good. It is man's plain, reasonable, bounden duty to obey these commandments; and when he fails in the performance of that duty, it is a righteous thing on the part of God to punish him. Some, indeed, have objected to this principle, and have supported their objection by perverting the Scripture doctrine of original sin, alleging that, if man's natural corruption render guilt inevitable, it is unjust in God to punish him for that guilt. To meet this objection in a plain practical manner, we would reply that, before any individual can reasonably plead this excuse in his own case, he must be able to prove that he has never been guilty of any transgression, except those only which were rendered inevitable by his original corruption; for the moment that he knowingly and wilfully breaks the law of God in any one instance, it becomes a righteous thing in the Lawgiver to inflict upon him the threatened punishment. II. GOD IN CHRIST IS A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR. Jesus Christ is an adequate substitute for the sinner. Every impediment to the most unbounded exercise of mercy being thus righteously removed, the invitation is given forth in all its blessed broadness and fulness unto all lands, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." (*D. Dickson, D.D.*) *The highest glory of the Divine character:*—I. These words present, in part at least, AN ASPECT OF APPALLING TERROR—"a just God." It is necessary to attend to this with becoming reverence and awe. Some deny it, or overlook it, regarding nothing but His mercy, and forgetting that there could be no occasion for the exercise of mercy did not His justice consign guilty men to punishment. 1. The fallen angels who have been cast down from their first estate, and are reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the last day, are monuments of His avenging justice. Adam and his transgressing partner exiled from Paradise, and that paradise accursed for their sakes; the inhabitants of the world before the flood, with the exception of a single family, swept away into a watery grave by a single stroke; Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain overwhelmed by a torrent of liquid fire from the skies; Mount Sinai itself with its clouded summit and trembling base, its flashing lightnings, its rolling thunders, and trumpet voices, all bespeak the terrors of that inflexible justice which overlooks no sin of men or angels, and suffers no transgression against the eternal authority and sovereignty of God to go unpunished. 2. Consider further what proofs are afforded of the justice of God in His dispensations with the offending race of men. The lot of the progenitor has now become that of all his posterity; and man everywhere is a suffering and dying creature, because he is everywhere a sinner. Consider the awful calamities which have attended the human race, from the first generations to the present. 3. These proofs of Divine justice may be further strengthened and enlarged by considering the very method He has chosen for displaying His mercy. Is He not a just God? Let the agonies of His beloved Son declare—let the cross of Jesus stand as a witness. II. THE DEEP AND GLORIOUS MYSTERY which, under another view, these words present. This glorious mystery consists in the union of these two characters in the one God of revelation—two characters which it appeared were hostile to each other—two characters which no other system ever did or ever could reconcile—and the difficulty of reconciling which has led some to deny the one, and some to deny the other. The mystery lies in the union of these two perfections of the Divine nature, justice and mercy—and in their united exercise towards the same sinful creatures. This the Gospel fully develops in the doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God, in His substituted obedience, His voluntary submission, His vicarious sacrifice. III. These words possess AN ASPECT OF DIVINE COMFORT FOR THE SOUL OF MAN. 1. The comfort depends on your reception of the salvation, which is essentially a salvation

from sin, in all those respects in which it has affected our nature, whether by guilt, pollution, degradation, or separation from God. 2. This Divine comfort is open to all. 3. The comfort never fails—never fluctuates—will accompany through life, and abound even in death—when all other sources of comfort fail. (*The Evangelist.*) *A just God and a Saviour:*—I. The grand truth is manifestly this—that THERE IS IN GOD AN EVERLASTING HARMONY BETWEEN THE JUST AND THE MERCIFUL. He is just, not in opposition to salvation, but because He is a Saviour. He is a Saviour, not in opposition to justice, but because He is justice seeking to save. 1. Let us mark the ground on which Isaiah founded that mighty truth, the supreme and solitary sovereignty of God—"I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is none beside Me." He had looked over the conflict of nations and the decay of empires, and seen one eternal God causing all to work His will. Realise that vision of God, and then the idea that He needs reconciling to Himself must instantly fall: for if God's justice needs reconciling to His mercy, then we have two Gods, the just and the merciful; and it is no longer true that He is God, "beside whom there is none else." Realise this, and the idea of the atonement which represents Christ as simply appeasing God the just and inducing Him to be merciful, passes away. God needs no reconciling to Himself: justice is in everlasting union with mercy. 2. Let us ask what is God's justice, and what His salvation? and then we shall see how they are in perfect harmony. God's justice is not merely the infliction of penalty; God's salvation is not merely deliverance from penalty. It is true that He does execute penalty and award retribution. We see it in the stern laws of life by which one error brings down life-long sorrow; one true effort reaps, inevitably, its blessed reward. There is a just God over all, for men ever reap just what they sow. But justice in God is something far grander than the mere exercise of retribution; it is the love of eternal truth, purity, righteousness; and the penalties of untruth, impurity, unrighteousness, are the outflashings of that holy anger which is founded in His love of the right, the pure, and the true. In the same way, God's salvation is more than the mere deliverance from penalty. It is, at the same time, the deliverance from evil, salvation from the cruel lusts of wrong; from the bondage of unholy passions growing into the giant-life of eternity; from the deep degradation and horrible selfishness of sin. Here, then, we see how His justice and His salvation are in perfect harmony. His salvation is to free men from the penalties of justice by making them righteous, true, and holy in Christ. 3. Take now one step further. Take the two great revelations of law and mercy, and we shall see how the law is merciful and mercy holy. (1) The law, the revelation of justice, came to lead men to God the Saviour. (*a*) The sense of immortality. Man, feeling that life is bounded by the present, will never be freed from evil. But sin destroys the sense of immortality, confines him to the narrow circle of the earth, and dares him to look beyond. Under its influence man forgets the grandeur of his nature, sinks into a mere animal, and becomes the slave of material things. To awaken him there is no other voice so powerful as that of the law he cannot obey—a law majestic in purity, and thundering penalties on transgression. The Divine voice in the law speaks to him, making him feel that he is greater than material things—greater than his sinful idols. He asks: Why does it mark out me? And the awful Sinai of conscience awakens at that voice, and the man feels the sublimity of his nature; and there is the beginning of salvation. (*b*) The sense of sin as a power in life. The voice of law shows him that in him is the power which the just God hates in holy anger. Cursing evil, it curses him. Thus law is the revelation of God the Saviour. Before its awful majesty and impossible claims man learns the weakness, and slavery, and horror of sin; and is prepared to accept the mercy that delivers him. (2) Christ, the revelation of God the Saviour, came to glorify God the just. The righteousness of God never was so revealed as in the loving Saviour of the world. Mount Sinai is less terrible than the purity of the man of Nazareth. Men felt it as they said, "Depart from us for we are sinful." Look now at His sufferings. Nothing could tear Him from them—nothing alter His course. Where is there a greater revelation of the righteousness of God? In the garden, the pure and holy One shudders at the contact with sin. Where can we see the awfulness of holiness so sublimely revealed as in that passion of woe? The just God was in the Saviour. Mark now the consummate power of Christ crucified; and what is it but a power rousing men to be holy as God is holy? Sin never was so slain as by Him whom sin slew. The law never was so attested as by Him who bore its penalty. II. We infer TWO LESSONS from this great truth. 1. The necessity of Christian endeavour. We are justified at once; for the germ of a righteous manhood exists in the first act of

faith. But the realisation of it is progressive. The Christian ideal is to be as Christ was, faithful, holy, and undefiled. Every day we have untruthfulness, selfishness, unbelief, to overcome. 2. The ground of Christian trust. Some men find security in the belief that they are delivered from the stern awards of justice. But we are not delivered from God's purity, we are reconciled to it. In the justice of God lies our confidence now, for He will make us righteous and holy in Christ. And this gives us hope in the midst of life's discipline, and explains much of its mystery. The object of His discipline is not to make us happy simply, but to train us into holiness, which is blessedness. There are men who trust in the infinite mercy of God, and feel that He will deliver them at last. Remember, that to remain in unbelief is to adopt the spirit which killed Christ. To refuse His salvation is to challenge the holy indignation of the Most High. (*E. L. Hull, B.A.*) "*Look unto Me!*"—Consider—I. How God is just. He will not deal unfairly with His creatures. He will not ascribe a single sin to them which they have not committed. He will not punish them beyond what their iniquities deserve. II. How He is at the same time a Saviour. III. What is the invitation which He addresses to a ruined world. Mark—1. To whom it is addressed. "All the ends of the earth." How broad an invitation! Who is there who can say, "I am not called"? 2. What does He invite us all to do? "Look unto Me!" "Behold Me with the eye of faith, as 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!' 'Look unto Me' as your refuge, your resource, your hope, your confidence, your almighty, all-sufficient, only Saviour! 'Look unto Me' for life, for pardon, for righteousness, for peace on earth, for heavenly happiness hereafter! 'Look unto Me,' by looking off from every object of your carnal confidence, from every vain deceitful hope which you have invented for yourselves, and by placing your entire, unbounded trust in the merits of My Cross!" 3. And what spiritual benefit shall that look of faith procure to them? "Be ye saved." Are there not those that look for mercy even though they look not unto Jesus? Consider seriously that expression, "There is none beside Me"—"A just God and a Saviour." Ye that are looking unto Him for salvation! remember that, in the very act by which the Lord hath delivered you from death He hath shown you also His horror and His hatred of your sins. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *Looking unto Jesus, the only Saviour:*—I. The gracious invitation. Notice—1. The benevolent Being by whom the invitation is given. 2. To whom it is addressed. Not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles: to every nation, and kindred, and tongue and people. 3. What is implied in the invitation. (1) The state of those to whom it is addressed. (2) That there is no obstacle whatever in the way of salvation. 4. What the invitation calls upon us to do in order to secure our salvation. "Look unto Me." In our natural state we are all looking from Him; and even when we are convinced of our lost condition, how prone we are to look to anything rather than to Him for salvation—our repentance, our obedience, our duties, our morality, our usefulness! What, then, is meant by looking to Him? It signifies the same thing with believing in Him. II. The powerful reasons by which that invitation is enforced. 1. He is God. 2. A just God. 3. A gracious God, for He is a Saviour. 4. The only God, and consequently the only Saviour. (*D. Rees.*)

Ver. 22. **Look unto Me.**—*Turning to God:*—"Turn ye to Me and be saved." The first imperative exhorts, the second promises. Jehovah desires two things—1. All men's turning to Him. 2. Their blessedness by so doing. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Look:*—The word does not correspond exactly to the English "look," but denotes the act of turning round in order to look in a different direction. The text, therefore, bears a strong analogy to those in which the heathen, when enlightened, are described as turning from their idols unto God (1 Thess. i. 9; Acts xiv. 15, xv. 19). (*J. A. Alexander.*) *The ends of the earth:*—The expression accords with the Jewish notion, that their land was situated in the midst of the earth, and that the countries which lay most remote from them, whose circumstances formed a contrast to theirs, were the ends or extremities of the earth. (*R. Macculloch.*) *Sovereignty and salvation:*—It has ever been one of the objects of the great Jehovah to teach mankind that He is God, and beside Him there is none else. I. How has God been teaching this lesson to mankind? 1. He has taught it to false gods and to the idolaters who have bowed before them. How hath God poured contempt on the ancient gods of the heathen! Where are they now? 2. Mark how God has taught this truth to empires. 3. To monarchs. Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, &c. 4. To the wise men of this world. 5. "Surely," says one, "the Church of God

does not need to be taught this." Yes, she does! How did the church in Canaan forget it when they bowed before other gods! If God gives us a special mission, we generally begin to take some honour to ourselves. II. SALVATION IS GOD'S GREATEST WORK, and in this He specially teaches us this lesson. Our text tells us how He teaches it. 1. By the person to whom He directs us. "Me." 2. By the means He tells us to use. "Look." 3. By the persons whom He calls to look. "All the ends of the earth." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Life for a look*:—The great sin of man, ever since he has fallen, has been that of idolatry. He is ever seeking to get away from God, who is real, but whom he cannot see, and to make for himself a god, which can only be an idol, but which pleases him because he can gaze upon it. And thus it comes to pass that, some with images of wood and stone, and others with carnal confidences and the like, put something else into the place which should be occupied by God alone; and they look to that something, and expect good from it, instead of looking for all good to God, and to Him alone. This looking to anything which usurps the place of God cannot but be most offensive to Him, and it must also be very disappointing to ourselves, for it is impossible for the false god to yield us any true comfort. Yet note the Lord's great patience even with those who are thus provoking Him by this idolatry of theirs. I. FOR SALVATION OUT OF ANY TROUBLE, WE SHOULD LOOK TO GOD ALONE. There are some troubles in which men do look to God alone. I have known even the most profane men turn to God, after a fashion, in the hour of supreme peril. Now, if men will act thus by the compulsion of great calamity, is there not sound reason why you should, cheerfully and willingly, do the same, and resort to God in every trial, and difficulty, and dilemma? Is any trial too slight for you to bring in prayer before Him? II. FOR ETERNAL SALVATION, WE MUST LOOK TO GOD ALONE. 1. Salvation is not to be found in any mere agent. 2. The great thing that thou needest to know, and look at, and rely upon, is the mercy of God. 3. Since God says, "Look unto Me," let me ask you whether you are looking unto Him as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word? 4. Especially is it intended that we should look unto God as He reveals Himself in the person and work of His dear Son. 5. Settle this matter in your mind as an absolute certainty that, whoever and whatever you are, you may look to God in Christ, and be saved. 6. Let no feeling of thine beat thee off from looking to Christ. (*Ibid.*) *Characteristics of salvation*:—I. It is a SIMPLE salvation—plain, clear, distinct, intelligible in its terms. It is, in this respect, unlike the false religions referred to in ver. 19, whose utterances, being involved in designed obscurity and ambiguity, are there represented as "spoken in secret, and in dark places of the earth." Such were the dubious responses which came from the Delphic oracle, the Cave at Lebadea, the Cumean Sybil, the Eleusinian Ceres, the soothsayers and necromancers of Egypt, Phœnicia, and Persia. The salvation of the Gospel is so clear and perspicuous that "he who runs may read." II. It is a FREE salvation, uncumbered and unconditional in its offers. There is no costly, protracted, elaborate preparation or probation needed. No painful penances; no rites, no fastings, no lustrations, no priestly absolutions. In ver. 13, God says of Cyrus (and He says the same in a nobler sense of a Greater than the earthly liberator), "He shall let go My captives, not for price nor reward." This is not, indeed, after the manner of men, nor in accordance with that natural legality of spirit which loves to fetter itself with conditions and terms. If the prophet had bid the Syrian leper of old "do some great thing," Naaman would have cordially assented; but he could not brook the trifling expedient of dipping himself in the river Jordan. III. It is a RIGHTEOUS salvation (vers. 19, 21). See Rom. iii. 26. It is a salvation which has been secured in accordance with the principles of everlasting truth and rectitude. Let us not, however, misinterpret the relation of justice to mercy, as if between these two Divine attributes there existed any antagonism,—as if they represented two conflicting principles (similar to the Magian), one of which had to be propitiated before the other could exercise its benignant will, or go forth on its benignant behests. Nay, they are in perfect harmony. Love can hold out her blissful sceptre only when standing by the throne of justice. In that glorious salvation, every attribute of the Divine nature has been magnified and made honourable. IV. It is a SURE salvation. The rites of the heathen leave their votaries in uncertainty, groping in the dark. Their feelings and experiences are well described in ver. 16. In impressive and sublime contrast with this, Jehovah avows in ver. 23, "I have sworn by Myself: the word" or "truth" (Lowth) "is gone out of My mouth in righteousness"; and in ver. 19, "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain"; or ver. 17, "Ye shall

not be ashamed nor confounded." Truly the covenant of grace is a covenant "well ordered in all things, and sure." V. It is here further unfolded to us as the ONLY salvation (ver. 24). Bishop Lowth renders it, "Only to Jehovah belongeth salvation and power." "Neither is there salvation in any other." VI. It is an ETERNAL salvation (ver. 17). (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Looking to Christ*:—Faith is one of the principal subjects of sacred Scripture, and is expressed in various forms: sometimes in plain terms, but more frequently in metaphors borrowed from earthly things, and particularly from the actions of the body. I. EXPLAIN THE DUTY HERE EXPRESSED BY THE METAPHOR OF LOOKING. Observe in general, that a man's looks often discover his condition and the frame of his mind. Hence we can understand a look of surprise and consternation, of sorrow and compassion, a look of joy, the look of a perishing supplicant, or of a needy, expecting dependant. If an agonising patient casts an eager look upon his physician, we understand it to be a silent petition for relief. Hence "looking to Christ implies those suitable dispositions and exercises of heart towards Him, which are expressed by the earnest and significant looks of persons in a distressed condition towards their deliverer." 1. Looking to Christ implies a particular notice and distinct knowledge of Him. 2. An importunate eagerness for relief from Him (Psa. xxv. 15). 3. A wishful expectation of deliverance from Him (Psa. lxix. 3). It may be illustrated by the history of the lame beggar (Acts iii. 4, 5). 4. A humble dependence upon Him for salvation (2 Chron. xx. 12). 5. A universal cheerful submission to His authority (Psa. cxxiii. 1, 2). 6. A hearty approbation of Him as a Saviour, and supreme affection to Him. Love is often expressed by looks. 7. Joy and gratitude for His delivering goodness. II. URGE YOU TO LOOK TO HIM BY SEVERAL WEIGHTY CONSIDERATIONS. This is the great duty of saints and sinners, and consequently of every one in all ages and places, even to "the ends of the earth." 1. It is salvation we are called upon to pursue. 2. It may be obtained upon the easiest terms, without any personal merit, viz., by a "look." 3. It is Immanuel, the incarnate God, who commands and invites us to look. 4. He is the glorious and affecting Object to which we are to look. 5. Our looking shall not be in vain, for He is God, who engages to save those who look to Him. 6. It is vain to look elsewhere for salvation, and needless to fear His grace should be controlled by another; for He is God, so there is none else. 7. We, in particular, are invited, being especially meant by "the ends of the earth." (*S. Davies, M.A.*) *The saving look*:—I. THAT ALL MANKIND ARE ENSLAVED TO SIN. II. THAT THE UNIVERSAL DESIRE OF MANKIND IS FOR HAPPINESS. III. THAT THE ONLY SOURCE OF REAL HAPPINESS IS TO BE FOUND IN GOD. "Look unto Me." "I am God, and beside Me," &c. IV. THAT THE SALVATION WHICH GOD HAS PROVIDED IS BOUNDLESS IN ITS PROVISIONS, AND UNLIMITED IN ITS EXTENT. "All the ends of the earth." V. THAT THE RECEPTION OF THIS BLESSING IS NEVERTHELESS CONDITIONAL. "Look unto Me," &c. What does this imply? 1. An apprehension of the object presented. 2. Of the good it proposes to impart. 3. An earnest desire to obtain it. 4. A vigorous use of appointed means. VI. THE GROUND OF ENCOURAGEMENT. "I am God"; and therefore, know that you need it — have prepared it for you — invite you to partake of it — promise to impart it—warn you of the consequences of refusing it. None other can save you. "Now is the accepted time," &c. (*R. Shepherd.*) *Life by looking*:—Sin came by an unbelieving look. Eve saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the eyes. Distrusting God, she looked and plucked and ate. Salvation comes from a believing and trustful look. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved." To those "who look for Him" will He appear with salvation. I. AS SIN FIRST ENTERED, SO IT STILL ENTERS. It enters through the eye. He who first saw the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment lusted for them, went after them, took and hid them. Therefore it is wise to say "Look not upon the wine when it is red," for temptations come through the eye. The Scriptures tell of those whose "eyes are full of sin" and cannot cease. This truth is realised in our own mournful experience. We look on injuries and brood over them. We contemplate objects of desire and lust after them. When it has conceived lust bringeth forth sin. II. SALVATION COMES BY THE SAME EASY METHOD. "Look unto Me and be ye saved." 1. This is a spiritual vision. Some regard that which we call spiritual as unreal and dreamy, whereas carnality is unreal, and spiritual things are, of all, the most actual. 2. It is an immediate vision. Of our physical functions sight is the most immediate. So faith is the most positive and assuring. You end a dispute by saying, but I saw it with my

own eyes and so I know it. The believer is able to speak thus of Him whom he knows, for he has seen Him. III. HOW ARE WE TO SEE CHRIST? In what respects? 1. As a Saviour. 2. As an Intercessor. 3. As King and Master. IV. THERE ARE SPECIAL TIMES WHEN WE SHOULD LOOK EXCLUSIVELY TO CHRIST. 1. In all our acts of public worship. 2. In temptations. Are you injured? Nothing so cleanses the heart of stinging pain as this. Do unholy desires annoy? Here is the remedy. 3. In approaching weakness. Though the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. By looking the light will increase more and more to the perfect day. God has promised to show us the path of life. Evangelist asked the Pilgrim, "Seest thou yonder light?" "I think I do." Evangelist by a long looking had acquired keen vision, and Pilgrim found his eyes opened as he looked. The way grew clearer, and you know the glorious end to which he came. His weakness was perfected in his Leader's strength. The subject before us has a twofold application. 1. For self-examination. In our worship have we been looking only to God whom we have professed to address? In hymn and prayer and preaching have our acts been merely formal and professional? 2. By way of invitation. The invitation is to all, even to "the ends of the earth." (*A. Whyte, D.D.*) *Salvation offered*:—These words show us that we have need to be saved. We have to be saved from enormous evils. But there is a great change that must take place in everyone before he can be saved. There is no salvation to an unregenerate man. Let me remind you what God intends when He says, "Look unto Me." 1. He bids you look to Him for mercy, to save you gratuitously, without bringing to Him anything. 2. We should look to the Son of God, as well as to the Father—for His meritorious intercession—that we may be saved. 3. Look to God the Spirit, as well as to the Father and the Son. He who wrought mightily in the persecutor Saul, to make him an eminent trophy of grace and a large benefactor to his fellow-creatures, has no less power, condescension and goodness, to extend to you, and to give to you all the same principle, the same courage, and the same perseverance. 4. The same blessed duty rests on all of you who by the grace of God have looked to Him and lived. You are called to prosecute your journey heavenwards, from one degree of faith and grace and comfort and joy to another, till you reach your eternal home, every day looking to God that you may be saved. 5. But He never meant His servants to be selfish, as He is beneficent and good; and therefore let me bid you notice the extent of this invitation: "All the ends of the earth." Then it is God's will that Japan, and China, and India must look to Him and be saved, as well as we. At the time these words were uttered by the prophet, we were the ends of the world to them, as China, Japan, and Borneo are to us; yea, we were beyond the limits of the known world at that time. And we have heard the good news and believed. (*B. W. Noel, M.A.*) *A Saviour*:—I. The everlasting God, He who alone is God, declares Himself to be THE SOURCE OF SALVATION. II. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE PLAN OF SALVATION. "All the ends of the earth." Men of all tribes and kingdoms shall be made to feel the power of Almighty grace. The plan of salvation is adapted to every variety of circumstance. The monarch on the throne of vast empire—he is seated there in the sight of God a poor rebel, and he needs salvation. Or take the other extreme—the lowliest and obscurest of the children of men—he is a sinner before God, an immortal creature. III. GOD'S SIMPLE COMMAND to the guilty and the lost, while announcing Himself as the Source of salvation, and while proclaiming its universality, is "Look unto Me." 1. To look unto God, as the Source of salvation, implies knowledge of Him. 2. The exercise of faith. 3. Confidence in God. 4. We may give emphasis to the expression, "Unto Me." God requires that you should look away from all other objects which would interfere with the entire yielding up of the whole soul to Him. 5. There should be in the mind of the believer a full assurance that He is able to save, and willing to save. (*G. Fisk, LL.B.*) *Salvation obtained only by looking unto Jesus*:—I. THE INVITATION, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," may be regarded as involving an offer of an invaluable blessing, a statement of the means by which the blessing is secured, and finally, an intimation of the extent of the offer made. II. THE REASON WHY THAT INVITATION SHOULD BE COMPLIED WITH. "For I am God, and there is none else." There are two ideas involved in this statement. 1. That Jesus is the true God, and therefore able to save. 2. That on Him only should we depend, for there is no other being in the universe who is able to rescue an immortal soul from eternal ruin. We see from this subject—1. The folly and danger of unbelief. 2. The

habitual duty of all true Christians. It is to look unto Jesus at every stage of their spiritual history. (*P. Grant.*) *The Divine invitation*:—I. THE SPEAKER. II. THE PERSONS ADDRESSED. III. THE BLESSINGS PROMISED. IV. THE MANNER OF OBTAINING THEM. (*Bp. R. Bickersteth, D.D.*) *Looking to Christ*:—I. If you look unto the Lord Jesus you will see GOD MANIFEST. II. If you look to Jesus you will see LOVE INCARNATE—Divine love. According to the medium through which it shines, the same lamp can be made to give a radiance of a very different colour, a cheering or a gloomy light. In a sinful world like this, could you not easily imagine a vindictive incarnation and manifestation of the blessed God, which would have brought into the midst of our sinfulness the consuming fire of His holiness, which, thus coming in contact with our combustible corruption, would have turned our earth into an early perdition? But what was the actual fact? "The Word dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." III. Looking unto the Lord Jesus, there is yet another sight with which the earnest sinner is regaled, and that is RIGHTEOUS RECONCILIATION. IV. Whosoever looks at Him long enough, simply enough, intently enough, will find in Him TRANSFUSED IMMORTALITY, life transmitted from that Saviour unto his own soul. V. If you look to Jesus simply as God reveals Him in His Word, and as He is in Himself, you will see A LOVE-ATTRACTING AND A LIFE-ASSIMILATING SAVIOUR; a Saviour who, when he attracts your love, will assimilate your life to His. (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*) *Looking unto Jesus*:—In these words, we have the same sort of invitation that we find in the New Testament: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden"; "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith"; "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." Such texts as these contain the very secret of Christianity. They meet all our wants, they heal all our sorrows, they save our souls. Christianity consists in having to do with Christ, in having the love of Christ implanted in the soul, and then the spirit of Christ guiding and influencing us every moment of our earthly history. I. AS TO THE PEOPLE WHO ARE ADDRESSED. "All the ends of the earth"—all men. II. WHY ARE THEY TO LOOK? "And be saved." Now, under the New Testament you and I are directed especially to Jesus Christ. He tells us that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him. Look upon this for your encouragement, what faith sees when she looks upon Jesus. She finds love in Jesus, pardon in Jesus, peace in Jesus, eternal happiness in Jesus. And this is so with God. He sees the sinner in Jesus, He is satisfied with His atoning work, and accepts the believing sinner for His sake. III. HOW THEY ARE TO LOOK. The term "look" in the Word of God is ordinarily intended to mean "belief." That we should look to the Lord Jesus expecting something, just as the lame man looked at Peter and John at the Beautiful gate of the temple, expecting to receive something of them. 1. If you can take this view of Christ, that He intends your salvation, then there will be a look of real sorrow for sin. We shall mourn for sin on the one hand, but rejoice in Christ Jesus on the other. 2. A look of acquiescence, of trust and confidence. 3. A look of prayer. (*J. W. Reeve, M.A.*) *The saving look*:—I. THE NATURE OF THE COMMAND, or what it is to look at the Lord Jesus Christ. 1. The very idea of looking to the Saviour, implies a looking off ourselves, our idols, our sins, our righteousnesses, and our unrighteousnesses. It is to look off our duties, our prayers, our tears, our humiliations, our resolutions, and simply and singly to look to Christ for salvation. 2. To look at Christ for salvation implies a conscious need of salvation. 3. To look at Christ is to look at Him not only as the very Christ of God, but as the Son of God. 4. To look at Christ is to look to Him for a whole salvation. II. THE NECESSITY OF THE PRECEPT. We have a natural disinclination to it; we naturally look at any other object. When in the world, and of the world, this is grossly the case. Our friends, our families, our prospects, profits, our pleasures, our sins, form our world. If we withdraw from its grossness, and are mingled up with its more decent enjoyments, and add something of religion; its forms, its ceremonies, its worship, quite occupy us. Our little orbit of vision is full, quite full; we can look at nothing else. A mere hand before the eyes hides the sun. We think ourselves far better than many, far from being so vile as some; and even after the Holy Spirit has convinced us of sin, yet still what backwardness to look to Christ! III. THE BLESSED EFFECT OF OBEYING THE PRECEPT. Salvation. 1. How wonderful is this salvation—that one real look at Christ has eternal life in it; that if the vilest sinner do but look at Him, he is saved even at the eleventh hour! 2. The longer thou livest, the more the Spirit will open the depravities of thy nature to thee. As He does this,

pray that He may open the very grace and glories of Jesus to thee. 3. When, through the power of the Holy Spirit, this peace is established in thy conscience, through the precious blood of the Cross, seek its increase into the full assurance of hope, in all the ways of holy walking, still looking to Jesus for all the supplies of His grace and Spirit. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *The extent of the Gospel call*:—I. AN OBJECT OF ATTRACTION. "Me"; the true God—the one Saviour, and none else but Me. But in what capacity is Christ exhibited in the Gospel? 1. As a Mediator. 2. As the Lord our righteousness. 3. As the Fountain to wash away sin. 4. As the sinner's Life. II. AN ACT CALLED FORTH. "Look unto Me," or as some would understand the original, "Turn your face to Me from false idols." This act implies—1. Knowledge. 2. Faith. 3. Conversion. Every man has gone astray from God. 4. A waiting posture. III. THE EXTENT OF THIS CALL. "All the ends of the earth." This phrase imples—1. That all men have gone astray from God. 2. That God is no respecter of persons. 3. That there is salvation in no other. 4. The sufficiency there is in Christ to every returning soul. IV. THE BENEFITS inseparably connected with a looking to Jesus Christ. "And be saved"—not be made rich for threescore years and ten. No! "and be saved." (*T. Jones.*) *Looking unto Christ*:—I. IN WHAT MANNER WE ARE TO LOOK TO CHRIST. 1. With an eye of faith. To direct our thoughts to Him in the same manner as to any other person, is not enough. 2. With eager desire of relief. 3. With gratitude and love. 4. As an example of righteousness whom it behoves us to follow. 5. As our Intercessor. II. SOME CONSIDERATIONS TO ENFORCE THE DUTY. 1. Who is the glorious Object to which you are required to look? None other than the Son of God. 2. Who it is that requires you to look. 3. It is salvation for which we are to look. 4. The facility of the duty here enjoined. 5. The boundless extent of the invitation. (*A. Ramsay, M.A.*) *Looking within, looking around, and looking up*:—Let us hear the story of the Look—a story in three chapters. I. Chapter the first. HOW HE LOOKED WITHIN. I do not know much about him, except this. How it came about, indeed, I know not. Whether it was some sermon that smote him; whether it was the death of some neighbour; whether it was some peril of his own; whether it was some sharp sickness that overtook him, I know not; but so it was. One day that man stopped and looked in at himself, and he said, "There is no mistake about it; I am wrong, I can see. I am all wrong, and I will just set to work, and I will make things right. I will turn over a new leaf." And he set to work, and he began to tie up his sins with the strong cords of his resolutions and his good desires, and there he set them all of a row. This was never going to be indulged any more, and this should not, and the other should be denied. All went well for a day, and then something or other came across him, and snap went the cords, and up sprang one old sin. Snap went the cords, and another sprang at him. "There," he said, "I knew that it was no good my trying," and he just gave it up. Who is that? You. I think I see here a man who has turned over a new leaf. Here it is all white and clean without a blot. Ah, there is a blot now. Oh, there is another smudge; there is a mistake. If we cannot find a better way than turning over new leaves, we shall soon give it up in despair. Besides, if thou couldst do so, what would it do for thee? Here is a man who has got into low water, and he cannot make ends meet, and one day a friend steps in to advise him and finds him in a state of glee, and the man says, "I have got credit for this, and I have received this"; and there he is filling up the column of his receipts. "Why, what does this mean?" says the friend—"My dear fellow, you have forgotten the 'brought forward.' You have left out the 'carried over.'" That dreadful "carried over!" That awful "brought forward!" What about the past? There it is, what can I do with it? We have not done with that chapter yet, for there is a second part of it. You say to me, "Yes; I can see that if I am ever going to be what I want to be, I must just come right up to God, and let Him do it." But, dear friend, what ails thee? "Well, you see, I do not know. I have not got any faith. I have not got any repentance. I have not got any earnestness. What is a man like I am to do?" Hast thou never learnt how to make thy hindrances into thy helps? Hast thou never learnt how to make thy very need thy claim upon thy God? I pray thee now, just as thou art, with all thy sense of want, lift up thine eyes. Why, the only thing that I know about repentance is what I feel in my heart when I see Jesus. I have never found any place of repentance except at the foot of the Cross. The only thing that I know about faith is what springs up in my heart when I look at Jesus. Faith does not come from

looking within. Let thy whole soul say, "I will look unto Him, and be saved." II. Chapter the second. HOW HE LOOKED ROUND. You say, "There is to-morrow; people would notice the change, and I should not like to tell them that I had given myself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and how I was going to be His soldier and His servant; and there would be the sneer, and scorn, and ridicule, and one would perhaps try this temptation, and another would see whether I could bear the other, and I do not know that I could." The Gospel is, that Christ comes right to me and takes my hand. He lives, and He comes to thee and me, and He saith, "Thou art setting forth to be My child and My servant, and I am never going to let thee be alone." Now, wilt thou put thy hand in His? But we have not done with the second chapter quite yet. I can think of some one going a step farther and saying, "Well, I do look to Jesus, you know, and I am looking to Him, and I have been trying to look to Him, but somehow or other I cannot get on." Why not? Well, it may be that you are looking around still. Some of you say to me, "Well, you see, I look to Him, but I cannot rejoice. I do not feel happy." Well, I do not know that it says, "Feel happy." It says, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved." I think that we must let the Lord Jesus Christ take care of our feelings. All we have got to do is just to look to Him. But we look around at one man and another. Somebody says to me, "John Bunyan went for three months weeping and crying. I am a dry eyes; I cannot shed a tear." Well, who wants you to shed a tear? What have you got to do with other people? We will look no more round. III. Chapter the third. HOW HE LOOKED UP. You must look up. Will you? (*M. Guy Pearse.*) *Would you be saved?*—The object of salvation is to bring a man into harmonious communion with God. I. ALL MEN NEED TO BE SAVED. We need to be saved—1. From our propensity to wrong-doing. 2. We need also to be saved from our spirit of unrest. 3. From our weakness in being overcome by pain and trouble. 4. From our fear of death. II. GOD DOES NOT FORCE ANY MAN TO BE SAVED AGAINST HIS WILL. In the occurrences of this life we may have to employ force sometimes to save the body of a fellow-creature against his will. But God cannot act so, because He is God, and would have men love Him. The only way God has of compelling us to follow Him is through the attraction of His love, as shown in Jesus Christ, who laid down His life on the Cross for love of us. Love is the strongest power in the universe, for God is Love. III. THE POWER AND SIMPLICITY OF THE SALVATION OFFERED TO US. 1. Its power. Salvation does not exist anywhere except in God. We ministers are only like the boys with handbills inviting you in to buy salvation from our Master without money. 2. The simplicity of the salvation. It is to be had for a look; but it must be—(1) A penitent look. (2) A look of entreaty, the sort of look that a man has who is trying to save himself from drowning, and seeing you, calls to you for help. (3) A look of hope. (4) A look of faith. IV. IT IS A UNIVERSAL INVITATION, embracing, "all the ends of the earth." You know what the "ends" are. When a coat becomes frayed, or a shawl worn, the ends are of no use and you cut them off. The outcasts of men, of what use are they? This salvation is for the despised ones, for the very "ends" that the world throws away; and, better still, it is for you. (*W. Birch.*) *The Gospel simple, rich, universal:*—I. HERE IS THE SIMPLEST METHOD. "Look unto Me." I give the highest praise to the man of science who can unify the manifold facts of the world, and to the philosopher who can reduce to order the strange and complex phenomena of the mind. How I should thank the God who expresses His will for me in a single word, and that word so easy and unencumbered. II. HERE IS THE RICHEST BOON. "And be ye saved." Salvation is a treasure unutterably and inconceivably great. If it begins with "no condemnation," it ends with "no separation." There is pardon in it, and holiness, and wisdom, and power; there is the blessed life here, and hereafter there is the life of "full and everlasting and passionless renown." III. HERE IS THE WIDEST OUTLOOK. "All the ends of the earth"—thus far the love of the Father and the grace of the Son and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit travel and reach. There is nothing calculating, niggardly, arithmetical in God's largesse and bounty. (*A. Smellie, M.A.*) *Look and be saved* (vers. 22–25):—I. A BLESSED INVITATION. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." 1. The subject to which it refers is unspeakably momentous. The word "saved" is easily pronounced, but who can comprehend the fulness of its meaning? 2. The duty it enjoins for securing this great blessing is exceedingly simple. "Look unto Me." Many are quite confounded at the simplicity of the Gospel terms

of salvation. 3. The range of this invitation is unlimited. "All the ends of the earth." The call is wide as the world. 4. The ground on which it rests is highly encouraging. "For I am God, and there is none else." In a previous verse it is said, "They have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save." The idols of the heathen are altogether impotent. But our God is able to save, and He alone is able. At the same time, something more than mere power is necessary, and that something is not wanting in Him to whom we are invited to look. He is "a just God and a Saviour." II. AN EMPHATIC PROCLAMATION. "I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return; that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." In reference to this subjection two things are stated—1. Its universality. In the time of Elijah, God had reserved unto Himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal; but here we have a period predicted when idols shall be utterly abolished. 2. Its certainty. "I have sworn by Myself." These emphatic expressions denote that the purpose was made in the most solemn manner, and ratified in the most sacred form. It is a purpose, therefore, that will be infallibly executed. "From henceforth expecting," says the apostle of the enthroned Redeemer, "till His enemies be made His footstool." And has He not ample grounds for such an expectation? The desires even of the righteous shall be granted, their hope will not be disappointed; how certain, then, must be the fulfilment of the desires and hopes of Him whom the Father heareth always? Is it not said, "Ask of Me"? &c. III. A WISE RESOLUTION. "Surely, shall one say," &c. (ver. 24). The two blessings which are here referred to, are absolutely necessary to salvation, and all who are enlightened from above will be led to apply for them where alone they are to be found. It is here stated, "Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength": let each of us determine, by Divine aid, to be that one. It must be a personal resolution, as the surrender is a personal surrender. It is added, "Even to Him shall men come, *i.e.* they will apply to Him for these blessings. On the other hand, He will be made known by terrible things in righteousness to those who refuse to seek His face, and continue to rebel against His authority. "All that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed." IV. AN IMPORTANT DECLARATION. "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." (*Anon.*) *The metaphor of looking*:—In the language of metaphor the mind has got an eye as well as the body. We say, "Look at this fact; look at this or that other historic personage; look at Luther; look at Julius Cæsar; look at Abraham"; and we all understand what is meant when such language is employed. It is in some such a way that we are told to look at the Saviour. (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*) *Looking to God*:—While the moon looketh directly upon the sun, she is bright and beautiful; but if she once turn aside, and be left to herself, she loseth all her glory, and enjoys but only a shadow of light, which is her own. (*J. Trapp.*) *The contrite soul must look away from self*:—Passing through a graveyard with her parents, a little girl drew them after her to look at a beautiful stone figure of the Christ, with a face full of suffering and yet of tenderest pity, leaning upon a massive marble cross. As they paused to look, she held her head down and said in a low voice, "I can hardly lift up my eyes to look at Him, I have done so many wrong things." It is just because we have done so many "wrong things" that we have need to lift up our eyes to look at Him. (*Quiver.*) *Looking*:—Some years ago I was asked by a workman to see a dying fellow-creature, as this man said in his peculiar way, to "pilot him to heaven." I went, and found that the poor man was too far gone to speak. All he could do was to look. I did not know whether he could hear, for when I spoke he only looked at me. Wishing at least to show him the way of salvation, I took a picture from the wall, turned it, and then drew on it with my lead pencil the figure of the Cross with Jesus upon it. I held this picture before the man's eyes, and then he looked at me in an expressive way, and tried to nod his head. Shortly after he died. (*W. Birch.*) *Looking up and lifted up*:—In Mrs. Fletcher's biography she tells us of a convert who had a strange dream. He thought he was down a very steep well in the night, and, looking up, he saw a single star shining far above him, and it seemed to let down lines of silver light that took hold upon him and lifted him up. Then he looked down and began to go down. He looked up and began to go up, and he looked down again and began to go down; and he found that by simply keeping his eye on that star he rose out of the well, and his foot stood on the firm ground. A parable is in the dream. If you look down,

you go down; if you look up, you go up. There must be first the looking up before there can be the lifting up. (*J. S. Drummond.*)

Ver. 24. **Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.**—*Our righteousness and strength*:—It is important to us, in reading the Old Testament, and more particularly its prophetical portions, to take with us as our guide the well-known statement of the angel to the evangelist John: "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The preceding verse contains one of the most remarkable predictions concerning the kingdom of Christ in the Old Testament, and in this prediction the kingdom of Christ is described as becoming universal and permanent. After such a prediction as that, we might have expected to find the prophet speaking of numbers being brought to acknowledge and to bow the knee to Christ. Instead of that, however, he speaks of one—a single, isolated, unknown individual; and he introduces to us this solitary individual as if the state of his mind, the subjugation of his heart to Christ, were an indication of the complete fulfilment of the most glorious prophecies of the universality of Christ's kingdom. In looking for the progress of the Redeemer's kingdom, we are too much disposed to undervalue individual conversions. We may trace the progress of Christ's kingdom in the subjugation of a single heart to the Saviour. I. THE STATE OF THIS INDIVIDUAL'S MIND IN RELATION TO THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST. The term "righteousness" is one of those words in the Bible which it is of the first importance that you should thoroughly understand. It includes all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us. Mark three stages in the history of this man's mind. 1. The first thing a man does when he is awakened to a sense of his need of some righteousness, is to try to find it in himself. But when once brought to see his own righteousness aright, he sees innumerable defects. 2. Look at the second step in this man's history. We might have expected that the man would have received this righteousness with promptitude; but he sets himself as deliberately against the righteousness of God as against the law of God. Long will he struggle against the friendly hand that would lead him to the Cross of Christ; but when brought there, he will exclaim, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." 3. Mark the third stage of the human mind in reference to the righteousness of Christ. This man appropriates it. II. HIS STATE OF FEELING IN REFERENCE TO THE STRENGTH OF CHRIST. This latter word, "strength," conveys an idea totally distinct from, and additional to, that suggested by the first. By the "righteousness" of Christ we always understand what the Lord Jesus has done for us; by the "strength" of Christ we always understand what the Lord has done in us; and it is the combination of these two that works out, in all its completeness, the salvation of an individual sinner. When he is first awakened to a sense of his own condition, he naturally tries to put forth his own strength, but he soon discovers that this is the wrong order. It is just in this way that the conviction is forced upon his mind that he has no strength in himself, but that there is strength for him in Christ. If you have sought Christ's strength and are conscious that you possess it, you must arise with vigour in the strength of the new man; and then, and not till then, will you go forth free. Mark the connection between the strength of Christ and the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of Christ is laid hold of first, the strength of Christ is appropriated next. "Unto Him shall men come." That is the practical conclusion of the whole matter. (1) You ought to come. (2) You may come. (*S. Luke.*) *Five Divine declarations*:—God's power over mankind is exerted in a way of grace, although it is also true that His power is put forth in a way of judgment towards those who reject His mercy. I read, with delight, the expressions of my text as the decrees, and determinations, and promises, and declarations of the God of grace, who affirms that men shall say, "In the Lord have we righteousness and strength," &c. There are five Divine declarations in the text. I. THERE SHALL BE A PEOPLE WHO SHALL OWN THE TRUTH CONCERNING GOD. Our version says, "Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength"; but there are other readings which appear to be more accurate. "Men shall say, In the Lord is righteousness and strength," would be quite as correct a rendering, or even more so. It means that there shall be a people who shall confess that in God there is righteousness and strength. 1. They shall see these to be His attributes. 2. They will see that all their righteousness and strength must be found in God. 3. They shall be prepared openly to avow it. "Surely shall

one say," &c. II. Men will not only own the truth concerning God, but THEY WILL ACT UPON IT. "Even to Him shall men come." III. THOSE WHO DO COME SHALL BE ASHAMED OF THEIR FORMER OPPOSITION. "All that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed." 1. There are some who are angry with God's providence. 2. Some are incensed against God because of His law and its penalty. 3. Others are incensed against God because of the great plan of salvation. 4. Some are even incensed against the Saviour Himself. IV. The fourth Divine declaration is, that THE LORD'S PEOPLE SHALL ALL BE JUSTIFIED. "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified." V. THOSE WHO COME TO CHRIST, AND ARE JUSTIFIED IN HIM, SHALL GLORY. What does the text mean when it says that they shall glory? Sometimes, when I have been preaching in Wales, or among Methodists, when I have set before them good, rich, Gospel truth, perhaps two or three have shouted, at the same time, "Glory!" And though it has not increased the solemnity of the service, it has added a good deal of vivacity to it. And, really, when we see what Divine grace has done for us, we often feel inclined to cry out, "Glory! Glory be to God!" 1. Have not many of you felt the glory in your soul, even if you have not uttered it with your mouth? 2. But the Lord's true people will not keep that glory all to themselves. They shall so glory that they shall speak about it to others. 3. Those who truly know Christ will glory in Him alone. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Even to Him shall men come.**—*Men coming to Christ:*—The doctrinal truth, deduced from these words, is the certainty of men, as sinners, coming to Christ, and being saved in Him. It is but necessary to direct attention to the meaning and import of the terms, in the text, as seen in their connection with the context. I. The word "HIM," viewed in its connection, points out several important particulars concerning Christ, His person, office, and work. 1. His person. The word "Him" refers to Jehovah, as its antecedent. Redemption is the work of Jehovah. Christ is Jehovah—our great God and Saviour. But Christ is man, too. This constitutes the glory of Christ's person. He is a God-man. 2. His office. The Mediator between God and man. 3. His work. The law is obeyed, magnified, and made honourable, its penalty borne, infinite justice satisfied, and everlasting righteousness brought in. II. They COME to Him. To come to Christ is to believe upon Him. III. They SHALL come. The language expresses certainty. This certainty depends upon—1. The purpose of God. 2. The work of Christ. 3. The agency of the Holy Spirit. IV. MEN shall come. No sinner who comes to Christ will be lost. Men do come to Christ and are saved. 1. They are justified. 2. Sanctified. 3. Preserved. (*J. I. Dunlop.*)

Ver. 25. **In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified.**—*The believer justified and glorying in the Redeemer:*—This passage is prophetic of the Messiah. Ver. 23 is quoted in Romans xiv. 11, and applied to Christ. I. Let us then attend to the assertion that "IN THE LORD SHALL THE SEED OF ISRAEL BE JUSTIFIED." 1. They are justified as it is through Him they obtain the forgiveness of their sins, and the acceptance of their persons in the sight of God. 2. As it is through Him they acquire a right to all the privileges of the children of God in a present and future state. II. HOW WE OUGHT TO GLORY IN HIM BY WHOM WE ARE THUS JUSTIFIED. 1. By entertaining suitable affections towards our Divine Redeemer. 2. Those who glory in Christ must avow their regard to Him before the world, and particularly by a frequent and devout attendance on the ordinances of the Gospel. 3. We must glorify Him by an active and steady zeal to promote the interests of His kingdom. 4. The seed of Israel are to glorify Christ by their patience and constancy under all their afflictions, especially those that are endured for His sake. (*A. Hunter, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XLVI.

VERS. 1-4. **Bel boweth down.**—*Bel and Nebo* are the Jupiter and Mercury of the Babylonian pantheon (they are represented by these planets), and were the supreme deities in Babylon at this time. Bel (*Bilu*) is the Babylonian form of the Hebrew *Ba'al* (=lord), and like that word is a generic name applicable

to any deity. When used as a proper name it usually denotes Merodach (Marduk), the tutelary divinity of the city of Babylon (Jer. l. 2, li. 44); although there was an older Bel, who is spoken of as his father. The elevation of Bel-Merodach to the chief place among the older gods, as recorded in the mythical Chaldean account of the Creation (Tablet iv. 1 ff.), is the legendary counterpart of the ascendency acquired by Babylon over the more ancient cities of the Euphrates valley. Nebo (*Nabu*) was the son of Merodach; the chief seat of his worship being Borsippa, in the vicinity of Babylon. His name, which is supposed to be from the same root as the Hebrew *nābî'*, "prophet," seems to mark him out as the "speaker" of the gods (another point of contact with Mercury, "the chief speaker"—Acts xiv. 12). He was also regarded as the inventor of writing. The frequency with which the Chaldean kings are named after him (Nabo-polassar, Nebu-chadnezzar, Nabo-nidus) has been thought to show that he was the patron deity of the dynasty. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *A contrast—idols and God:*—1. This is an incident in the fall of Babylon. Cyrus has broken in, and the mighty city lies open to the Persian army, exasperated by long waiting at her gates. The blood of her nobles has flowed freely over the marble floors of her palaces; most of her defenders are slain. Women and children are cowering in the inmost recesses of their homes, or filling the streets with screams of terror and appeals for help, as they fly from the brutal soldiery. The final and most sanguinary conflicts have taken place within the precincts of the idol temples; but all is still now. The priests have fallen around the altars which they served; their blood mingling with that of their victims, and their splendid vestments are become their winding sheets. And now, down the marble staircases, trodden in happier days by the feet of myriads of votaries, lo, the soldiers are carrying the helpless idols. The stern monotheism of Persia would have no pity for the many gods of Babylon; there are no idol-shrines in the land of the sun-worshippers where they could find a niche: but they are borne away as trophies of the completeness of the victory. There is Bel, whose name suggested that of the capital itself. How ignominiously it is handed down from its pedestal! And Nebo follows. The hideous images, lavishly inset with jewels and richly caparisoned, are borne down the stately steps, their bearers laughing and jeering as they come. The gods get little respect from their rude hands, which are only eager to despoil them of a jewel. And now, at the foot of the stairs, they are loaded up on the backs of elephants, or pitched into the ox-waggons. In more prosperous days they were carried with excessive pomp through the streets of Babylon, wherever there was plague or sickness. Then the air had been full of the clang of cymbals and trumpets, and the streets thronged with worshipping crowds; but all that is altered. "The things that ye carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity" (xlvi. 1, 2, R.V.). So much for the gods of Babylon being borne off into captivity. 2. Close on this graphic picture of the discomfiture of the gods of Babylon, we are invited to consider a description of Jehovah, in which the opposite to each of these items stands out in clear relief. He speaks to the house of Jacob, and to all the remnant of the house of Israel, as children whom He had borne from the birth, and carried from earliest childhood. Their God needed not to be borne, He bore; needed no carriage, since His everlasting arms made cradle and carriage both. Such as He had been, He would be. He would not change. He would carry them, even to hoar hairs. He had made and He would bear; yea, He would carry and deliver. 3. This contrast is a perpetual one. Some people carry their religion; other people are carried by it. Some are burdened by the prescribed creeds, ritual, observances, exactions, to which they believe themselves to be committed. Others have neither thought nor care for these things. They have yielded themselves to God, and are persuaded that He will bear them and carry them, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that they go, until they come to the place of which God has spoken to them (Deut. i. 31; Isa. lxiii. 9). (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Israel's infancy and maturer life:*—"From the womb" and "from the lap" point back to the time when the nation whose existence began with Abraham, marching from Egypt, was born, so to speak, to the light of the world; from that time it has lain like a willingly assumed burden on Jehovah, who carries it as a nurse the babe (Num. xi. 12); as a man his son (Deut. i. 31); as an eagle its young (Deut. xxxii. 11). The *senectus* and *canities* in verse 4 are self-evidently the nation's, but not as if this were at present in a senile

state, but the yet future and latest days of its history. Up to that moment Jehovah is He, *i.e.* the Absolute One, and always the same (chap. xli. 4). As He has done hitherto, He will act in the future—bearing and saving. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *National life—its stages*:—The general analogy between the life of individuals and that of nations, is sufficiently obvious, and is finely expressed by Florus, in his division of the Roman history into the periods of childhood, youth, manhood, and old age. (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Idols found wanting, but Jehovah found faithful*:—The confidence of Babylon is buried among her heaps of rubbish, for her gods have fallen from their thrones. As for us, our trust is in the living God, who lives to carry His chosen. I. FALSE CONFIDENCES PASS AWAY. 1. The Lord has made a full end of false gods and their worship. "Bel boweth down," &c. Not only concerning Bel and Nebo, but concerning many a set of heathen deities, a note of exultant derision may be taken up. "The idols He shall utterly abolish." 2. The like thing has happened unto false systems of teaching. If you are at all readers of the history of religious thought, you will know that systems of philosophy, and philosophical religions, have come up, and have been generally accepted as indisputable, and have done serious injury to true religion for a time; and yet they have vanished like the mirage of the desert. 3. It will be just the same with us if we trust in false confidences of any sort; such, for instance, as our experiences, or attainments, or services, or orthodox belief. II. OUR GOD ABIDES ALWAYS THE SAME. "Even to your old age I am He." He is always the same in Himself, and always the same to His people. 1. We rightly expect trials between here and heaven; and the ordinary wear and tear of life, even if life should not be clouded by an extreme trial, will gradually wear us out. What saith our God concerning the days of decline and decay? He says to us, "I am He." He will not grow weak. His eye will not be dim. His ear will not be heavy. 2. If life should flow never so smoothly, yet there are the rapids of old age, and the broken waters of infirmity, and the cataract of disease—and these we are apt to dread; but why? Is it not sure that the Lord changes not? 3. In the course of years, not only do we change, but our circumstances change. If you are where you ought to be, your confidence is in God now, and you will have the same God then, and He will still be your guardian and provider. His bank will not break, nor His treasury fail. 4. "Ah!" say you, "but what I most mourn is the death of friends." Yes; that calamity is a daily sorrow to men who are getting into years. But the Lord says, "I am He," as much as to say, "I am left to you, and will not fail you." 5. Some trouble themselves more than there is need concerning prophetic crises which are threatened. We know so little of the future that to worry about it will be the height of unwisdom. The Lord took care of the world before we were here to help Him, and He will do it just as well when we are gone. We can leave politics, religion, trade, morals, and everything else with Him. What we have to do is to obey Him, and trust Him, and rejoice in Him. 6. "Still," says one, "there are such evil tokens in the Church itself as must cause serious apprehension to godly men." But never despair of the Church of God, for of her it is true, "Even to hoar hairs will I carry you; to your old age I am He." The Head of the Church never alters. His choice of His Church is not reversed. His purpose for His Church is not shaken. We shall see better days and brighter times yet, if we have but faith in God and importunity in prayer. III. WHILE FALSE CONFIDENCES PASS AWAY, GOD WILL FOR EVER BE THE SAME. His former mercies guarantee to us future mercies. 1. He says, "I have made." It is well to remember the mercy of God to us in our formation, and in the first days of our birth and infancy. But God made us in another sense. He new-made us. 2. Then He also tells us that He has carried us; and if we have been carried by Him, He will carry us the rest of the way. What a great care has our gracious God, since none of His children can run alone without His power, His love, His grace! 3. Practically, God's mercies through life are always the same. Notice two things which are always here—the same God and the same mercy. There is nobody else here but the Lord alone with His people. You and your God; and you are nobody but a poor thing that has to be carried. God's great "I," and that alone, fills up the whole space. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 4. **And even to your old age I am He.**—*The best support in frailty*:—Nothing can exhibit the character of God in a more amiable point of view, than the representations which the Scriptures give us of His conduct to youth and

age. Youth is ardent, thoughtless, and presumptuous. But to them God says, Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth? Old age needs a comforter. God saith in the text, "Even to your old age," &c. I. THE GRACIOUS ASSURANCE GOD HERE DELIVERS TO HIS AGED SAINTS. 1. God's continued presence with them. Few of the companions of their early days remain. But the Guide of their youth lives to be the companion of their age. 2. It implies unabated affection. The aged are ready to complain, and in many cases with truth, that relatives and friends are cold to them, and weary of them. They fear that their moral infirmities will provoke the anger of their Father in heaven. But God having loved His own that are in the world, will love them to the end. 3. The promise assures aged saints of the kindest tokens of endearment from their God and Father. He will bear them in His arms as the parent does the child for whose welfare she is most solicitous. 4. This promise assures aged believers of effectual support. Various are the burdens which the aged have to bear, and various are the duties which they are required to perform, and for which they have no might. In youth, saints are apt to err on the side of presumption, and in old age, on that of despondence. But the grace of God can strengthen the bending back and invigorate the fainting spirit. 5. It assures them of His patience and indulgence. This may be intimated in the phrase—"I will bear." Men are more disposed to bear with the young than with the old. He will correct you for the failings of age to secure their amendment, and to make your decline a more happy specimen of the beauty and the power of religion; but it will be with a gentle hand. He will dig about the aged tree, and prune it, that it may still bear fruit. 6. The text contains a promise of complete deliverance. Many are the afflictions and temptations of old age, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all. Human life is like a hill. Its sunny side we climb in childhood and youth; in middle life we loiter a while on its summit; in old age we descend its dark side, and at its foot lies the valley of the shadow of death. The staff which supported your decrepitude shall help you in your dying agony; the rod which drove enemies from your course shall terrify them from your pillow; yea, the Comforter of your age shall take you to Himself, that in Him you may find the bliss of eternity. II. THE GROUNDS OF CONFIDENCE IN THESE PROMISES, that God will do all this to His aged people. 1. God hath made. His creating goodness is frequently employed in Scripture as an encouragement to hope in His protecting care (chap. xliii. 1, 2). Besides, you are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. 2. The character of Him who makes the promise confirms it. What is the reason why the word "I" is five times repeated in this verse? It is to point out the pleasure God takes in making promises of mercy to His aged people, and to fix their view on the Author of it, that they may confide more fully in its accomplishment. The greatest promises, if made by those destitute of power to fulfil them, excite contempt; or, if made by persons whose integrity is questionable, are thought of with the torturing anxieties of suspicion, rather than the comforts of hope; but in God we see everything to make distrust appear foolish and criminal, and to produce a steadfast and triumphant faith. Conclusion—1. This subject is admirably adapted to lead the aged to their proper duties. It should lead them to love God with all their heart and strength. The reflection, I am poor and needy, but the Lord thinks on me, is powerfully adapted to melt the heart. Your capacities of service are more limited than they once were; but this consideration should make you more zealous in the holy improvement of them. Let it teach you patience. Let it teach you to be joyful. Be not weary of a season thus marked by the Divine pity and care. 2. Let the conduct of God to the aged be imitated by us as far as possible. Let not your regard to them wax cold, though you may perceive in them increasing infirmities. Give them every proper testimony of your kindness. 3. Let aged transgressors consider, that none of these consolations is theirs, and that they exclude themselves from them by their temper and conduct. (*H. Belfrage, D.D.*) *The aged saint comforted*:—I. WHAT HAS GOD DONE FOR YOU ALREADY? "I have made." This brings Him very near. Others have claimed us as children; and we early learned to say, My father. But to them we owe our being subordinately, and instrumentally: to Him we owe it supremely and efficiently. They were "fathers of our flesh": but He is "the Father of our spirits." But there is another and a higher operation of which the Scripture speaks. "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." "We are His workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus unto good works." As the subjects of His grace, a foundation is laid for everlasting confidence and joy in Him. II. WHAT GOD WILL DO. 1. He will carry. This implies something more than to guide and to lead. It supposes helplessness on their side; and tender support and assistance on His. God has a large family; but, as Bishop Hall observes, none of His children can go alone. Yet they are not left to perish in their weakness. 2. He will deliver. This implies that they are exposed to danger; but that they shall not become a prey. He delivers them from trouble. In trouble. By trouble. III. BUT HOW LONG—HOW FAR WILL HIS TENDERNESS AND CARE EXTEND? "To old age; to hoar hairs." This is a period in which a man is deprived of many of his relations and friends; is gazed on by a new generation; feels a thousand infirmities, anxieties, and distresses; and is reduced to dependence upon those around him. 1. The promise does not necessarily suppose that you will reach this period. The meaning is, that if you should reach this period you need not be afraid of it; He will be with you, and "a very present help in trouble." 2. It is only said that He will be with you "to old age, and to hoar hairs." He will be with you all through "the months of vanity, and the wearisome nights appointed you"; He will be with you even when "your heart and flesh fail you." This is implied. But it was not necessary to mention it—old age and death are so near each other—they touch. This subject displays—(1) The patience of God. What a number of provocations has He had to bear with from you in the course of sixty, seventy, eighty years! (2) Encouragement for those who are descended into the vale of years. Doubts may assail the mind of a believer to the last. But be of good comfort, ye aged servants of God. He will not turn you out of doors now your labour is over. Your salvation is nearer than when you believed. (3) What shall I say to the hoary-headed sinner? (4) What a motive is there here to induce us all to become the Lord's followers! (*W. Jay.*) *The God of the aged*:—I. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TEXT I hold to be, the constancy of God's love, its perpetuity, and its unchangeable nature. God declares that He is not simply the God of the young saint; that He is not simply the God of the middle-aged saint: but that He is the God of the saints in all their ages from the cradle to the tomb. The doctrine, then, is twofold: that God Himself is the same, whatever may be our age; and that God's dealings towards us, both in providence and in grace, are alike unchanged. II. But now we come to our real subject, which is, to consider THE TIME OF OLD AGE AS A SPECIAL PERIOD, and to mark, therefore, the constancy of Divine love—that God bears and succours His servants in their later years. 1. Old age is a time of peculiar memory. 2. The aged man, too, hath peculiar hopes. He hath few hopes of the future in this world. But he has one hope, and that is the very same which he had when he first trusted in Christ. What is the ground of thy hope? Is it not the same as that which animated thee when thou wast first united with the Christian Church? Thou saidst then, "My hope is in the blood of Jesus Christ." And the object or end of hope, is not that the same? And is not the joy of that hope just the same? 3. Old age is a time of peculiar solicitude. An old man is not anxious about many things, as we are; for he hath not so many things for which to concern himself. He hath not the cares of starting in business, as he once had. He hath no children to launch out in business. But his solicitude hath somewhat increased in another direction. (1) He hath more solicitude about his bodily frame than he once had. Even your bodily pains are but proofs of His love, for He is taking down your old tenement, stick by stick, and is building it up again in brighter worlds, never to be taken down any more. (2) And there is another solicitude—a failure of mind as well as of body. God is just the same: His goodness does not depend on their memory; the sweetness of His grace does not depend upon their palate. (3) But the chief solicitude of old age is death. God's faithfulness is the same; for if nearer death, he has the sweet satisfaction that he is nearer heaven; and if he has more need to examine himself than ever, he has also more evidence whereby to examine himself. 4. Old age hath its peculiar blessedness. The old man has a good experience to talk about. He has peculiar fellowship with Christ. There are peculiar communings, peculiar openings of the gates of paradise, peculiar visions of glory, just as you come near to it. 5. The aged saint has peculiar duties. (1) Testimony. (2) Comforting the young believer. (3) Warning. Application—1. What a precious thought, young men and women, is contained in this text. You want a safe investment; here is an investment safe enough. Young man, God's religion will last as long as you will; His comforts you will

never be able to exhaust in all your life. 2. Middle-aged men, you are plunged in the midst of business, and are sometimes supposing what will become of you in your old age. But is there any promise of God to you when you suppose about to-morrows? Listen to what David says, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." 3. Venerable fathers in the faith, and mothers in Israel, take these words for your joy. Do not let the young people catch you indulging in melancholy, sitting in your chimney corner, grumbling and growling, but go about cheerful and happy, and they will think how blessed it is to be a Christian. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God always with His people:*—When we begin with the Alpha of our life's spelling, we find Him good; and when we come to the Omega, and faintly pronounce the last letter of life, we know still better how gracious He is. (*Ibid.*) *God's presence with the aged:*—I remember, when I was a lad, I took a long walk from the place where I was working, late on a Saturday night, to my father's house; and all the way along that walk the night increased about me, the darkness got thicker and thicker. I knew that just before I should reach home I should pass through what to me was the gloomiest and thickest wood that ever was. It was gloomy even at midday. And I remember I was feeling my way through that dense wood, when suddenly my heart leapt to my mouth, and the same instant almost all my fears vanished. For a great, strong voice rang through every timber of the wood—"Are you coming, Johnny?" 'Twas my father coming to meet me! Oh, the night became almost light about me. I could almost fancy I saw the outline of a great, strong man flashed upon the darkness—so vivid was the impression, not only on the ear, but also on the imagination. Then the whole darkness was vocal with the crash of his voice. Some of you are in darkness. It is wearing late, my brother. It is getting dark and late and lonely, and not many people are tramping your road now. Time was when the road was filled with your friends. You are like one who sits up far into the night, and sees the lights in the neighbours' houses one by one put out, while the darkness and silence are deepening round about him. But suddenly, suddenly, in this darkness and loneliness, God's voice rings out, "I am here; fear not; never nearer than now, in your hoar hairs and old age." (*J. M'Neill.*) *The reward of life-long consecration to God:*—In our great naval and military hospitals, it is only those grey-haired veterans who have fought the battle in youth and manhood, who can be received as in-door pensioners. It is long and devoted service which is the passport to admission there. The inmates bear upon them marks of the fight—the mutilated limb or the scar of battle, or medals hang on their breast, the mementoes of brave and heroic deeds. Let us work while it is called to-day. Let us give to God, not the crumbs which fall from life's table, but the best of the feast; not the evening hour of weariness and sleep, but the morning prime of active energy; not the few stray winter berries left on the top of the olive tree, but the ripe and abundant autumn fruits. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Old age with and without God:*—Old age without God—it is the picture of querulousness, discontent, fretfulness, gloom! Old age with God—it is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness. Old age without God—it is graphically described, in this chapter, as the overturn of all worldly pride and glory—"Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth"; it is the spoliation of the earthly temple, the pillage of everything that ministered to earth's ephemeral happiness. Old age with God—it can stand with the prophet, even in the midst of catastrophe and ruin and death, claiming as its own the sustaining words, "Even to your old age I am He," &c. (*Ibid.*) **I have made, and I will bear.**—*Creating and carrying:*—I. The two ideas of creating and carrying are thrown together, and in such a way as to show that they are related: that IN THE FACT OF GOD THE CREATOR LIES ENFOLDED THE FACT OF GOD THE REDEEMER. We must not let the fact of redemption, wonderful as it is, throw the fact of creation into the background; because the two are inseparably linked. Redemption, in one sense, grows out of creation. Because God made man in His own image, He is bent on restoring him to that image. Because God made us, God loves us, educates us, bears with us, carries on the race on the line of His infinite patience, ministers to us with help and sympathy, is burdened with our perverseness and blindness, yea, comes down in person into the sphere of our humanity and takes its awful load of sin and sorrow and pain and death upon Himself. In anything that one makes he has a peculiar interest. The young artist knows that his first picture stands no chance in comparison with the works of his masters, and yet that piece of

canvas is more to him than a Raphael or a Rembrandt. Love seems to thrive on defect. The idea is worked out in Wordsworth's little poem, "The Idiot Boy." And the same fact holds on the moral side. Parental love is not conditioned on a child's goodness. All this is familiar enough. Are we afraid to carry the truth farther up—up to God? Are we of those who say that God must be just and may be merciful—as if mercy were not one of His essential attributes as well as justice? Why should the "must" hold in the one case any more than in the other? All that is included in the word "bear" is practically pledged to us in the fact of creation. One reason why we take so slowly to the idea of God's bearing or carrying us, is because we divorce it from the fact that He made us; and we look at the bearing simply as a concession, forgetting that God the Redeemer is bound up with God the Creator. You find that in the New Testament. Take the parable of the Prodigal Son. What is at the bottom of the whole story but this truth of sonship? It is that which defines the measure of the prodigal's sin. That also defines the father's longing, and the joy over the returning son, the free forgiveness and the festivity. God is under the stress of the parental instinct to take our sicknesses and to bear our infirmities, and He yields to it, gives Himself up to it in His own Divine measure. I am saying nothing which goes to mitigate the essential badness of sin, or God's hatred of it, or to deny the fact of God's punishment of it. Even fatherhood has limitations. God cannot restore His erring child without conditions. Simply to forgive the past is not enough. God aims at the perfect establishment of the filial relation, and that cannot be without a filial heart in the son, and the son's cheerful obedience. If the prodigal had not come back repentant, he would not have had the robe and the ring. II. SOME OF THE ASPECTS UNDER WHICH THIS TRUTH OF GOD'S BEARING MANIFESTS ITSELF. 1. It appears as a matter of tolerance. It is perfectly clear from the Bible that God's love for His children makes Him bear patiently with their infirmities and errors. When an enthusiastic sculptor has once conceived the idea of a statue, he is not daunted by hardness in the stone, nor by defects in the grain. He is bent on carrying out his cherished ideal. The greater the difficulties, the more his energies are called out. Are we to suppose that God conceives a purpose less sharply or works it out with less intensity than a man does? This idea of bearing is at the root of the doctrine of Christ's atonement. The truth also comes out experimentally in the Christian life of each one of us. Every one, if he is honest with himself, knows that God has had much to bear with him, and knows, too, how patiently God has borne it: and every one of us has had experience of God's bearing in the sense of sympathetic love and helpfulness. How many of us know from most blessed experience what it is to have a great High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities. How many of us have known what it was to have Him bear our heavy load for us; and therefore, in the way that lies before us, can we not trust in larger measure the love of Him who made us to bear with us? God makes nothing in vain. When He made man in His own image, He did not make him to gratify a caprice, or in mere wantonness of power. He made him with a solemn, an awful, a glorious purpose over which He took heaven into counsel: and be sure that He will accomplish that purpose, that His patience shall not fail, that He who made will bear until He shall have perfected His work. 2. And meanwhile let us not forget the lesson of His bearing as it speaks to us of duty. Let us not presume on it. (*M. R. Vincent, D.D.*) *God our burden-bearer*:—I. THE BURDENS FOR WHICH GOD MAKES HIMSELF RESPONSIBLE. The lives of most of us are heavily weighted. We began our race unencumbered, but the years as they have passed have added burdens and responsibilities. There is the burden of existence. Of sin. Of responsibility for others. Of our life-work. In all these things we are doomed to be solitary. Each human soul must bear his own burden. We are a dead-weight; but it matters nought to Him. II. THE REASON WHY GOD ASSUMES THIS RESPONSIBILITY. "I have made, and I will bear." When a parent sees his own evil nature re-appearing in his child, so far from casting that child aside, and quoting its faults as reasons for disowning it, he draws nearer to it, filled with a great pity, and murmurs, "I have made, and I will bear." When a man has elicited in another a love which will never be at rest till it has nestled to his heart, even though considerations arise which make it questionable whether he has been wise, yet as he considers the greatness of the love which he has evoked, he says to himself, "I have made, and I will bear." When a Christian minister has gathered around him a large congregation, and many have been converted

from the world, as he looks around on those who count him captain or father, he says to himself, when voices summon him elsewhere, unless some overmastering consideration is pressed upon him, "I have made, and I will bear." Now let us ascend, by the help of these reflections, to the Divine nature, which is not above similar considerations. He has made and fashioned us; He has implanted within us appetites that only He can satisfy; He has placed us amid circumstances of unusual difficulty, and entrusted to us work of unwonted importance; He has committed to us the post of duty which taxes us to the uttermost: and because He has done all this, He is responsible for all that is needed for the accomplishment of His purposes. III. THE CONSOLATION WHICH ARISES FROM THESE CONSIDERATIONS. 1. In hours of anguish for recent sin. The sin is our own. And yet from the depth of sin-consciousness there is an appeal to God. He created, permitted us to be born as members of a sinful race. He knew all we should be, before He set His heart upon us and made us His own. May we not ask Him to bear with us whom He made, redeemed, and took to be His children by adoption and grace? And will He not answer, "I have made, and I will bear"? 2. In moments of great anxiety. 3. In days of anxious foreboding. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *False and true religion—bearing or borne:*—It makes all the difference to a man how he conceives his religion—whether as something that he has to carry, or as something that will carry him. We have many idolatries and idol manufactories among us. This cleavage is permanent in humanity—between the men that are trying to carry their religion and the men that are allowing God to carry them. Let us see how God does carry. 1. The first requisite for stable and buoyant life is ground, and the faithfulness of law. What sends us about with erect bodies and quick, firm step, is the sense that the surface of the earth is sure, that gravitation will not fail, that our eyes and the touch of our feet and our judgment of distance do not deceive us. Now, what the body needs for its world, the soul needs for hers. For her carriage and bearing in life the soul requires the assurance that the moral laws of the universe are as conscience has interpreted them to her, and will continue to be as in experience she has found them. To this requisite of the soul God gives His assurance, "I have made, and I will bear." These words were an answer to an instinct, the instinct that springs from the thought, "Well, here I am, not responsible for being here, but so set by someone else, and the responsibility of the life, which is too great for me, is His." God's Word comes to him to tell him that his instinct is sure. 2. The most terrible anguish of the heart, however, is that it carries something which can shake a man off even that ground. The firmest rock is of no use to the paralytic or to a man with a broken leg. And the most steadfast moral universe, and most righteous moral governor, is no comfort—but rather the reverse—to the man with a bad conscience, whether that conscience be due to the guilt or to the habit of sin. Conscience whispers, "God indeed made thee, but what if thou hast unmade thyself? God reigns; the laws of life are righteous; creation is guided to peace. But thou art an outlaw of this universe, fallen from God of thine own will. Thou must bear thine own guilt, endure thy voluntarily contracted habits. How canst thou believe that God, in this fair world, would bear thee up, so useless, soiled, and infected a thing?" Yet here, according to His blessed Word, God does come down to bear up men. The thing is man's realest burden, and man's realest burden is what God stoops lowest to bear (chap. liii. 4, 11). God has made this sin and guilt of ours His special care and anguish. We cannot feel it more than He does. 3. But this Gospel of God's love bearing our sins is of no use to a man unless it goes with another—that God bears him up for victory over temptation, for attainment in holiness. God never gives a man pardon but to set him free for effort, and to constrain him for duty. He bears us best and longest by being the spirit and the soul and the life of our life. The Lord and His own are one. 4. God does not carry dead men. His carrying is not mechanical, but natural; not from below, but from within. You dare not be passive in God's carriage. Again, in His bearing God bears, and does not overbear, using a man not as a man uses a stick, but as a soul uses a body,—informing, inspiring, recreating his natural faculties. Many distrust religion, as if it were to be an overbearing of their originality. But God is not by grace going to undo His work by nature. "I have made, and I will bear"—will bear what I have made. If that be God's bearing, how wrong those are who, instead of asking God to carry them, are more anxious about how He and His religion are to be sustained by their consistency or efforts! (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. **To whom will ye liken Me?**—*Idols cannot represent God:*—The Jews might have alleged that they served not the false gods of the Gentiles, but the God of Israel; and that they used images when they worshipped Him only that they might have before their eyes, like other nations, some beautiful object. This delusive notion is here reprobated; and they were taught that there is neither likeness nor equality betwixt the true God and these foolish pretended resemblances made of Him by the hands of men. (*R. Macculloch.*) *God incomprehensible by mere reason:*—God asserts an immeasurable difference between Himself and all created beings. 1. We distinguish the Creator from every creature by declaring Him self-existent. There is no way of accounting for the origin of everything except by supposing something which never had origin. Nothing could have begun to be unless there had been something which never began to be. Here is the grand distinction between the Creator and the creature: the being of the one is underived, and that of the other derived. The existence of all creatures is a dependent existence; it has been imparted by another, and may be withdrawn by that other. The existence of the Creator is a necessary existence, altogether independent, indebted to none for commencement, and resting on none for continuance. It is by His name Jehovah—that name which breathes self-existence—that God proclaims Himself inscrutable and unimaginable. 2. We learn from this the vanity of all attempts to explain or illustrate the Trinity in Unity. If we were able to produce exact instances of the union of three in one, we should have no right to point it out as at all parallel with the union of the Godhead. We ought to know beforehand that the created can furnish no delineation of the uncreated; so that it shows a forgetfulness of the self-existence of God to seek His resemblance in what He hath called into being. He best shows the workings of a sound judgment and ripened intellect who, in such a matter as the doctrine of the Trinity, submits to the disclosures of revelation, and receives it on the authority of God, though unable to explain it through any reasoning of his own. The doctrine of the Trinity is above reason, but it is not against reason. 3. Consider the paramount importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is so bound up with the whole of Christianity, that to think of removing it and yet of preserving the religion is to think of taking from the body all its sinew and its bone, and yet leaving it all its symmetry and its strength. The whole falls to pieces if you destroy this doctrine. The short but irresistible way of proving that the doctrine of the Trinity is in the largest sense a practical doctrine is to remind you that if this doctrine be false, Jesus Christ is nothing more than a man and the Holy Spirit nothing more than a principle or quality. To remove the doctrine of the Trinity is to remove whatever is peculiar to Christianity, to reduce the religion to a system of loftier morals and stronger sanctions than the world before possessed; but, nevertheless, having nothing to deserve the name of Gospel, because containing no tidings of an expiation for sin. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Vers. 9–11. **Remember the former things of old.**—*The purposes of God:*—I. When we come to look at THE PURPOSES OF GOD, we must not be misled by words. The word "purpose," with us, supposes several things, which have nothing to do with the same term when applied to God. There is, with God, no ignorance previously to the formation of His purposes; no new light thrown on circumstances, out of which His purpose arises; no period in His past eternity, when His purposes were not formed; no consulting either with Himself or with others, with regard to their formation. Perhaps you may be ready to say, if we are to look at the purpose of God in this way, it is not a purpose at all, in the sense in which we use the term. And it certainly is not, as you will perceive. We accommodate human language to the infinite characteristics of the Divine nature; but we must do it with caution, and must be careful what measure of idea we associate with our common terms, when we are applying them to God. If not, we shall be deceived in the conclusions we draw and the doctrines we believe. If the purpose of God is to be viewed as it really is, we take it to be simply this: God's foreknowledge of everything that is to come to pass, together with the operation of His influence upon that foreknowledge, in connection with those things. His foreknowledge had no beginning; His resolution, as to what He was to do, could have no beginning. From the moment He foresaw, He resolved or purposed. Such appears to be the meaning of the word "purpose" as applied to God. If it should be said, "This is a view of 'purpose' altogether

foreign from the view we take of it," we grant it. But why? Because the nature of God is altogether foreign from ours. Ours is a finite and limited nature in itself; His is infinite and unlimited. II. THE APPLICATION OF GOD'S PURPOSE IN REFERENCE TO MAN. 1. Are we to regard the purposes of God as involving in them the charge of originating immorality and sin? Did God purpose that man should be a sinner? If His purposes are to be taken and explained, as we take and explain our own, then this was the case. If He foresaw that man would fall before He made him, yet had not determined whether He should permit this or not, and then permitted it, we should say that the purpose of God implies in it a part at least of the moral guilt of His creature. But He had formed no such purpose as this. He foresaw that man would fall; He foresaw the provision that was to be made for his case; but there was no period in eternity when He had not foreseen this, and hence no purpose arose out of the mere incident of the liability of man to fall. He was left to the working of those powers which God gave him: and with the working of those powers the purposes of God never interfered. 2. But if we look not merely to the connection between the purpose of God and the origin of evil, but also to the connection between the purpose of God and the free agency of man, we have another field opened to us, in examining which we must very carefully recollect the views that we have taken of the Divine purpose. When God created man, He gave him powers and faculties which He intended to commit to his trust, and which He did commit to his trust. He foresaw what use he would make of them, and how far he would abuse them; but He did not destroy them, in order that they might not be abused. There is an entire freedom in the operation of our faculties, so far as our own consciousness is concerned; are they not also exhibited to us as free, in the Word of God? Are we not addressed upon the subject of our shortcomings and our sins, as if we were held strictly free by the God that addresses us? Are we not hailed to return from our iniquity, as if we were free to return? Are we not invited to "lay hold on the hope set before us in the Gospel," as if we were free to accept the invitation? Let us look next at the view that men take of our capacity; and we shall find, that except when they are induced to quarrel with the Word of God, except when they are induced to throw difficulties in the way of their own salvation, they too act upon the principle that man is free. 3. But let us look at the purpose of God in reference to man's responsibility. If man were not free, on what ground could he be held to be responsible? and does any one doubt of his responsibility to God? The responsibility of man arises out of the very nature of his faculties, just like the proof of his free agency in the use of them. And we find the Word of God harmonising with the view, which our own faculties would alone give us, in holding the responsibility of man. Then, what has the purpose of God to do with our responsibility? It merely foresees the consequences of that responsibility, and purposes to leave the man to those consequences. Reject and neglect the "great salvation," and you cannot be saved: such is the announced purpose of God. Accept that salvation, and "he that believeth shall be saved": such is also the announced purpose of God. His purpose, therefore, in all these respects, is nothing more than His foreknowledge, connected with His determination respecting what He foresees; both the foreknowledge and the determination how He shall act in reference to what He foresees, being eternal. 4. Regarding the purpose of God in this light, we may take yet another view of its application, namely, its connection with the Gospel of Christ. With your belief, or your unbelief, the purpose of God has nothing to do, except so far as that purpose determines to reward the one, and to punish the other. (1) Remembering these things, which of you would be disposed, in the face of the nature of God, in the face of his own consciousness, in the face of the settled opinions of all men and all ages, in the face of the Word of God itself, to say that he is not held responsible for the exercise of the powers which God has given him? In everything but religion, we act upon this consciousness of freedom and responsibility. (2) Let us associate our own salvation with the determined purpose of God, that they who come to Him shall "in no wise be cast out," and that he that believeth shall and must be saved. (*J. Burnet.*)

A fourfold aspect of the Infinite:—I. AS THE ONE AND ONLY GOD. "I am God, and there is none else." The Bible establishes the doctrine of monotheism. This doctrine—1. Agrees with our spiritual nature. The whole soul, both in its searches after truth and love, one for the intellect, the other for the heart, struggles after unity; it turns to the centre, as the needle to the pole, as the flower to the sun,

2. Explains the harmony of the universe. How is it that all things in their constitution fit into each other, and in their operations are so harmonious and uniform? The whole machine shows in all its parts and revolutions that it had but one Architect. 3. Makes clear human obligation. If there be but one God, His will should be the supreme law of all our activities; His being should be the centre of our sympathies and love. Were there more gods than one we might be distracted on the question as to who should have our love and obedience. II. As ACQUAINTED WITH ALL THE FUTURITIES OF THE UNIVERSE. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done." There is one mind in the universe, and only one, whose infinite glance comprehended all, swept over all space, and over all durations. Though such a fact baffles all our attempts at comprehension, its denial would undeify God. The whole history of the universe, from beginning to end, was in His mind before it took active shapes, or concrete embodiments. Hence—(1) He can have no surprises. (2) He can have no disappointments. III. As PURPOSING NOTHING THAT CAN BY ANY POSSIBILITY FAIL. "My counsel shall stand," &c. 1. God has a concern for His pleasure. The apostle calls His pleasure a "good pleasure." What is it? The pleasure of disinterested benevolence. 2. All God's purposes point to His pleasure. Whatever will make His creatures happy is His pleasure; and the whole universe is constructed on this principle. 3. None of God's purposes shall fail. "My purposes shall stand." The special purpose here referred to was terribly realised (Dan. v. 30). Our purposes are constantly being broken; the vast shore of human history is crowded with the wrecks of broken purposes. Our purposes are broken sometimes—(1) Through the lack of power to carry them out. (2) Through the lack of time to carry them out. God has ample power and ample time to carry out His purposes. IV. As HAVING ABSOLUTE POWER TO SUBORDINATE EVEN UNGODLY MEN TO HIS SERVICE. "Calling a ravenous bird," &c. In God's great moral kingdom He has two classes of servants. (1) Those who serve Him by their will—all holy angels and sainted men. (2) Those who serve Him against their will—wicked men and devils. Conclusion—What an ennobling view of our God! He is One: let us centre our souls on Him; He knows all futurities, let us trust His providence. He will fulfil all His purposes, let us acquiesce in His arrangements. He renders even His moral enemies subservient to His own will, therefore let us "trust in Him who liveth for ever." (*Homilist.*) *Cyrus, a ravenous bird:*—Cyrus is compared to a "ravenous bird" on account of the celerity of his movements (chap. xli. 3), just as Nebuchadnezzar had been likened to an eagle (Jer. xlix. 22; Ezek. xvii. 3). (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. **Declaring the end from the beginning.**—*God as a Worker:*—God is not a passive existent, resting idly in immensity. He is essentially, incessantly, everlastingly active. He "fainteth not, neither is weary." He has done wonderful things, and He will do wonders more. The text suggests four things in relation to God, as a Worker in the future. I. He KNOWS ALL THAT IS TO BE DONE IN THE FUTURE. "Declaring the end from the beginning." When we embark in an enterprise, difficulties start up in our path that never entered into our calculation and baffle us. Not so with God. When He began the work of redemption, He saw all the infidelities, superstitions, depravities, devils, and hells that would oppose Him. II. HE HAS REVEALED ALL THAT IS TO BE DONE IN THE FUTURE. "Declaring," &c. Applying the words to redemption, He has declared in many a grand prophetic passage what will be its end, sweeping all wrongs and woes, all sins and sufferings, from this planet, and filling it with Christly virtues and heavenly blessedness. Yes, and more, peopling heaven with untold millions of souls. His declaration of "the end" is very explicit, very frequent, very encouraging. III. HE WILL EXECUTE ALL THAT IS TO BE DONE IN THE FUTURE. "My counsel shall stand." He will employ thousands of instrumentalities and ministries, but He will do it. They will work by His direction, and by His power. He will do it gradually and efficiently. IV. HE HAS A PLEASURE IN ALL THAT IS TO BE DONE IN THE FUTURE. "I will do all My pleasure." To re-create and re-paradise lost souls is His pleasure. He rejoices over repentant sinners. (*Homilist.*) **My counsel shall stand.**—*God's standing counsel:*—To form a plan and then to alter it, or to have a fixed plan and to fail in it, is one of the many sad imperfections of humanity. In the first case, some new light springs up which was not evident before. In the second some difficulty arises, which,

as a mountain, hinders the carrying out of the plan. But who can suppose any of this in God—a Being of Infinite Power? (Chap. xl. 15–17.) With Him there is no difficulty. He is a Being of Infinite wisdom. Nothing escapes Him. The past, the present, the future are an everlasting now. Unchanged are His resolves, as His nature is unchangeable (Psa. xxxiii. 11; Prov. xix. 21, xxi. 30; Acts v. 39; Heb. vi. 17). I. THE DECLARATION. 1. We see this exemplified in the works of nature. Such is the regularity of all that the Great Mechanist is too usually lost sight of in the very machinery of His hands, as if it worked by its own power, regulated itself. 2. Still more distinctly do we see this declaration in the works of Providence. Wheel runs within wheel, but He is in every wheel, whatever its direction, whatever its movement. He is directly or indirectly in it. Look at Cyrus. Look at the history of Joseph. Look at Jesus Himself. (Acts ii. 23, iii. 18, iv. 26–28.) 3. But if He does all His pleasure in His works of creation and providence, how much more in the greater, infinitely greater displays of Himself in His grace, which is His glory! (2 Tim. i. 9.) II. THE GROUND OF SUCH DECLARATION. "I will do all My pleasure." It is His own work. True, He works by means, and most commonly by human instrumentality. But it is in all respects His own work. 1. The subject has an awful look upon any who have been trifling. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." Look at the fall. Look at the sin and sinfulness of this polluted world. These are but a fearful comment on "My counsel shall stand." "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Look at the flood. Look at Babylon. Look at Jerusalem. 2. The subject is most encouraging to every returning sinner. 3. This is most consolatory to the tried saint. 4. Beware of any abuse of this great and glorious truth. If God's counsel standeth fast, and He does all His pleasure, it is that God who delights in human instrumentality. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

Vers. 12, 13. **Hearken unto Me, ye stout-hearted.**—*God's voice to sinners:*—I. A WRETCHED CONDITION. 1. Insensibility to the good. "Stout-hearted." The word "stout-hearted" does not mean courageous, intrepid, morally brave; it means hardness, obduracy, spiritual stubbornness. It represents a soul dead to all that is spiritually true and good. 2. Alienation from the good. "Far from righteousness." To be "far from righteousness" is to be far from all that is noble, Godlike, and happy; it is to be in the kingdom of darkness, and in regions under the ban of Heaven. II. A GLORIOUS PROMISE. "I bring near My righteousness," &c. "Righteousness and salvation" are in morals convertible terms. The promise is, Divine deliverance to men in this wretched condition. This deliverance God brings near to the sinner. "Near"—1. In the Gospel of Christ. 2. In the ministry of the good. 3. In the suggestions of conscience. 4. In the spiritual influence of events. III. AN URGENT DUTY. "Hearken unto Me." 1. Earnestly. Withdraw thine ear from the din of worldliness, sinful thoughts, and carnal passions, and open it to Me when I speak. Adjust yourself in a listening attitude. 2. Constantly. I am constantly speaking in nature, in conscience, in history, as well as in the Gospel. All My voices are one in significance and aim. I am calling you to My "righteousness" and "salvation." 3. Practically. What I say attend to. Don't let My voice pass away in mere impressions. Act on My counsels, obey My behests. (*Homilist.*) *God's call to the unrighteous:*—1. The first thing on which we would fasten your attention is that God's dealings with mankind have been all of a character which may be called unexpected. We do not believe that any reason could have been given why men should be redeemed, had the question been proposed to higher ranks of intelligence. Nay, forasmuch as no provision had been made for the rescue of fallen angels, it could not have been imagined that any would have been made for the rescue of fallen man; the conclusion must rather have been that ruin followed inevitably on rebellion, and there could not be reconciliation where once there had been offence. Even now that we know of the Mediator's interference we can trace it to nothing but the unmeasured love of God, and can give no account of the wondrous matter of our redemption save that so it pleased Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." 2. We may be sure, that having summoned the stout-hearted to hearken, the words which immediately follow are such as God knows to be specially adapted to the case of the stout-hearted, that is, to contain the motives which are most likely to bring them to contrition and repentance. The nearness of salvation is made an argument with the ungodly why they should turn from

evil courses, just as preached the Baptist—"Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3. God goes on to speak with more distinctness of His purposes of mercy—"And I will place salvation in Zion for Israel My glory." We may believe of this prophecy as of similar ones where Zion is mentioned, that it refers originally to what Christ would accomplish at His first appearing in Judea, and delineates also what He would effect at His Second Advent. This salvation God placed in Zion, for it was only by the going up of the Mediator as a victim to the altar, by His ascending the Cross erected upon Calvary, that the curse of the law was exhausted and the honour of the Divine attributes secured. "For Israel My glory." Wonderful words! I had thought that "the heavens declared Thy glory"; I read of the glory of the Lord like a devouring fire abiding in Sinai; and when the sun and moon are withdrawn from the firmament, of the New Jerusalem I am told that "the glory of God doth lighten it." In such cases, if I cannot define the glory, I am at least dazzled by its shinings; and there is something of correspondence between what I know of the nature of God and what I hear of His glory. But that man, fallen, sinful man should be His glory, the mortal the glory of the immortal, the corruptible the glory of the incorruptible—in this is a mystery which might seem too deep to be fathomed by our searchings, yet not a mystery while I have the Bible in my hands and know what God "hath done for us men and for our salvation." (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The ungodly world:*—I. THE UNHAPPY MORAL CONDITION OF THE WORLD. 1. A condition of moral stubbornness. 2. Of moral unrighteousness. II. THE GLORIOUS REMEDIAL PROVISION OF HEAVEN. "I bring near," &c. 1. Christ has brought righteousness very near to mankind. It is inculcated in His teaching, exemplified in His life, honoured in His death. 2. Christ has brought salvation very near to mankind. It comes within the reach of all to whom His Gospel is preached. "Say not in thine heart who shall ascend up into heaven," &c. III. THE URGENT SPIRITUAL DUTY OF MANKIND. "Hearken unto Me." Why this attention? 1. It is only by faith that the remedial provision can be enjoyed. 2. It is only by attention that this faith can be attained. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 13. **I bring near My righteousness.**—*Justifying righteousness brought near:*—It appears from a comparison of many texts of Scripture, that when the word "righteousness" is connected, as in this passage, with "salvation," it does not mean the Divine attribute of justice or rectitude, but the work of righteousness wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ, and which it is the grand design of the Gospel to reveal and make offer of to sinners of [mankind for their justification—their salvation. I. Let us inquire with reference to THE RIGHTEOUSNESS SPOKEN OF, why it is termed, in this and so many other parts of Scripture, "the righteousness of God"? The Lord terms the work of His Son Jesus Christ—His obedience unto death—His whole endurance of the curse, and fulfilment of the precept of the law, His own, God's righteousness. There is no difficulty in seeing why it should be called Christ's, because He wrought it out. Our question is, Why the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ is termed "the righteousness of God"? 1. It is so called, in marked contrast and opposition to man's own fancied righteousness (Rom. x. 3). 2. Because it is that which God has, for the sinner's justification, devised, provided, and stamped with the seal of His approbation and acceptance. 3. Because it was wrought out by God in the person of His eternal Son—Emmanuel, "God manifest in the flesh." II. WHERE, HOW, AND TO WHAT PARTIES OR PERSONS THE LORD BRINGS THIS RIGHTEOUSNESS NEAR? 1. Where? In the Gospel (Rom. i. 16). 2. How? In the free and earnest character of the offers and invitations of the Gospel. 3. To whom? "Ye stout-hearted that are far from righteousness." Ye that not only have no righteousness but are living at ease,—"stout-hearted," careless, and indifferent, for the present, at least, about finding one—"I bring near My righteousness" to you. While ye despise it, "stout-hearted," I offer it to you; while ye are "far from righteousness," righteousness is brought near to you—it is pressed and urged upon you. Improvement—1. It may occur to some as an objection, What use in bringing near, and freely offering, a salvation to men wholly indifferent about it? There can be no doubt, that so long as men are "stout-hearted, and far from righteousness," they cannot, in the very nature of the thing, embrace this righteousness; and the offer of it to them is thus, in one sense, to no purpose. But only in one sense. For, not to speak of believers, who often find their hearts

so hard, that till they see invitations to the "stout-hearted," they cannot perceive their warrant at all to trust in Christ—the very freeness and universality of the offer, coming with overwhelming grace upon the "stout-hearted" sinner, may just be among the most powerful means blessed of the Holy Ghost for awakening him to deep and serious concern and thought. 2. That you may see how little weight there is in the objection to the doctrine of Christ's righteousness as the ground of justification, observe that we read comparatively seldom in Scripture of the righteousness of Christ—generally of the righteousness of God. 3. We might have remarked, on the question, how the righteousness is brought near, that, besides the freeness and urgency of Gospel offers, the Lord comes specially near at particular seasons, in the events and dealings of His providence. (*C. J. Brown.*) *Two aspects of salvation*:—The two verses express a paradox which enters deeply into the thought of the prophet. While salvation is near in point of time, yet Israel is spiritually far from it. Hence the work of salvation or righteousness has two aspects; along with the providential deliverance of which the agent is Cyrus, there is an inward and spiritual salvation which consists in bringing the nation to right thoughts about itself and God. And in this spiritual transformation the instrument is the servant of Jehovah. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Jehovah's righteousness and Israel's salvation* (with chap. li. 5):—I. What are these two things—JEHOVAH'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ISRAEL'S SALVATION? How are they related to one another and connected with one another? And what in particular is the meaning of the precedence or priority assigned to the one as coming before the other—My righteousness, My salvation? 1. It is very evident that the Lord's righteousness must mean, not a Divine attribute, but a Divine work, or effect or manifestation of some kind. 2. A judicial dealing with His enemies, on the part of God, precedes and prepares the way for the deliverance or salvation of His people; and when He brings near the one, the other will not tarry. 3. God must first consult for His own righteous name before He can consult for His people's complete safety; He must first right Himself before He can consistently and conclusively deliver them. Only in the train of the right-eousness of God can His salvation go forth. II. It may be said that THE LORD BRINGS HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS NEAR, or that it is near, in three senses. 1. In the Gospel offer as a free gift, wholly of grace, not of works at all. 2. In the powerful striving and working of His Spirit. 3. In the believing appropriation of it which His Spirit enables you to make. (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) **I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory.**—*The connection between the use of means and the accomplishment of Divine purposes*:—I. THE DIVINE PURPOSES WHICH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES REVEAL. They have respect—1. To the exhibition of God's glory in the development of His perfections. 2. To the deliverance of mankind from the consequences of sin. 3. To the establishment of Messiah's kingdom in the earth. 4. To the total overthrow of the empire of darkness. 5. To the everlasting happiness of believers in the realms of glory. II. WHAT MEANS ARE EMPLOYED FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THESE PURPOSES. 1. The means which are primary. (1) The mediatorial character of Christ. (2) The agency of the Holy Spirit. (3) The energy of Divine providence. 2. Those means which are subordinate. (1) The revelation of God's will in the inspired volume. (2) The preaching of the Gospel. (3) The constitution of the Christian Church. III. THE CONNECTION WHICH EXISTS BETWEEN THE USE OF DIVINELY APPOINTED MEANS AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE DIVINE PURPOSES. That such a connection exists we may argue—1. On the principle of analogy. Through all the works of God there is an evident connection between the means and the end. 2. There is a peculiar fitness in the means to accomplish the end. 3. From Divine authority. That the means shall accomplish the end is the frequent subject of the Divine promise. 4. The evidence of fact further establishes this connection. 5. To deny this connection involves the greatest absurdity. IV. THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF THE DOCTRINE. 1. Ought we not to consider our personal interest in the subject? We are within the precincts of the Divine purposes, and the means of their accomplishment. 2. This subject strongly inculcates holiness in the disciples of Christ. Both the means and the end seem encircled with a halo of sanctity. 3. We learn our obligation and encouragement in the use of appointed means. 4. Let us be careful that the means we employ are those only of Divine appointment. 5. How dreadful the condition, and dangerous the conduct, of those who oppose the Divine purposes, and despise Divinely appointed means! (*J. R. Cooper.*)

CHAPTER XLVII.

VERS. 1-3. **Come down, and sit in the dust.**—*Dirge on the downfall of Babylon:*—Babylon is pictured as a royal lady, dethroned, led in captivity over the streams to a distant land, and there made the meanest slave behind the millstones. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Thy nakedness shall be uncovered.**—*Mental and moral nakedness:*—Every person hath somewhat which may properly be called his nakedness or shame, in a figurative sense—such as a weak judgment, imprudence, inconsideration, injustice, cruelty, avarice, poverty, or contempt of religion. Over that he studiously endeavours to throw a veil, that it may be preserved from public observation. Now, when the covering is taken away by which any of these things were concealed, then people's nakedness or shame is laid open to the inspection of those who possess penetration and discernment. (*R. Macculloch.*) *A fearful meeting:*—I. "THY NAKEDNESS SHALL BE UNCOVERED." Man practises deceit. He imposes upon himself, and, as far as possible, upon his fellows. He cloaks his sins, his motives, his evil ways. He is not sincere in his professions, not open in his conduct, not honest in his judgments. Sin itself is a monstrous deceit and lie. The author of sin is a "liar." And so with the children of the devil. There is nothing in them—in their hearts, lives, characters—that will stand the light of the throne. The truth will flash the sunlight into the chamber of the soul, and into every transaction of life, and lay bare to the eye of God and the quest of the universe the true real state and status of the moral man. Then "thy nakedness shall be uncovered." The awful sight of a rational and immortal soul, steeped in guilt, lost to virtue and to God, and deceived to its eternal undoing, will shock the very heavens. II. "YEA, THY SHAME SHALL BE SEEN." The shame of wanton rebellion against the great God, our Heavenly Father; the shame of sinning unto death against the Cross of the loving and dying Christ; the shame of consummating a character of incorrigible wickedness, and a doom more awful than that of sinning angels, under all the light and influences of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. To look upon such shame in the judgment day will shock and confound the sinner himself, and fill all heaven with loathing and indignation. III. "I WILL TAKE VENGEANCE, AND I WILL NOT MEET THEE AS A MAN." The vengeance of God! Who can stand before it? The partial displays of it in this life, where wrath is restrained and clemency bears rule, are fearful tokens of what is in store for those who refuse offered mercy and exhaust God's long-suffering goodness in the world of retribution. It is awful to face an angry man whom we have grievously wronged. It is more fearful still to confront a stern judge, who, as minister of the law we have broken, makes inquisition upon us. But oh, to stand face to face before the offended Majesty of heaven, now risen up to take "vengeance" upon the despisers of His grace, is a thought that may well fill us with the profoundest concern. (*Homiletic Review.*) **I will not meet thee as a man.**—"*I will not meet thee as a man*":—The sense is very obscure. (*Skinner.*) "I will run against no man," namely, that I should need to give way to him. (*Stier.*) "I will not intervene as a man." (*Ruetschi.*) "I shall not meet a man, so depopulated will Babylon be." (*Hahn.*) "I shall encounter no one who can resist Me." (*Cheyne.*) It means to encounter, meet, hit upon one, not only in a hostile, but also, as here and chap. lxiv. 5, in a friendly sense; so I will befriend no one, pardon no one. (*Delitzsch.*) "Vengeance I take, and strike treaty with none." (*G. A. Smith.*) Possibly, "I will take vengeance, and will not spare, saith our Redeemer." (*A. B. Davidson.*) Independently of these minuter questions, it is clear that the whole clause is a laconic explanation of the figures which precede, and which are summed up in the simple, but terrific notion of resistless and inexorable vengeance. (*J. A. Alexander.*) "*I will not meet thee as a man,*" whose compassion may induce him to show ill-judged forbearance and clemency, but thou shalt have judgment without mercy, who hast showed no mercy: I will not meet thee with the justice of a man, that may be perverted, but with that impartial equity which can neither be corrupted nor evaded. I will not meet thee with the anger of a man, which for certain reasons may be concealed or deferred, but with my fierce wrath that shall inevitably consume thee. I will not meet thee with the strength of a man, that may be opposed or vanquished, but clothed with omnipotence that cannot

be resisted, so that it shall appear that it is not the vengeance of man, but of God. (*R. Macculloch.*) *God meeting sinners as a man*:—His threat is a threat of departure from His usual course. Thus, the expression is resolvable into a statement, that there is a human character about God's dealings with men, and that it is an evidence of His not having given them up to vengeance, that He continues to meet them "as a man." Let us consider the evidences which we have, that as a God of love, God meets us "as a man." I. Let us begin with those OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY GHOST, through which God may emphatically be said to "meet" us, to come in contact with us. There is much of mystery around these operations; we recognise them by their effects. Not only are these operations hidden from others, but the very party himself, within whose breast they are making themselves felt, can give little or no account whence they come, or how they work. He resolves whatever he experiences into the strugglings of his own mind, and the wrestlings of his own conscience. Would it be for our advantage, that, in meeting us, God should meet us as a God, and not "as a man"? We could not have borne that God should have spoken with us by unearthly voices, and warned us by unearthly spectacles, and approached us through unearthly avenues. Hence, the evidence that God has dealt lovingly with us, when we observe the appointed method in which the Spirit operates—it is, that Divinity may be said to identify itself with humanity. II. The mind turns naturally to THE GREAT SCHEME OF REDEMPTION, and finds at once in that scheme full material of demonstration. Does it not commend itself to us as an arrangement beautifully indicative of the tenderness of God, that the "great High Priest of our profession," who was essentially Divine, was, at the same time, "a man"? If the Divine nature had entered into union with the angelic so that God had met us, not "as a man," but as a cherub or seraph, we should have had no power, comparatively, of estimating what had been done on our behalf. We have little or no knowledge of higher orders of being, and there could consequently have been nothing which came home to the heart in the tidings of a Mediator, who, though essentially God, had assumed, for our sake, the likeness of one of those ranks. But when, in order to the meeting us in love in place of vengeance, God has become man, we can judge, we can feel the stupendousness of this humiliation. III. WHEN CHRISTIANS COME TO DIE, how are they accompanied through the dark valley and across the dark waters? God still meets them "as a man." "Thy rod and Thy staff"—a shepherd's implements, a man's implements—"they comfort me." IV. What shall we say to THE JUDGMENT SEAT, occupied by One so terrible in His splendour that the very earth and heavens flee away at His presence? This is the last great display of the mercy of that appointment through which a man has been given as a Mediator. How could an angel, with all his purity and his equity, make due allowance for human infirmity, or place himself in our circumstances, so as to decide with reference to our powers and opportunities, and thus throw into his verdict that consideration for our trials and temptations, without which, if there may be the strictness of justice, there can scarcely be the admixture of mercy? But the Man who hath "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows"—this is the Being who is to gather all nations before Him, and determine the eternal condition of each individual. V. We may draw one more striking illustration of the text from THE APPOINTED MEANS THROUGH WHICH THE GOSPEL IS PROPAGATED. In the great work of gathering in the nations, and shrining the religion of Christ in the households and hearts of the human population, the Almighty makes not use of lofty angels, who have "kept their first estate," but of persons who are themselves in peril, themselves but wrestlers for immortality. God, in the person of His ambassadors, might have met us as an angel, and not "as a man." You could not, as you listened to the angel, or reflected on his preaching, put from you the feeling that he knew nothing experimentally of your trials, nothing of your difficulties—that he had no evil heart to struggle with, no mighty foes to withstand him in a course of obedience; and very easy you would think it, for one pure as this exalted creature to urge upon men the practice of righteousness, and to declaim with lofty vehemence on the vanity and worthlessness of the best earthly pleasures; very easy to recommend that to which he is prompted by his nature, and to denounce that for which he has neither inclination nor capacity. And this feeling would tell quickly and fatally on the moral hold which he might gain on an audience; making them suspicious that he spake on a matter of which he was no fair judge, and giving to the whole discourse

the aspect of an airy speculation. Therefore is it in love to you that God meets you "as a man." (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Vers. 7–11. **And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever.**—*False security:*—I. THE CAUSE OF THEIR SECURITY. They did not lay this to heart (ver. 7), did not apply it to themselves, and give it due consideration. They lulled themselves asleep in ease and pleasure, and dreamed of nothing else but that "to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." They did not "remember the latter end of it"—the latter end of their prosperity, that it is a fading flower and will wither; the latter end of their iniquity, that it will be bitterness; that the day will come when their injustice and oppression must be reckoned for and punished. II. THE GROUND OF THEIR SECURITY. They trusted in their wickedness and in their wisdom (ver. 10). 1. Their power and wealth, which they had gotten by fraud and oppression, was their confidence. 2. Their policy and craft, which they called their wisdom, was their confidence. III. THE EXPRESSIONS OF THEIR SECURITY. Three things this haughty monarchy said in her security. 1. "I shall be a lady for ever." She looked upon the patent of her honour to be, not during the pleasure of the Sovereign Lord, the fountain of honour, or during her own good behaviour, but to be perpetual to the present generation, and their heirs and successors for ever (Rev. xviii. 7). 2. "I shall not sit as a widow," in solitude and sorrow; shall never lose that power and wealth I am thus wedded to. The monarchy shall never want a monarch to espouse and protect it, and to be a husband to the State; nor shall I "know the loss of children." 3. "None seeth me" when I do amiss, and therefore there shall be none to call me to account. It is common for sinners to promise themselves impunity because they promise themselves secrecy in their wicked ways. IV. THE PUNISHMENT OF THEIR SECURITY. It shall be their ruin. 1. A complete ruin; the ruin of all their comforts and confidences (ver. 9). 2. Sudden and surprising. The evil shall come in one day, nay in a moment. "Thou shalt not know from whence it riseth," and therefore shalt not know where to stand upon thy guard. Babylon pretended to great wisdom and knowledge, but with all her knowledge cannot possess, nor with all her wisdom prevent, the ruin threatened. 3. Irresistible (ver. 11). (*M. Henry.*) *Earthly honour fleeting:*—Saints shall be saints for ever, but lords and ladies will not be so for ever. (*Ibid.*) *Afflictions in perfection* (ver. 9):—Afflictions to God's children are not afflictions in perfection; widowhood is not to them a calamity in perfection, for they have this to comfort themselves with, that their Maker is their husband. Loss of children is not, for He is better to them than ten sons. But on His enemies they come in perfection. (*Ibid.*) *Sinful boasting:*—The utterance of proud Babylon is identical with that of the vain and self-confident in all ages. The delusion prosperity produces in such men or nations is always of this sort. This expression suggests that lengthened prosperity in the case of the ungodly leads to—1. False security. 2. Presumption. "A lady for ever," *i.e.* in my own right; "no contingency can arise to deprive me of any title and wealth." 3. Boasting. The vernacular of pride—"a lady," superior to others. 4. Self-satisfaction. "A lady." "I am that now. None will dispute it" (Rev. iii. 17). 5. Abandonment to luxury. "A lady for ever." I mean to be at ease, to enjoy life. 6. Spiritual blindness. Prosperity dazzles the eye; the future is wilfully disregarded. Conclusion—Remember the desolation of self-confident Babylon-widowhood, childlessness, poverty, famine, shame, disease, insanity, exile, death. (*R. A. Griffin.*) **Thou didst not lay these things to thy heart.**—*Neglected warnings:*—God warns before He strikes. I. THE COURSE OF CONDUCT CONDEMNED. "Thou didst not lay," &c. This insensibility to the threatened judgments of heaven is—1. Very common. 2. Very sinful. 3. Very foolish. 4. Very dangerous. II. THE FEARFUL JUDGMENT DENOUNCED—a type on a large scale of the overthrow of sinners. 1. The certainty of it (vers. 8. 9). 2. The suddenness of it. "In a moment" (ver. 9). 3. The retributory character of it. An exact proportionment of the punishment to the crime. No undue severity shown even to Babylon (ver. 6; Jas. ii. 13; Rev. xviii. 5, 6). Nor even to the chief of sinners. Always a just recompense of reward. 4. The utter hopelessness of those on whom it comes (vers. 12–15). (*S. Thodey.*)

Ver. 10. **Thou hast said, None seeth me.**—*Omniscience ignored:*—I. THIS NOTION HAS GREAT INFLUENCE UPON THE CONDUCT OF MAN. Such a notion is convenient. Concealment is the helpmeet of wrong. It is not necessary that

this be formulated. It is sufficient if the mind accustoms itself to question whether God sees. The sinner will take advantage of a doubt. II. THIS NOTION IS UTTERLY UNTRUTHFUL AND DELUSIVE. III. GOD HAS OFTEN, IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE, SHOWN THE DELUSIVENESS OF THIS NOTION, AND THE TIME IS FIXED FOR THE COMPLETE DEMONSTRATION OF ITS DELUSIVENESS. 1. Character is often seen through by man. 2. Retribution often follows man's deeds in the present world. 3. The future state will show what God saw. (*Pulpit Analyst.*) *Practical atheism and genuine piety* (with Gen. xvi. 13):—I. PRACTICAL ATHEISM. "Thou hast said, None seeth me," *i.e.* God is indifferent to our conduct. This is the practical denial of Divine omniscience. This haughty language suggests a sad tendency in human nature. The causes of this tendency are—1. Dislike of God. 2. Dread of God. II. GENUINE PIETY. "Thou God seest me." 1. The very nature of God implies this. 2. The Bible teaches it. III. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS which this subject conveys. 1. It warns the wicked. 2. It should restrain from evil. 3. It should incite to a beautiful and useful life. 4. It should comfort and strengthen the people of God amid the duties and conflicts and trials of life. (*A. Tucker.*) "*None seeth me*":—Graceless men, having hid God from themselves, think also to hide themselves from God. (*J. Trapp.*) **Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee.**—*Pernicious knowledge*:—I. EXAMINE AND VINDICATE THIS DECLARATION. 1. Of what wisdom and knowledge does Isaiah thus speak? It was human wisdom and science in the highest perfection! To this Babylon even the sages of Greece came as learners. 2. Against this wisdom and knowledge the Scriptures bring the charge of perverting men's minds in morals and religion (text; Ezek. xxviii. 3–7; 1 Cor. i. 21–27, iii. 18–20; Rom. i. 22, 23). 3. That this testimony is not overcharged, all history proclaims. 4. All this is accounted for by the Scriptural account of the fall of man. Intellectual blindness is upon the heart of man; all his rational faculties are incapable of just conclusions on any religious subject, except they be assisted by a supernatural power. 5. Hence it inevitably follows that the cultivation of the intellectual parts of man can of itself have no tendency towards moral or spiritual good. If all the mental powers of man be in themselves depraved, the increase of his intelligence can only increase his faculty of evil; so that secular education, apart from religious and moral control, must be in itself a curse and not a blessing. It may create a generation of philosophic sceptics and apologists for vice, or even praters about virtue, but a moral and religious people it never has produced, and never can. II. THE REMEDY WHICH GOD HATH PROVIDED AGAINST ALL THESE INTELLECTUAL EVILS. 1. The supreme need is instruction in the wisdom and knowledge which are of God, above those which are of men. 2. This wisdom and knowledge must be imparted by those means which God has appointed. The Bible. Preaching. The instruction of children in Divine truth. (*F. Close, M.A.*)

Vers. 11–15. **Therefore shall evil come upon thee.**—*Sudden destruction*:—The predicted calamity is represented as a great storm, which suddenly arises in eastern countries, and blows with such violence as to spread devastation and ruin wherever its fury extends. (*R. Macculloch*). *False securities: an exposure and a challenge*:—Can you find a solitary instance in which God approved iniquity? Was ever His sword sheathed in presence of evil? This constancy of judgment upon corrupt ways is itself an argument. One act of moral hesitation would have destroyed God! Time cannot modify Divine judgments. What was wrong in Babylon is wrong here: what was right in the most ancient time will be right on the world's last day. We should remind ourselves of these elementary principles; for their very simplicity may cause us to neglect their claims. We shall regard the solemn denunciations as if spoken to our own city. I. LOOK AT THIS PICTURE OF UTTER AND MOST PAINFUL BEWILDERMENT. "Evil shall come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know." There are times when the wind seems to be blowing from all quarters at once. There are times when all things seem to have a controversy with us. We set down our feet, and, lo, they are fastened to the ground: we put forth our hand, and an invisible weapon smites it: we look round, and behold the path is ploughed up, so that there is no way of retreat. We lose our own sagacity. Our wit fails us. Once our mind was quick, now it is dead or helpless. We lose confidence in ourselves; substances become shadows; the strongest of our fortresses melt away; and in our friend's face there are discovered lines of suspicion or of mortal hate. This is the necessary

and inevitable result of sin. 1. We have been warned of it. 2. A way of escape has been made. II. HEAR THE DIVINE CHALLENGE ADDRESSED TO THE FALSE POWERS IN WHICH WE HAVE TRUSTED. "Stand now with thine enchantments," &c. (ver. 12). Think that we are now called upon to set out in order the false securities in which we have trusted! There is one,—Money; there is two,—Chance; there is three,—Self-confidence; there is four—Atheistic speculation. Now let them do for us all they can. God has challenged them! 1. They ought to be most useful when most needed. 2. They should show their sufficiency by their fearlessness. It is a challenge. I hear the whirlwind coming,—get out your money. You thought something would happen—something is happening,—God's judgment is descending; where is your God Chance? You have confidence in yourself; be it so; make bare your arm,—see, it is but lightning,—it is but flood upon flood,—it is but world dashing against world, &c. "Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee." There is to be a great collision. In that collision only the true can stand. III. SEE THE DOOM OF FALSE SECURITIES. "Behold, they shall be as stubble," &c. (ver. 14). 1. Let no man complain of want of opportunity of observing the value of his moral securities. 2. Let no man complain of having been allowed to live unwarned. 3. Think of so living that at last a man shall be left without a coal at which to warm himself! This is the end of sin,—this is the worthlessness of false gods! So far as we have had experience of life, we have seen the terrible failure of all false things. We have seen the judgment of God in parts. It is not all left to be revealed. We are entitled to reason from the past to the future; and when our own experience has, as a matter of fact, confirmed the revelation of God, we may know that future to be a terrible one to the servants of unrighteousness. What is the duty of man as dictated by mere common sense? It is to seek and trust that which is true. (1) We cannot escape the trial of our securities. (2) If we set ourselves against God, we challenge all the forces of His creation, fire, wind, flood, pestilence. &c. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Monthly prognosticators* (ver. 13):—The special reference is to the preparation of monthly almanacs (based on astrological calculations) in which coming disasters were foretold, lucky and unlucky days pointed out, &c. A specimen of these almanacs is translated by Sayce in *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archæology.* (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **Behold, they shall be as stubble.**—*God's judgment as consuming fire* :—The flame is no comfortable fire for warmth, no hearth-fire (chap. xliv. 16) to sit in front of; but, on the contrary, consuming, eternal, *i.e.* annihilating flames (chap. xxxiii. 14). (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *The portion of the ungodly* :—I. With reference to the FIRST SENTENCE. 1. One of the most striking thoughts which it conveys to the mind is this, that the punishment of the wicked will be easily inflicted. "They shall be as stubble." Nothing can be more easy than to kindle stubble when it is fully dry. Oh, ungodly and impenitent man, there is that in thyself to-day which, let alone and permitted to ripen, will bring a hell upon thee. Thou hast in thyself the power of memory, and that power shall become a vehicle of sorrow to thee. Thou hast, beside thy memory, a conscience; a conscience which thou hast striven to silence; but, even drugged and gagged as it is, it sometimes makes thee feel unhappy. You will then find that you cannot palliate the guilt of sin. Thy memory and thy conscience shall be as two great millstones grinding thee to powder. Then, added to thy memory and to thy conscience, there shall come thy increased knowledge. Thou knowest enough now to leave thee without excuse, but then thy knowledge shall increase so as to leave thee without pretence of apology. Thou shalt then perceive the craft of the tempter who deluded thee. Thou shalt then see the blackness and the filthiness of sin as thou dost not see it now. Then shalt thou understand the greatness and the goodness of the God whom thou hast despised; thou shalt then discern the glory of the heaven which thou hast lost; thou shalt then begin to get an idea of that eternity which shall roll over thy head for ever. Beside, think of thy companions. Shut up fifty drunkards and profane men together, and would they not soon make a hell for themselves without any interposition of Divine power? What will it be when they are bound up in bundles; when the tens of thousands of those who obey not Christ shall find themselves in their own place? 2. This punishment shall be most searching and terrible. The metaphor

of fire is used in Scripture because it is that which of all things causeth the most pain, and is the most searching and trying. As fire consumes, and so reaches to the very essence of things, so shall the wrath to come reach to the very essence and subsistence of the soul. 3. This destruction will be most inevitable. "They shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame." There is hope now; there shall be no hope then. The Lord Jesus, though the most loving of spirits, was the most awful of preachers; and in His sermons, while there is everything that could melt and woo, there is no lack of the great and terrible thunderbolt, and the sounding forth of wrath to come, and the judgment which must await the impenitent. II. BUT OUR TEXT NOW CHANGES ITS FIGURE. "Thus saith the Lord, There shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it"; by which is meant that there shall be nothing in hell that can give the sinner a moment's comfort; nothing. III. And now our text bids us "BEHOLD," therefore I pray ye turn not away your eyes from this meditation. 1. Children of God, behold it; it will make you grateful. Does not the thought of the misery from which you have escaped make you love your Saviour? And oh, will it not make you love poor sinners too? 2. But specially, you that are unconverted, the text says, "Behold." It is a gloomy subject for you to think upon, but better to think of it now than to think of it for ever. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

CHAPTER XLVIII.

VERS. 1, 2. **Hear ye this, O house of Jacob.**—*God's appeal to Israel*:—The lessons of God's method of prophetic revelation which Israel is to lay to heart. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) "*The waters of Judah*":—The people, by a natural figure, are described as streams from the fountain of Judah (Psa. lxviii. 26). (*J. A. Alexander.*) *Hollow profession*:—Here is—I. PRIVILEGE. II. FORM. III. PROFESSION. IV. YET NO REAL RELIGION. (*J. Lyth, D.D.*) "*Hear ye this*":—I. HOW? Place yourselves in a hearing posture, that the intense application of your minds may be discovered in your attitude and gestures. Listen with diligence and candour. II. WHAT? 1. To the reproofs I administer. 2. To the arguments I adduce. 3. To the duties I inculcate. 4. To the assurances I give you. III. WHY? 1. That your obdurate hearts may be mollified. 2. Your consciences convinced. 3. Your conversion from your evil ways effected. (*R. Macculloch.*) *A twofold charge against Israel*:—God chargeth them with hypocrisy in that which is good, and obstinacy in that which is evil (vers. 1–8). (*M. Henry.*) *Religious profession*:—Observe—I. HOW HIGH THEIR PROFESSION OF RELIGION SOARED. II. HOW LOW THEIR PROFESSION OF RELIGION SANK FOR ALL THIS. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 3. **I have declared the former things from the beginning.**—*The probability and use of inspired predictions*:—I. It is quite plain that ANY BEING THAT IS DISTINGUISHED ABOVE OTHERS MUST BE EXALTED EITHER BY KNOWLEDGE OR BY POWER, OR BY BOTH. If, then, God is to make Himself known to His creatures, it must be by some displays of this kind—by power, doing those things which they cannot do; or by intellect, making known those things which they cannot know. There is one advantage in these displays of God by means of knowledge, telling things that we could not know otherwise—that it addresses our judgment. Miracles seem to astound us; they may be supposed to throw us out of our calm self-possession, and to bewilder us by their wonders; but prophecies coolly address our judgment, without disturbing our passions, and enable us to exercise our reason in reflection upon these discoveries of the great superior Mind. Though we cannot tell exactly what preference we are to give to one or the other, some minds being most struck with the displays of power in miracles, others most with the displays of knowledge in predictions, yet we can easily see that these may concur and aid each other. Is it not probable that God will make Himself known to man? But is it not equally probable that if He tells us about a futurity and eternity, He will take some method of convincing us that what He thus tells us is true and will surely come to pass? II. THE USES OF INSPIRED PREDICTIONS. These are various; many of them

we have yet to discover. 1. A most important use of the inspired predictions of Scripture is, that you should study the Book that contains them. 2. You should watch His providence, that you may see how it fulfils His Word. He that eyes providences shall never want providences to eye. 3. You should learn from hence to admire and adore the omniscience and faithfulness and truth of God. 4. Expect all that God has predicted both for time and eternity. (*J. Bennett, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **See all this.**—*Things seen as a whole:*—The words "See all this," have been rendered by one of the latest commentators, "See it as a whole." This rendering reproduces the prophetic argument. Isaiah had recalled a period of history which, taken as a whole, was a fulfilled word of Jehovah. That completed epoch of history from the predictions of old to the events in which it had issued was to the prophet proof of God's control of human affairs. Any completed historic cycle, taken as a whole, becomes to us significant of God. The evidence of the Divine providence discovers itself when we view things largely, when we see life as a whole. 1. Look at your life in the large relations of it, see it as a whole. This is not the view of life which it is altogether easy for us to take. For we touch life at single points; we receive life moment by moment; and our first views of things are apt to be partial. We ought, in our moral maturity, to fit our daily doings into some large conception of our whole reason for being here in this world. We do not know how to live well, certainly we have not learned to live richly if we have not gained something of the happy art of massing things in nobler groupings; if we cannot hold the little things and daily details of life under some broad, generous conception of our life; very much as from some height we see the several parts of a landscape, not singly, but together, as one wide sunny expanse. 2. That particular thing, for example, for which it may be necessary for you to strive to-morrow in your business, or which it seems desirable to secure for your enjoyment, needs to be sought for, not as though it were the one thing only to be attained, but as a possible part of some greater good in which your life is to find its satisfaction. A man to be successful in any calling must have something of that power of concentration to which Sir Fowell Buxton once attributed his success—"the power of being a whole man to one thing at a time." Nevertheless, that would be an unworthy success which should leave us entirely confined to any single thing. 3. If we desire to possess our friendships well, we must learn this art of seeing things not in their little, often vexatious details, but largely and as wholes. You must take your friend largely for what he is in his entire character, if you would keep your friend. The microscope has its uses; but it was never made for the eye of friendship. 4. Another instance for the application of this text might be found in our habits of regarding our homes. We are to possess the home, not as a good for itself alone, but in its whole social setting, in its relation to the neighbourhood, to the Church of humanity, to the kingdom of heaven, of which it is part and portion. 5. I wish now to go up with this principle to some higher lines of experience, and to observe how this entire earthly life of ours is itself life but in part, and how, if we would live truly, we must learn to see all our life, from the cradle to the grave, as itself but a part of some still larger, better whole for us. If this earthly span of our days be all, what is a human life at its best but as the rainbow which we have seen, one end of it resting upon the depths of the waters, and the other end lost in the cloud, itself as fleeting as the mist upon which for its moment of promise it becomes visible? But here lies the difficulty and the doubt. We have no experience of what lies beyond. Our hand can lay no measuring-rod upon futurity. We have only this present. It is also true, and it is the more important part of the truth, that we have this present only as an incomplete thing, we have this life only as a segment; its present brief span is the arc of some curve of larger sweep than we can measure. What its future may be like, we do not know; but we know this present as in itself incomplete and requiring some future completion. "If you ask me," said Savonarola, as he was ready to be borne to the stake, "what shall be in general the issue of this struggle, I reply, Victory. If you ask me what shall be the issue in the particular sense, I reply, Death." It was the answer of a seer. Seen in the particular, the issue of life may be death. Seen in the general, seen as a whole, true life is not death, but victory. The Christian faith brings to a man its Gospel of the One sinless Man, who knew whence He came, and whither He went, and whose life was always to Him not an affair of the

moment only, but a truth of eternity. Jesus' earthly life was indeed a broken one. In one aspect of it no human life has been left so incomplete as was that life which we can follow for a few brief years of it through these gospels. The verse in the book of Acts, "All the things which Jesus began both to do and to teach," suggests the incompleteness, the utter brokenness of Jesus' earthly life. What work did He live to see completed? what doctrine to finish? His hands did not complete His work of mercy; they were pierced before they had wrought all their possible work of healing. His lips did not finish His teachings; He had many things to say, and He died leaving much unsaid. Into our Lord's Gethsemane may there not have entered the pathos of an unfinished life? Yet He said, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." He could not have said that had He not looked always upon His life here as part and daily portion of one Divine whole, His sacrifice as something complete in God's eternal purpose; had He not known that His life here, and there, and always, is one life, continuous throughout, on earth and in heaven, one will of the Father—each part of it, whether of humiliation or transfiguration, of suffering or resurrection, partaking of the glory of the perfect whole. (*N. Smyth, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **Yea, thou heardest not.**—*God's foreknowledge of man's sin:*—As in a looking-glass, let us see ourselves. 1. Let the unconverted man see his own picture. God has spoken quite as pointedly to you as ever He did to the seed of Israel. He has called you by providences of different kinds. As for the Bible, has it not often addressed you with a voice most clear and simple, "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?" You have, some of you, been called by the admonitions of godly parents; you were further invited to the path of holiness by loving friends in the Sabbath school. Frequently the voice of God's minister has bidden you to come to Jesus from the pulpit; and conscience, a nearer pleader still, has echoed the voice of God. And yet it may be said, "Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not," &c. Three times a "yea" is put in our text, as if to show God's wonder at man's obstinacy, and the certainty that such was the state of the heart. It was certainly so. You heard, but it went in at one ear and out at the other; you heard and heard not. 2. More painful still is it to remember that in a certain degree the same accusation may be laid at the door of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even those who have received grace to become the sons of God, have not such a degree of spiritual sensibility as they should have. Having thus reminded you of your sin, trusting we may be led to confess it with deep humility, I have now an encouraging truth to tell to you—that all this folly and ignorance, and obstinacy, and rebellion on our part, was foreknown by God, and notwithstanding that foreknowledge, He yet has been pleased to deal with us in a way of mercy. I. We shall endeavour to address the truth to THE BELIEVER. 1. The latter part of our text mentions a mournful fact, "I knew that thou wouldest deal," &c. Thou art the beloved of heaven, redeemed by blood, called by grace, preserved in Christ Jesus, accepted in the Beloved, on thy way to heaven, and yet "thou hast dealt very treacherously"; very treacherously with God, thy best friend; with Jesus, whose thou art; with the Holy Spirit, by whom alone thou canst be quickened unto life eternal. That word "treacherously" is one which a man would not like to have applied to himself in the common transactions of life; he would feel it to be very galling, and, if there were truth in it, very degrading. How treacherous you and I have been to our own vows and promises when we were first converted! Instead of a heavenly mind there have been carnal cares, worldly vanities, and thoughts of evil. Instead of service there has been disobedience; instead of fervency, lukewarmness; instead of patience, petulance; instead of faith, confidence in an arm of flesh. This is not all. It is not merely that we have failed in promises which were made in a period of excitement, but we have been treacherous to obligations which were altogether apart from voluntary vows on our part; we have been treacherous to the most blessed relationships which mercy could have instituted. Know ye not that ye are redeemed men and women, and therefore the property of the Lord Jesus? Have you not found yourselves full often spending your strength for self and for the world, and robbing Jesus of that which He purchased at so dear a price? Remember that we are soldiers of Christ, soldiers enlisted, sworn in for a life-long campaign. As soldiers, by cowardice, disobedience and desertion, we have been treacherous to a very shameful degree. You know what the military doom is of a treacherous soldier on earth! truly, if we had been

accused, and condemned by court-martial, and ordered to be shot forthwith, we should have been dealt with most righteously. We have been armed, and carried bows, and have turned back in the day of battle. Worst of all is the fact that we have been treacherous to our Lord in a relationship where fidelity constitutes the very essence of bliss, I mean in the marriage bond which exists between our soul and Christ. We are one with Him, by eternal union one, and yet we treat Him ill! Never did He have a thought towards us that was unkind, never one faithless wandering of His holy immutable mind; but as for us, we have thought of a thousand lovers, and suffered our heart to be seduced by rivals, which were no more to be compared with Christ than darkness is to be compared with the blaze of noon. 2. We pass on to the Divine statement of the text, that all this was known. "I knew." As the Lord foreknew the fountain of sin, so He knew all the streams which would gush from it. Wherein is the edification to the people of God? (1) Adore the amazing grace of God. (2) Our security is clearly manifest. (3) This truth should tend very much to enhance our sense of the fulness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus. God has provided for us in Christ, for all the necessities that can occur, for He has foreknown all these necessities. II. I have to use the text in its relation to UNCONVERTED PERSONS. You have discovered lately the natural vileness of your heart. You have a deep regret for your long delay in seeking mercy. You are willing to acknowledge that there have been special aggravations in your case. Now, the Gospel says to you, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." All these sins, delays, aggravations, and rebellions of yours, were all foreknown to God; therefore, since He has sent the Gospel to you, be not slow to accept it, since it is not possible that your sins, whatever they may be, can at all militate against the fact that if you believe and receive the Gospel, you shall be saved. For, if God had not intended to save men upon believing, then, since He foreknew these things, He would never have planned the plan of salvation at all. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **A transgressor from the womb.**—*Native depravity*:—God here traces all the insincerity, stupidity, obstinacy, ignorance, and unbelief of sinners to the native depravity of their hearts, which led them to disregard His commands and to disbelieve His predictions. The text in this connection naturally leads us to conclude that mankind begin to sin as soon as they become capable of sinning. I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY SIN. "Sin is the transgression of the law." The law requires true love to God and man. The transgression of the law, therefore, must essentially consist in something which is directly opposite to pure, holy love. And there is nothing in nature more directly opposite to perfectly disinterested love, than interested love, or selfishness. So that all sin consists in the free, voluntary exercise of selfishness. II. WHEN MANKIND BECAME CAPABLE OF SINNING. If sin be a voluntary moral exercise, they are not capable of sinning before they become moral agents. Perception, memory, and volition appear to be the essential powers or properties which constitute a free agent. Animals are free agents. They act freely and voluntarily in the view of motives. But God has endowed man with a moral faculty to discern moral good and evil. This we call conscience. Those who allow that a child four years old is a moral agent and knows what is right and wrong, will generally allow that a child two years old is a moral agent and knows what is right and what is wrong. And where shall we stop? Why may we not suppose that a child one year old, or half a year old, is a moral agent, and knows what is right and what is wrong in some cases? III. THEY DO SIN AS SOON AS THEY BECOME CAPABLE OF SINNING. They certainly discover, as early as possible, impatience, obstinacy, and revenge, which are sinful exercises in any moral agent that can distinguish between right and wrong. The testimony of observation on this subject is strengthened, at least, by the testimony of experience. Every person in the world is conscious of sinning, and of sinning as long ago as he can remember. And now, if we look into the Bible, we shall there find conclusive and infallible evidence that mankind do actually sin as soon as they become moral agents, and are capable of sinning. When we say a serpent is naturally poisonous, we mean that it is poisonous as soon as its nature renders it capable of having poison. So, when the inspired writers speak of men's sinning as soon as they be born, their expressions plainly imply that they are sinners by nature, or begin to sin as soon as they are capable of sinning. These representations of the sinfulness and guilt of childhood are confirmed by God's providential treatment of children. Death is a natural evil, and was threatened to mankind as a punishment for sin,

IV. WHY THEY ALWAYS HAVE SINFUL BEFORE THEY HAVE HOLY EXERCISES. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Human depravity* :—In conversation with Boswell, Dr. Johnson said, with respect to original sin, the inquiry is not necessary; for, whatever is the cause of human corruption, men are evidently and confessedly so corrupt, that all the laws of heaven and earth are insufficient to restrain them from crimes. (*Boswell's "Life of Johnson."*)

Vers. 9-11. **For My name's sake will I defer Mine anger.**—*God's anger deferred* :—"For My name's sake I draw out My wrath." Jehovah lengthens out His wrath, *i.e.* delays its outbreak, thus shows Himself long-suffering; He checks, restrains, damps it for the good of Israel, that He may not by unchaining His wrath utterly destroy it; and that for the sake of His name, His praise, which demands the carrying out of the plan of salvation, which is the purpose of Israel's existence. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *Mercy's master motive* :—I shall take the text to illustrate—I. THE CONVERSION OF THE SINNER. 1. In him there is no argument for mercy, no plea for grace. 2. God Himself finds the reason for His mercy. He finds it in Himself. The Lord is a patient God, and determines to make His patience glorious. God also would illustrate His sovereign and abundant mercy towards sinners. God can display His power. 3. But it may be that a soul is saying, "Well, I can see that God can thus find a motive for mercy in Himself, when there is none in the sinner, but why is it that the Lord is chastening me as He is?" Possibly you are sickly in body, have been brought low in estate, and are grievously depressed in mind. God now, in our text, goes on to explain His dealings with you, that you may not have one hard thought of Him. It is true He has been smiting you, but it has been with a purpose and in measure. "I have refined thee, but not with silver." God has not brought upon you the severest troubles. 4. Notice the next thing: the Lord declares that the time of trial is the chosen season for revealing His love to you. "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." It often happens that the time in which God reveals His choice and manifests His electing love to a soul is when that soul is almost consumed with trouble. 5. But note, before I leave the sinner's case, that lest the soul should forget it, the Lord repeats again the point He began with, and unveils the motives of His grace once more. What is the eleventh verse but the echo of the ninth? If a soul should perish while trusting in the blood of Christ, the glory of God would go over to Satan. It would be proved that Satan had overcome the truthfulness of God, or the power of God, or the mercy of God. II. THE RECLAIMING OF THE BACKSLIDER. God was speaking to His own people Israel in these remarkable words. I see more reason for punishing you, for you have made a profession and belied it (ver. 1). God having declared the reason of His love to the backslider goes on to tell him, that the present sufferings which he is now enduring as the result of his backslidings should be mitigated. "I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have put thee into the fire, but I have not blown the heat to such an extreme degree that thy sin should be melted from thee: that would be a greater heat than any soul could bear. I have refined thee, that was needful, but not as silver; that would have been destructive to thee." Thou sayest, "All Thy waves and billows have gone over me." Not so; you know not what all God's waves and billows might be, for there is a depth infinitely lower than any you have ever seen. Then comes His next word: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction"; that is, as if He said, "I will renew My election of you." It was never revoked, but now it shall be more manifestly declared. God has looked at you in prosperity and He has seen you treacherously forgetting Him. Now, however, your affairs are at a low ebb and you begin again to pray. Hear this for your comfort—when repentance defiles the face before men it beautifies it before God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 10. **Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver.**—*Refined, but not with silver* :—More severely, yet more exactly than silver (*Stier*). Less strictly than silver (*Cheyne*). It was a melting of a higher sort, the suffering which befell Israel doing for it the work of a furnace (*Hitzig, Delitzsch*). Possibly, not with the result of gaining silver (*A. B. Davidson*). *Refined, but not with silver* :—The Lord refines His people, but He exercises great discrimination as to the means by which He does so. A silver furnace is one of the very best for the removal of dross, and would seem to be well adapted for refining the most precious things, but it is not choice enough for the Lord's purpose with His people. It is prepared

with extreme care, and has great separating power, but the purging away of sin needs greater care and more cleansing energy than a silver refinery can supply. The greatest delicacy of skill is exhibited by the refiner, who watches over the process, and regulates the degree of heat and the length of time in which the precious metal shall lie in the crucible: this, then, might well serve as a figure of the best mode of sanctification, but evidently the figure falls short in its delicacy. The process of silver refining is, no doubt, one of the best arranged and most ably conducted of the works of man; but when the Lord sits as a refiner, He executes His work with greater wisdom and Diviner art. Silver refining is but rough work compared with the Lord's purification of His people, and therefore He says, "I have refined thee, but not with silver." The Lord hath a furnace of His own, and in this special furnace He purifies His people by secret processes unknown to any but Himself. No one would think of refining silver by the same rough means as they smelt iron, so neither will the Lord purify His precious ones, who are far above silver in value, by any but the choicest methods. More subtle and yet more searching, more spiritual and yet more true, more gentle and yet more effectual are the purifying processes of Heaven; there is no refiner like our refiner, and no purity like that which the Spirit works in us. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's refining furnace* :—The Lord has special dealings with each one of His saints, and refines each one by a process peculiar to the individual, not heaping all His precious metals into one furnace of silver, but refining each metal by itself. "I have refined thee." "I have chosen thee." Not "you," but "thee." I. Between God's election and the furnace there is this connection—that THE FURNACE WAS THE FIRST TRYSTING-PLACE BETWEEN ELECTING LOVE AND OUR SOULS. Before one solitary star had begun to peer through the darkness the Lord had given over His people unto Christ to be His heritage, and their names were in His book; but the first manifestation of His electing love to any one of us was—where? I venture to say it was in the furnace. Abraham knew little of God's love to him till the voice said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." I do not think that Isaac knew much about God's choice of him till he went up the mountain's side, and said to his father, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" So was it with Jacob. Little did he understand the mystery of electing love till he lay down one night with the stones for his pillow, the hedges for his curtains, the skies for his canopy, and no attendant but his God. Certainly, Israel as a nation did not understand God's election till the people were in Egypt; and then, when Goshen, the land of plenty, became a land of brickmaking and sorrow and grief, and the iron bondage entered into their souls, they cried unto God, and began to understand that secret word—"I have called My son out of Egypt." They knew then that God had put a difference between Israel and Egypt. God finds His people in the place of trial, and there He reveals Himself in His special character as their God. Did He not say to Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry"? When did you first know anything about God's choice of you? Was it not when you were in trouble—in many cases in temporal trouble? I make no kind of exception to another rule, namely, that we first began to learn electing love when we were in spiritual distress. II. It is very clear that THE FURNACE OF AFFLICTION DOES NOT CHANGE THE ELECTION OF GOD. If He chose us in it, then His choice stands good while we are in it and when we are out of it. If the very first knowledge we had of His electing love found us at the gates of despair, we can never be worse than we were then, nor can His love see less to rest upon. Yet have I known a great many fears cross the mind of God's anxious people when the smoke of the furnace has brought tears into their eyes. No amount of trouble, no degree of pain, no possibility of grief can change the mind of God towards His people. The furnace may alter the believer's circumstances, but not his acceptance with God. The furnace very often alters our friends. And the furnace changes us very wonderfully. Believe very firmly in the fixity of the Divine choice. III. THE FURNACE IS THE VERY ENSIGN OF ELECTION. The escutcheon—the coat of arms—of election is the furnace. You know that it was so in the old covenant which God made with Abraham. He gave him a type when the victim was divided. When a deep sleep fell upon the patriarch there passed before him a smoking furnace and a burning lamp,—two signs that always mark the people of God. There is a lamp to light them, but there is also a smoking furnace to try them. "No cross, no crown." If you think of our great Master's

dying will and testament, what is its prominent codicil? "In the world ye shall have tribulation." That the Lord refines us shows His value of us. IV. THE FURNACE IS THE WORKSHOP OF ELECTING LOVE. God has chosen us unto holiness. There is no man in this world chosen to go to heaven apart from being made fit to go there. Electing love uses the furnace to consume our dross. The Lord uses the furnace also to prepare the soul for a more complete fashioning. The metal must be melted before it can be poured into the mould, and affliction is used by the Holy Ghost to melt the heart and to fit it to receive the fashion and take the shape of the sacred mould into which heavenly wisdom delivers it. Besides, affliction has much to do in loosening a Christian from this world. V. THE FURNACE IS A GREAT SCHOOL WHEREIN WE LEARN ELECTION ITSELF. 1. In the furnace we learn the graciousness of election. When a child of God in the time of trouble sees the corruption of his heart he begins to say, "How can the Lord ever love me? If He has loved me, His affection must be traced to free sovereign grace." 2. There, too, we learn the holiness of election, for while we lie suffering, a voice says, "God will not spare thee, because there is still sin in thee: He will cleanse thee from every false way." 3. Then, too, we see what a loving thing election is, for never is God so loving to His people consciously as when they are in the flames of trouble. 4. It is at such times that God's people know the power of electing love. 5. And it is at such times that the sweetness of God's electing love comes home to the Christian heart, for he rejoices in his tribulation while he is conscious of the love of God. VI. BY THE FURNACE SOME OF THE HIGHER ENDS OF A YET MORE SPECIAL ELECTION ARE OFTEN REVEALED, for there is not only an election of grace, but there is an election from among the elect to the highest position and to the noblest service. Jesus Christ had many choice disciples, but it is written, "I have chosen you twelve." Out of the twelve there were three; and out of the three there was one, elect of the elect—that loving, tender John, who leaned upon his Master's bosom. The furnace has much to do with this, as a rule, since it usually attends and promotes the higher states of grace, and the wider ranges of usefulness. 1. With the preacher this truth is seen; affliction makes him eminent. I do not think that the preacher will long feed God's saints if he does not read in that volume which Luther said was one of the three best books in his library, namely, affliction. That book is printed in the black letter, but it has some wonderful illuminations in it, and he who would teach the people must often weep over its chapters. Men never bake bread so well as when the oven is well heated, nor do we prepare sermons so well as when the fire burns around us. 2. So is it with the Christian hero, he could never lead the host if he had not been chastened of the Lord in secret places. Calvin, that mightiest master in Israel, clear, upright, and profound, suffered daily under a list of diseases, any one of which would have made a constant invalid of a less courageous man; and, although always early in the morning at the cathedral delivering his famous expositions which have enriched the Church of God, yet he always bore about with him a body full of anguish. Nor could England find a Wycliffe, nor Scotland a Knox, nor Switzerland a Zwingle, except it be where the refiner sits at the furnace door. It must be so. No sword is fit for our Lord's handling till it has been full oft annealed. So it will be with us if we would rise. (*Ibid.*) **I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.** —*The use of the furnace*:—The twofold use of the furnace is—I. TO PROVE OR TEST METALS. II. TO PURIFY THEM, OR REFINE THEM BY SEPARATING THE DROSS FROM THE GENUINE. Discipline of every kind, is God's chosen furnace to test and purify His people. (*Homiletic Review.*) *The furnace of affliction*:—A furnace is a fireplace or crucible for melting and refining gold or other metals (Prov. xvii. 3, xxvii. 21). Sometimes it is the emblem of cruel bondage (Deut. iv. 20; Jer. xi. 4). Also of judgments and severe and grievous afflictions, by which God punishes the rebellious (Ezek. xxii. 18-20). By the furnace of affliction He also tries and proves His people. This furnace is—I. AFFLICTIVE. It is composed of many severe trials, which are designed by the great proprietor and manager of this furnace, to purge and refine the souls of His people. 1. Sometimes they are tried by the scantiness of temporal things. This may be induced by want of employment; it may be the result of sickness; it may result from the injustice of man. 2. Frequently the saints are chastised with bodily afflictions. 3. Sometimes they suffer from bereavements. 4. They too have domestic trials of various kinds from ungodly relatives, refractory and disobedient children, &c. Thousands of God's people have been in this furnace. Moses, David, &c,

Even Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. II. THIS FURNACE IS DIVINELY APPOINTED. It is not the result of chance; afflictions arise not out of the dust; they are not the works of our enemies merely. They imply the moral government of God, and the wise and gracious arrangement of His providence. Every event is either His appointment, or has His all-wise permission. Such views of the subject have reconciled and supported the minds of the godly under their various afflictions. What a blessing that all is arranged by infinite Wisdom and Love! III. THIS FURNACE IS NOT VINDICTIVE, BUT GRACIOUS. Divine chastisement may be a kind of punishment for sin committed. It supposes some fault, which it is intended to correct. But when men are persecuted for righteousness' sake, it does not appear to be for sin. It may be for righteousness' sake on the part of man, and for unrighteousness' sake on God's part. God will suffer persecution and reproach to befall us, when we are cold and indifferent in His cause. But such punishment is not like that inflicted on the wicked. IV. THIS FURNACE IS DESIGNED FOR THE SPIRITUAL AND EVERLASTING BENEFIT OF THE CHURCH ONLY. Even as a furnace is prepared for the refining of gold, so afflictions are appointed for the saints who are compared to gold (Lam. iv. 2; Job xxiii. 10). This intimates to us the high value which the Divine Being places upon His people. They are His jewels, His chosen, a peculiar people, &c., and it is His will that they should shine in the world, and exhibit the glory and power of His grace. V. THIS FURNACE IS PROPORTIONATE. He will regulate its heat according to the circumstances of His people who may be placed there. "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver," &c. As a refiner adopts this posture for minute inspection, and that he may quicken the fire, or lower its temperature, as a view of the process may intimate, so the Divine presence, inspection, and compassion may well comfort the afflicted saint (1 Cor. x. 13; Isa. xliii. 2; Heb. iv. 15). There can be no caprice, no unwise or intemperate anger in Him. Compassion is mixed with the severest dispensations, and a wise distinction made between the different members of His family. God often tries the faith and patience of such as have been long under tuition, and are like the elder branches of His household, while He spares the young and inexperienced. VI. THE TENDENCY OF THIS FURNACE IS BENEFICIAL. "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." A more proper translation would have been, "I have tried thee," &c. By affliction of various kinds I have proved thy faith, hope, patience, and love. The root of the matter is within thee. Matthew Henry gives this beautiful exposition, "I have made thee a choice one by the good which the furnace has done thee." God has nevertheless chosen some in the furnace of affliction. He has met them there, and by His Spirit has subdued them, and brought them to repentance, faith, and consecration to Himself. The design of a position in this furnace is to purify the Christian from sin, to wean from the world, &c. Application—1. Let the sublime design of this furnace induce patience and submission. 2. Remember the time of trial is but short. "Weeping may endure," &c. Called the day of adversity; the hour of affliction; but for a moment. 3. What a furnace of infliction awaits the ungodly in the world to come. (*Helps for the Pulpit.*) *God's people in the furnace* :—1. All persons in the furnace of affliction are not chosen. It is a great truth that every child of God is afflicted, but it is a lie that every afflicted man is a child of God. 2. The second preliminary remark I would make is on the immutability of God's love to His people. Think not, when you are in trouble, that God has cast you off. I. IF YOU WANT GOD'S PEOPLE YOU MUST GENERALLY LOOK FOR THEM IN THE FURNACE. Look at the world in its primeval age, when Adam and Eve are expelled the garden. They have begotten two sons, Cain and Abel: which of them is the child of God? Yonder one who lies there smitten by the club, a lifeless corpse; he who has just now been in the furnace of his brother's enmity and persecution. A few hundred years roll on, and where is the child of God? There is one man whose ears are continually vexed with the conversation of the wicked and who walks with God, even Enoch, and he is the child of God. Descend further still till you come to the days of Noah. You will find the man who is laughed at, hooted as a fool, building a ship upon dry land, standing in the furnace of slander and laughter: that is the elect of God. Go on still through history; let the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob pass before you, and you may write upon all of them: "These were God's tried people." Then go down to the time when Israel went into Egypt. Do you ask me to find out God's people? I take you not to the palaces of Pharaoh, but to the brick-kilns of Egypt. As we follow on in the paths of history, where

were God's family next? They were in the furnace of the wilderness, suffering privation and pain. Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, against whom the people took up stones to stone them: these were distinguished above their fellows as being elect out of the chosen nation. Pass through Judges and come to the time of Saul, and where was God's servant then? He is in the furnace—wandering in the caves of Engedi, climbing the goat tracks, hunted like the partridge by a remorseless foe. And after his days where were the saints? Not in the halls of Jezebel, nor sitting at the table of Ahab. They are hidden by fifties in the cave, and fed by bread and water. I might tell you of the days of Maccabees, when God's children were put to death without number, by all manner of tortures till then unheard of. I might tell you of the days of Christ, and point to the despised fishermen, to the laughed at and persecuted apostles. I might go on through the days of popery, and point to those who died upon the mountains or suffered in the plains. I suppose it shall be so until the latest age. II. THE REASON FOR THIS. 1. It is the stamp of the covenant. 2. All precious things have to be tried. The diamond must be cut. Gold, too, must be tried. It was one of the laws of God, "Everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make go through the fire, and it shall be clean" (Num. xxxi. 23). It is a law of nature, it is a law of grace, that everything that can abide the fire—everything that is precious—must be tried. 3. The Christian is said to be a sacrifice to God. Now every sacrifice must be burned with fire. 4. Another reason why we must be put in the furnace is, because else we should not be at all like Jesus Christ. If He walked through the flames, must not we do the same? III. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE FURNACE? 1. It purifies us. 2. It makes us more ready to be moulded. What could our manufacturers do if they could not melt the metal they use? They could not make half the various things we see around us, if they were not able to liquify the metal, and afterwards mould it. There could be no good men in the world if it were not for trouble. We could none of us be made useful if we could not be tried in the fire. 3. Then the furnace is very useful to God's people because they get more light there than anywhere else. If you travel in the neighbourhood of Birmingham, or in other manufacturing districts, you will be interested at night by the glare of light which is cast by all those furnaces. It is labour's own honourable illumination. There is no place where we learn so much, and have so much light cast upon Scripture, as we do in the furnace. 4. One more use of the furnace—and I give this for the benefit of those who hate God's people—is, that it is useful for bringing plagues on our enemies. Do you not remember the passage in Exodus, where "the Lord said unto Moses and unto Aaron, take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast"? There is nothing that so plagues the enemies of Israel, as "handfuls of ashes of the furnace" that we are able to cast upon them. The devil is never more devoid of wisdom than when he meddles with God's people, and tries to run down God's minister. "Run him down!" Sir, you run him up! Persecution damages our enemies; it cannot hurt us. IV. THE COMFORTS IN THE FURNACE. 1. The comfort of the text itself—election. Let affliction come—God has chosen me. 2. You have the Son of Man with you in the furnace. Conclusion—There is another great furnace. "The pile thereof is of wood and much smoke, the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, shall kindle it." Would you be saved? There is but one way. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's glory concerned in our holiness* (with ver. 11):—We have a right to be made as pure as God can make us. This is our claim upon Him. He created us, and we have a right to demand that He should make out of us the best He can, and should do this refining work on the creatures He has called into being. It is His duty to burn up our dross, and bring out our full beauty and worth. Love demands that He should. (*Mrs. H. W. Smith.*) *Chosen in the furnace*:—In 1553 Sir Thomas Palmer was led from the Tower to be executed. He leaped upon the scaffold, red with the blood of four companions previously executed. "Good-morning to you all, good people," he said, looking round him with a smile; "ye come hither to see me die, and to see what nerve I have. Marry, I will tell you: I have seen more in yonder terrible place (the Tower) than ever I saw before throughout all the realms that ever I wandered in: for there I have seen God. I have seen the world, and I have seen myself: and when I beheld my life, I saw nothing but slime and clay, full of

corruption: I saw the world nothing else but vanity, and all the pleasure thereof nothing worth: I saw God omnipotent, His power infinite, His mercy incomprehensible: and when I saw this, I submitted myself to Him, beseeching of His mercy and pardon, and I trust He hath forgiven me: for He called me once or twice before, but I would not turn to Him, but even now, by this sharp kind of death, He hath called me unto Him." (*H. O. Mackey.*) *The furnace needed for perfection of character* :—"He would be a nice person," wrote George Eliot in one of her letters concerning one, who might have been many a modern prosperous man, "if he had another soul added to the one he has by nature—the soul that comes by sorrow and love."

Ver. 12. **Hearken unto Me, O Jacob.**—*God's unchangeableness throughout eternity* :—"The eternity and immutability of God are in their own nature inseparable, and are so generally united in the Holy Scriptures that the passages which declare the one declare or imply the other also." I. GOD IS ETERNAL. 1. Reason itself claims this attribute for God. Nor was it unknown even to the heathens. Proclus, a follower of Plato, proved God to be eternal, because He exists of Himself. Thales defined God to be a being without beginning and end; before all things; and who was never born. 2. What reason teaches, the Scriptures assert. They represent God's eternity to be—(1) An eternity of duration. (2) An eternity of perfection. "From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God!" All that is involved in that great name He always was, and always will be! II. GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE, eternally unchangeable. 1. Unchangeableness is an essential perfection of God. (1) In His existence He cannot cease to be (Psa. cii. 27). (2) In His nature or essence. (3) In His purposes (chap. xlvi. 10, xiv. 24). (4) In His promises to His people; in His threatenings against the wicked; and in all His predictions (Numb. xxiii. 19). 2. All these declarations are in harmony with the teachings of Scripture and the conclusions of reason. (1) Scripture (Mal. iii. 6; Psa. xxxiii. 11; Isa. xlvi. 10; James i. 17). (2) Reason. As God is self-existent, caused by none, He can be changed by none. As He is infinite in all His perfections, He cannot change, for nothing can be added to or taken from the infinite—any change would make Him less than infinite before or after. The unchangeableness of God is confirmed—(*a*) By the stability of His natural government. (*b*) By His moral government, and the identity of the several dispensations of grace. III. PRACTICAL LESSONS WHICH THIS GREAT SUBJECT TEACHES. 1. It assures us of the essential Divinity of the Christ. The application to our Lord of the terms here used by God to describe Himself, places His Deity beyond doubt (Rev. i. 8, 17, xxii. 13). 2. It assures us of the fulfilment of God's promises and the accomplishment of His plans. 3. It affords "strong consolation" amid all the trying changes of this mortal state. 4. It should stimulate us to seek stability of character (Heb. xiii. 8, 9). 5. It should alarm the impenitent. (*A. Tucker.*) *God's eternity a ground of confidence* :—Who can be too quick for Him that is the first, or prevent Him? Who can be too hard for Him that is the last, and will keep the field against all opposers, and will reign till they are all made His footstool? (*M. Henry.*)

Ver. 13. **Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth.**—*The Creator*:—I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH. II. THE OVER-ARCHING HEAVENS. III. THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THESE GREAT WORKS. 1. The heavens have been God's grand lesson-books for the instruction and elevation of His children (Psa. viii. and xix.). 2. The earth has been the scene of revelations of His character which we cannot believe to be surpassed by any vouchsafed to any other portion of His universe; His judgments on sin; His manifestations of mercy; His tabernacling amongst men in the person of His Son; the death on the Cross for the redemption of lost humanity; the nobleness, sincerity, patience, unselfishness, forgiveness of God manifested in the spiritual education of His children. 3. The long process of sin and redemption shall at length have a glorious consummation. (*W. Seward.*)

Ver. 16. **And now the Lord God and His Spirit hath sent me.**—*The Holy Spirit* :—"And now the Lord God hath sent Me with His Spirit." The Spirit does not send, but is sent. (*Prof. A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) Note the tendency in chaps. xl.-lxvi. to treat the Divine Spirit as a separate personality (xl. 13, lxiii. 10, 11, 14). (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*)

Vers. 17, 18. **Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer.**—*The "I am's" of God and of man*:—How beautiful and impressive are the "I am's" of God; so different from the proud and empty boastings clearly discernible in the "I am's" of man. We are never nearer to misleading others and deceiving ourselves, than when we utter sentences beginning with "I am." For, after all, what are we in ourselves that is worth mentioning? When we yield to the constraint of the Bible and conscience, and come to know something of our own hearts, we shall not dare to speak aloud to those about us; but, like Job, our words will be for God, and into His ears we shall whisper, "I am vile." Or, if beneath the influence of the blessed Spirit we come to realise that our nature is changed, then shall we temper our assertion with humility, and, like Paul, say, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." Only on God's lips has the declaration, "I am," its full meaning. This is God's great name. (*W. J. Mayers.*) *God is what He is for His people*:—This grand self-assertion of God will increase in its beauty and power for us when we remember that God is not some powerful monarch, isolating Himself from those around Him, withholding succour from the distressed, guidance from the perplexed, relief from the poor, and living only to gratify Himself. What God is He is for His people—as the sun is light for the earth, or the earth nourishment for the crops, or the crops food for the people. How comforting and helpful is the recollection of what God is! In God's "I am" the sick man finds his medicine, the poor man his riches, the lonely man his company, the sinner his salvation, the wanderer his hope, the wounded heart its balm, the hungry soul its manna, the fearful one his cordial, the dying one his life, and every glorified one his all. We must go out of ourselves to get real blessing for ourselves; and to whom should we go but to Him, described as the "Lord, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel"? The heart must have a person to love, to lean on, to live for. No doctrine, no idea, no creed can take the place of the person. The language just quoted describes a character peculiar to the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the true Lord, the Redeemer, the Holy One, supreme in all creation, paramount in redemption, having the pre-eminence in holiness. As Lord He rules, as Redeemer He saves, as Holy One He inspires and guides. He claims to be our Lord and God, and in this high station deigns to address us. Nor would we be slow to recognise His claims, but would have our faith to be the echo of His love, while, with Thomas, each one of us says: "My Lord and my God." It is indeed Divine love which speaks to us in the text, and makes known to us the good will and pleasure of the great "I Am." (*Ibid.*) *God, our Teacher and Leader*:—"Learn of Me" and "Follow Me" are two most impressive commands of Jesus Christ. I. THERE IS AN IMPORTANT RELATION BETWEEN THESE TWO OFFICES OF OUR DIVINE MASTER. Not every teacher is a leader, not every leader a true teacher. Theory and practice are often divorced. Words and works are not always wedded. But in our Lord there is perfection in both teaching and leading. Does Jesus teach us to "pray and not to faint"? He also leads in this, for He prayed. Does Jesus teach us to glorify God by our "good works"? He "went about doing good." Does our Master teach us to love our enemies and pray for those who despitefully use us? How grandly are we led by His dying prayer, "Father, forgive them." Are we to "seek first the kingdom of God," according to His teaching? So, indeed, did He, for it was His meat and drink to do His Father's will. Would He have us patient under suffering, calm amid reproach, submissive under affliction, and alway resigned? So, indeed, was He. Let the Garden of Gethsemane bear witness. Let Pilate's hall testify. Let Calvary give answer. He truly "teaches us to profit, and leads us by the way we should go." These are the two great forces which aid us in the formation of the Christian character and the development of the Christian life. The teaching of our Master is sometimes out of the book of affliction and sorrow. He teaches us our folly, and weakness, and sin; and then leads us into His wisdom, and strength, and holiness. He teaches us in the valley of the shadow that He may lead us to the golden height of Divine light and love. He teaches us by the furnace that He may lead us to the palace. He teaches us by the noon-day heat, and then leads us to the sheltering rock. In multitudes of ways does our Lord teach His people, but ever to the end that He may lead them in the way in which they should go. But for His instructions we should be poor followers. If He beckoned to us in silence we should hardly dare to take a step. But He is not silent, for as He goes before us we can hear His voice. The thought of His instruction encourages us, while His leadership emboldens us. II. Let us now spend a little while in THE CONTEMPLATION OF THOSE SWEET WORDS, "WHICH LEADETH THEE." Here, indeed,

is found soul-comfort and strength, such as we all need amid our feebleness and the bewilderment around. It will be well for us to read these words in the light of Scripture thoughts and incidents. How they remind us of God leading His people from the thraldom of Egypt. Only let faith's eye be clear, and the leading pillar will ever be discerned. In the Song of Moses we have a beautiful figure to help us in understanding our Lord's leading. There the mention of the eagle's care for her young in fluttering over them as they try to fly, and spreading her wings beneath them to give them confidence, and bearing them on her wings when they are weary, is followed by the declaration,—"So the Lord alone did lead them." As we pass on we come to the beautiful poem of the shepherd-king, and we hear his sweet voice singing, "He leadeth me beside the still waters." And then we find David's son putting into the lips of wisdom the words, "I lead in the way of righteousness." Let us take another example; now from the prophet Isaiah. There we find this precious promise of our God's: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." Is not this what He has done and still does for us? How strengthening, again, is the promise recorded by this same prophet: "I will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him"; and how soothing the words written for us by Jeremiah: "With favours will I lead them; I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble." III. WHAT SPIRIT SHALL WE MANIFEST IN VIEW OF THIS PRECIOUS TRUTH? Let us take our place by the Psalmist, and with him in a spirit of humility, resignation, trustfulness, and hope, put up these petitions: Psa. v. 8, xxv. 5, xxvii. 11, xxxi. 3, lxi. 2, cxxxix. 24, cxliii. 10. Thus shall we on earth have a true foretaste of the unspeakable rest and blessedness of that sinless place where "the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall lead them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (*Ibid.*) *Profitable teaching and right leading:*—I. GOD AS A REDEEMER. The redemption spoken of by Isaiah was temporal in the first place. But he ascends a much higher sphere than that circumscribed by any earthly demand. 1. The captivity of evil; the Babylon of sin. The whole human race is involved in misery as in guilt. The bondage of iniquity is the worst sort of captivity that beings capable of a better life can possibly suffer. 2. The mercy of the Redeemer at work in the city of bondage. (1) The greater because of our helplessness and need. (2) The greater because of our sinfulness and unbelief. (3) Crowned by the maintenance of God's righteousness with the recovery and perfection of our own. The Gospel is not simply a principle of forgiveness, it is that and something more: it is the power to become holy—the happiness and endlessness of a righteous and godly life. II. GOD AS A TEACHER. The Gospel is too generally only regarded and valued as a something which adds to our enjoyment. Few Christians even understand the beneficence of discipline. 1. Look at the Gospel as a teacher. The new birth opens the eyes to a new world; it is followed by a new language. Here is the high school of heaven in which the Spirit of God is the principal Teacher. 2. Learning is never easy. There is no royal road to this learning, any more than to mere secular knowledge. (1) The lessons are harder because we have to unlearn. Satan has had us in his school, where we were as apt to learn as he to teach. (2) The lessons are harder because we are not diligent. The elements always seem most difficult, because they are so near. If a man always sticks at the elements he is ever in difficulties, yet never makes progress. (3) The learning is harder because as yet we are not much better than invalids. 3. Yet all the teaching is profitable. (1) As a correction. Our weakness makes us more humble, and less prone to self-reliance. (2) As a spiritual development. All these things are made to work together for our highest good. III. GOD AS A LEADER. 1. The way God would have us go is not always according to our inclination. (1) The pleasantest way is not necessarily the best. (2) The fact that we are called to walk in an unpleasant path, so far from proving God's desertion may indicate just the reverse. He may be nearer to us in the cloud than in the sunshine. The wilderness with Him in it is the way to Canaan: no other way, however pleasant, can be safe. 2. The knowledge that it is His way should be enough. (1) As a reason. For there can be nothing irrational in following Him who is the source and crown of wisdom. (2) As an incentive. For the voice of His approval should sound both distinctly and pleasantly to our ears. (*J. Parrish, B.A.*) *Life an education:*—1. Our life is an education; not a mere probation, or trial of what we are to be and to do, but a training of our lives and characters into as great likeness as is possible to the perfect life and character of God, revealed to us

in Christ. It is a great truth, helping us to see many things in their true light; above all, helping us to understand the meaning of our life, and its relation to the will of God. The human father is too often but a deceiving type through which to try to understand the Divine Father. Still, even those who have had least to thank their earthly parents for should be able to rise to the idea, however imperfect, of a wise, righteous, unselfish fatherhood, and to picture to themselves a man who should show these qualities in his relation to his children. And thinking of such an one, could you think of him as content that they should simply go their own way, seek their own pleasure, indulge their own whims, let loose their own tempers and desires, and own no authority, and recognise no purpose in life, and believe in no will higher, more experienced, more just than their own? All that is truest and most useful in the discipline and training which an earthly father, who knows his relation to his family and is faithful to it, bestows on his children, is based on something that is eternal in the heavens, that exists as the true rule of fatherhood in the mind of God the Father. Is it not involved in the very idea that God is our Father that there should be in His mind a design for each of us? And is it not inseparable from such a design that there should be much in it that is not naturally easy and pleasant? The pain has been inevitable because the true end of life has been kept in view, above all temporary and petty objects that lie in the way to that end. The end could not be reached by one ignorant, untrained, undisciplined, unaccustomed to obey or to learn. In the training for the higher life it is not all plain and smooth. Least of all is it so at the beginning. This is the meaning of the "strait gate" and the "narrow way" that "lead to life." They are strait and narrow, because they lead to life, because they lead us on to a definite purpose of God for us that is not laid down at random, not shaped by chance, but is the result of love and foresight, and must, like all things that are high and good, be worked out not carelessly and easily, but with patience and thought and toil. 2. If we believe in this Divine purpose of our life, if we believe that the object of it is to train us into more perfect union with our Father, to educate us to fill our place as His children in His family, surely it will be our wisdom to try to learn what it is and to fulfil it. How are we to do this? Not through self-will; of that we may be sure. 3. There are two great errors into which those who are failing of God's plan may have fallen, or be falling. There is the error of being self-confident, impatient of all authority, advice, control, even of such control (a parent's, for instance) as is one of God's own ordinances, one of the abiding bonds of human life, which cannot be broken without the family or the society in which it is broken suffering loss, and at last dissolution. And there is the error of yielding absolutely to some authority (other than a natural authority) to which you submit your own reason and conscience, and for which you resign your own responsibility. We should beware of either of these errors. And lest we fall into them, we should use our reason and our conscience diligently in striving to find out the will of God for us; and if ever it seems hard to find, then there is the refuge of work and of prayer to resort to, until the dawn of light and peace. 4. It is a great thing to trust God; to have faith in Him and in His goodwill and loving purpose for us, really to believe that we are children in His family, and scholars in His school. Such faith is the root of strength, hope, patience and courage in human life. (*R. H. Story, D.D.*) *The soul's Guide* (for the New Year):—1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GUIDE. He is Jehovah—the Lord our strength; the Cause of all existence, and the Fountain and Source of life. Thus He is "mighty to save," and able to conduct His servants through every danger, and deliver them from every foe. He is "thy Redeemer," loving thee "with an everlasting love." A companion to rescue thee from danger, to take a loving interest in all thy cares and sorrows: One who has "chosen thee in the furnace of affliction," that He may make thee "all glorious within," and imprint on thee His own likeness. He is "the Holy One of Israel," faithful and true, rich, tender, and unfailing in His promises. II. THE METHODS OF GUIDANCE. "Teacheth thee to profit, . . . leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." The methods are various and sometimes peculiar, but always full of wisdom. Nothing is ever wanting on the part of the Teacher: if it is necessary for the pupil's progress, he will have to submit to the discipline of restraint, and to bear the yoke of adversity. 1. God leads us sometimes by unknown paths, by ways we cannot understand. Joseph, Jacob, Daniel, Elijah. The ways of providence need careful watching to see their fitness and beauty. 2. By gentleness. David could say, "Thy gentleness hath made me great,"—the Divine condescension had stooped to his frailties and errors. "I will guide thee

with Mine eye." Not with bit and bridle, nor with the "hook in thy nose," as Sennacherib. 3. This guidance is continual. The Guide never relaxes His vigilant care. He will "never leave thee,"—"even unto death" He is by thy side. Thus guided we are always safe, right, and happy. III. THE RESULTS OF ACCEPTING THIS GUIDANCE (ver. 18). "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." God's promises are always to character. 1. Peace—that quiet, restful condition of soul which is the heritage of those from whom all painful emotions and all disturbing influences are removed. 2. Righteousness—as the foundation on which character is built, and the element of which it consists. "Righteousness . . . as the waves of the sea—so wide in its influence as to cover all the interests of life; so deep as to go down to the deepest places of the heart, and permeate the whole life with its power and beauty. And the peace and righteousness united make life fruitful—so that it abounds in goodness, and the soul at all times and in all places is enabled to fulfil life's highest duty. (*J. Edwards.*) *It might have been:*—These words would be sad from the lips of man, but coming from God they are inexpressibly touching and solemn. They are the cry of a wounded heart. They tell not of the wrath of justice, but of the sorrows of love. This may be regarded as implying—I. GRIEF FOR LOST HOPES. Once there was hope and fair promise. God's beautiful ideal might be realised. But that is all gone. God only knows what has been lost. He is, so to speak, alone with His sorrow. II. JUDGMENT FOR NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITIES. God is speaking here in the character of "the Redeemer—the Holy One of Israel." He recalls what He had done, and what might and ought to have been the happy results. But the precious opportunities had been abused. 1. Gracious instruction. "I am the Lord which teacheth thee to profit." 2. Infallible guidance. "Which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." 3. Holy blessedness. "Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." But the time is past. The glorious vision has faded away for ever. Neglected opportunities bring sure and terrible retribution. III. EXONERATION FOR NEEDLESS RUIN. Reason, conscience, and the Holy Scriptures combine in testifying that man's ruin is not of chance or fate, far less of God, but exclusively of himself. (*W. Forsyth, M.A.*) **I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit.**—*The benefit of afflictions:*—I. AFFLICTIONS MAY BE MADE PROFITABLE TO THE CHILDREN OF GOD. 1. They may be greatly instrumental in turning off their attention from the world. 2. They may turn off their affections as well as their attention from the captivating objects of the world. 3. They may be of much greater benefit to them by raising their affections to God, the source of all good. II. GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE AFFLICTIONS PROFITABLE TO HIS CHILDREN. 1. He is able to bring Himself into the view of His afflicted children. 2. He can place their affections as well as attention upon Himself. III. THIS IS A MATTER OF CONSOLATION TO THEM. Improvement—1. Since God makes use of afflictions to keep His children near to Him, it appears that they are extremely prone to forsake Him. 2. It appears from the manner in which God instructs and benefits His afflicted children, that they may derive the greatest advantage from their severest sufferings. 3. If God chastises His children for good, then those who are suffered to live in uninterrupted prosperity have reason to fear that they do not belong to the household of faith. 4. If God can make afflictions profitable to His children, then we may justly conclude that He can make them profitable to others. 5. It appears that every person may know whether he belongs to His family or not. Afflictions are peculiar trials of the heart, and give men the best opportunity to determine what is in reality the supreme object of their affections. 6. The afflicted ought to be of a teachable spirit under Divine convictions. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *True profit:*—It is not only the commercial world which has to make its calculations of profit and loss. All life is made up of profit and loss. If there is not profit, there is loss; if there is not loss, there is profit. 1. I understand the text to mean, not that God teaches us in a profitable way, but that He instructs us how to get the profit in all things; that He gives that faculty, the power to take the good and refuse the evil. 2. Consider how God does "teach to profit." (1) The first thing which God will probably teach, and which we must receive, is a general confidence that there is profit, however imperceptible it may be at the time to us, in the thing which He is sending to us. (2) This faith given, the next thing that God puts into our hearts is to seek that good; eternal profit, profit both to ourselves and to Him, in that He is glorified in His own work. We are to look for that profit, not on the surface, but in certain deeper, hidden meanings and intentions which lie underneath. Into

those deeper meanings God will lead and admit you. But not without three things: a reverent acceptance of His teaching, hard work, and a good life. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

Ver. 18. **O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments.**—*Hearkening to God's commandments* :—1. It is the duty of all people to "hearken," however and whenever God may see fit to speak to them. 2. To hearken denotes a reverent and careful attention to God's message. 3. To hearken implies also that we consider God's commandments as binding upon us, and as pointing out certain particulars which we are required to attend to. (*J. N. Norton.*) *Peace as a river* :—Peace may be compared to a river—I. IN ITS ORIGIN; small, joyous, sparkling, vigorous, rapid. II. IN ITS PROGRESS—widening and deepening; receiving new tributaries on the right and left, from the various means of grace, as they are supplied with the dew of heaven and showers of blessings; sweeping away—as it rolls on in its strength—the obstacles of unsanctified affections and unconquered lusts. III. The beautiful figure of the text conveys the idea also of OVERFLOWING ABUNDANCE. The ancient heathen, in order to represent the universal power and beneficence of Jupiter, used the symbol of a river flowing from his throne. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the "perfect peace" enjoyed by God's true children. The Psalmist describes it as "great peace." St. Paul refers to it as "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." We make mention of it in our daily prayers as "that peace which the world cannot give." It is not a scanty, fluctuating, failing stream, but a full tide of peace, both wide and deep, and supplying to the utmost every longing of the soul. IV. The language suggests the idea of PERPETUITY. It is not uniform, indeed, any more than the course of the river. Now it is half hidden in a narrow channel, among overhanging mountains and forests; and now spread over a wide bed conspicuous in the plain. Again, it is seen contracting and deepening itself, and moving onward with tenfold velocity and strength. Such, too, are the variations in the Christian's peace. V. The promise of "peace as a river" includes the idea of INCREASE. It shall grow stronger and more pervading. As the mighty river may be traced back to an insignificant spring, far up the mountain-side, so is it with the beginnings of peace in the soul. (*Ibid.*) *The great privation; or, the great salvation* :—From this verse we may learn that when God smites men on account of sin, it gives Him no pleasure. John Knox said that he never chastised his children without tears in his own eyes. Jeremiah, in the bitterest chapter of his Lamentations, bears this graceful witness to our covenant God: "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." And surely if in the gentler chastisement of His hands the Most High takes no pleasure, much less can He find delight in that withering curse which destroys the finally impenitent. Nor is this the only lesson which lies on the surface of the text. Observe, the Lord addresses words of poignant regret over the prize the sinner has lost, as well as the penalty he has incurred. What loss thinkest thou is that which God bewails on thy account? "Peace like a river," and "righteousness like the waves of the sea." There is a privation which you unconsciously suffer. You are a stranger to peace. David Hume used to say that Christians were melancholy people. But that was a happy retort, in which somebody observed—"David Hume's opinion is not worth much, for he never saw many Christians; and when he did see any, there was enough to make them miserable in the sight of David Hume." The true Christian has a peace which is totally unknown to any other man. I. The metaphor is full of beauty, and not wanting in instructiveness either, by which PEACE IS COMPARED TO A RIVER. 1. Peace like a river, for continuance. 2. For freshness. The water which runs down the Thames, say at Maidenhead, never was there before. It is fresh water, fresh from the hills to-day, and to-morrow it is the same, and the same the next day—ever fresh supplies from the heart of old England, to keep her glorious river swelling and abounding. Now the peace which a Christian has is always fresh, always receiving fresh supplies. 3. A river increases in breadth, and its waters augment their volume. Such is the Christian's peace. Pure and perfect though it is at the first, little temptations seem to mar it; oftentimes the troubles of this life threaten to choke it. When the Christian is ten years older, and has meandered a few more miles along the tortuous course of a gracious experience, his peace will be like a broad river. 4. The peace of the Christian is like a river, because of its joyful independence of man. We have heard the story of a simpleton who went to see the reputed source of the Thames, and putting his hand over the little rivulet that came trickling down the ditch, he stopped it, and

said, "I wonder what they are doing at London Bridge now that I have stopped the river." But who knew the difference? A whole Parliament could not make the Thames swell with waves, and fifty Parliaments could not lessen the body of its waters. It were well, by the way, if they could preserve its streams from the pollution of those foul and putrid sewers constantly emptied into it. The rivers would be better without the interference of men. Such is the Christian's peace. I have watched this river as it broke over the stones of adversity; and when the tide of earthly comfort ran low, it hath seemed as if the flow of peace were clearer and more transparent than ever. The devil cannot rob us of the peace which comes from God, neither can the world take it away. II. "THY RIGHTEOUSNESS AS THE WAVES OF THE SEA." 1. Notice how this metaphor surpasses the previous one in dignity, if not in delicacy. We can all see a sort of comparison, and yet at the same time a strong contrast, between the water of an inland river and the collection of waters which make up the wide expanse of the sea. One for the most part is tranquil, the other always heaving and surging to and fro. So I suppose, as the words were originally addressed to the Jewish nation and referred to their temporal welfare, the river would represent the beauty and happiness of their own land, like the garden of Eden, watered by the river of God's pleasure; and the sea, with its waves rolling in majestically one after another in unbroken succession, would set forth that progress which is the renown of righteousness. Generation after generation would witness the rising tide of prosperity. Each chapter of their chronicles would lift its crested plume and tell of mighty acts and righteous deeds, till, like the roar of ocean, the righteousness of Israel should proclaim the name of the Lord from the river even to the ends of the earth. Oh! what did that rebellious seed of Jacob lose by forsaking the Lord! This seems to me to be something like the meaning. 2. But I want to apply this metaphor of the waves of the sea, like that of the flowing of the river, to the happiness of the believer. The man who believes in Jesus Christ has the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. But how is this righteousness like the waves of the sea? (1) For multitude. You cannot count the waves of the sea, do what you will; and so is it with the righteousness of Christ, you cannot count its different forms and fashions. Let us tell you of some of these waves. I was born in sin and shapen in iniquity, but the holiness of Christ's birth takes away the unholiness of my nativity. I have committed sins in my childhood, sins against my parents; but Jesus Christ was a child full of the Spirit; so Christ's childish perfection is imputed to me, and hides my childish sins. I have to mourn over sins of thought; but Christ can say, "Thy law is My delight," and the thoughts of Christ's mind cover my thoughts, &c. (2) For majesty. What an illustration of overwhelming power! And ask now, who can withstand the power of Christ's righteousness? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Then, it is majestic because it is profound. Who can plumb the depths of the righteousness of Christ?—deep as the demands of the law, deep as the miseries of hell, deep as the thoughts of God. It is majestic, too, because of its ceaseless energy. Wave upon wave, it breaks upon the eternal shore of Divine justice, fulfilling the counsels of God, while it covers all the sins of His people. (3) And the analogy may be traced still further, if you reflect on the sufficiency of the one and the other. All over the world, at low water, you will find certain muddy creeks, bays, and coves. How are all these to be covered? There is water enough in the sea to cover every cove and creek; and there is not a river which will have to say "We had no tide to-day." There is enough righteousness in Christ to cover you. (4) The righteousness of Christ is like the waves of the sea for origin. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The river an image of peace*:—I. The image sets before us A PEACE WHICH IS THE EXPRESSION OF LIFE AND POWER. II. The image is expressive OF HEALTHFUL INFLUENCE. III. OF PROGRESS AND PERPETUITY. IV. OF PLEASANTNESS. (*W. S. Davis.*) *The Divine commandments sources of peace*:—I. THE CONDUCT THESE MEN OUGHT TO HAVE PURSUED. "O that thou hadst hearkened," &c. What does this hearkening mean? 1. An understanding of God's commandments. 2. A remembering of God's commandments. 3. A regarding of them as commands. II. A BLESSED RESULT OF THIS CONDUCT WHEN PURSUED. 1. It leads the soul to Christ, the great Prince of Peace. 2. It leads us to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. 3. The commands gradually make us holy, and holiness leads to peace. III. THE EXTENT OF THIS BLESSED EFFECT. "As a river." (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *The lost ideal*:—I. THE LOST IDEAL—what might have been. II. THE DIVINE LAMENTATION OVER THIS. III. THE DIVINE PROPOSAL FOR RESTORATION. What means this next word, "Go ye forth of Babylon"? &c. (ver. 20). (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Obedience and its*

blessings :—I. THE DUTY OF THE CREATURE. To hearken to the Divine commandments. Filial obedience springing from love to his Father in heaven ought to be the rule of his life. II. BLESSINGS RESULTING FROM PERFORMING THIS DUTY GLADLY AND WILLINGLY. 1. The peace of such is as a river. A river the source of verdure and fertility. As the river beautifies the landscape, so does peace beautify the soul. Its fostering influence is essential if the virtues and graces of the Spirit are to develop within us. 2. "Thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." When the tide is coming in the waves advance farther and farther over the strand. Those who hearken to the Divine commandments make progress in righteousness. (*H. P. Wright, B.A.*) *Peace as a river* :—Not as the brook, as it gushes rapturously forth, breaking musically on the stones, and flashing in the glee of its early life; not as a streamlet hardly filling its wide bed, and scarcely affording water enough for the fish to pass to its higher reaches: but like a river far down its course, sweeping along with majestic current, deep and placid, able to bear navies on its broad expanse, to collect and carry with it the refuse of towns upon its banks without contamination, and approaching the sea with the sympathy begotten of similarity in depth and volume and service to mankind. Oh, rivers that minister perpetually to man—not swept by storm, not drained by drought, not anxious about continuance, always mirroring the blue of the azure sky, or the stars of night, and yet content to stay for every daisy that sends its tiny root for nourishment—in your growth from less to more, your perennial fulness, your beneficent ministry, your volume, your claim, ye were meant to preach to man, with perpetual melody, of the infinite peace that was to rise, and grow, and unfold with every stage of his experience! Such at least was God's ideal for Israel, and for all who swear by His name and make mention of Jehovah as God. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Peace as a river* :—A perennial stream, such as the Euphrates (Amos v. 24). It is easy to understand the impression made on the mind of a native of Palestine, accustomed to "deceitful brooks" that run dry in the summer, by the sight of a great river, flowing on for ever in undiminished volume. The actual history of Israel had been like the *wadis* of Judea, transient gleams of prosperity being interrupted by long intervals of misfortune. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Dredging the river of peace* :—God promises a river of peace if we will dredge out the channel. The water is His business—the water-course is ours. There are three important words which we should consider carefully. I. "PEACE." If we are to dredge the river we must get out of the way at once and for all time any false conceptions about peace itself which we have been entertaining. Nothing stops the inflow of Divine life more effectually than false notions. Peace is an essentially Hebrew word, but it contains a cosmopolitan thought. The Jews said "Peace" as a salutation in the market-places and upon the highways, but we all want peace as a proof of our salvation and a mighty power of service. The Greek salutation was "rejoice." When Christ rose from the dead He used this form: "Rejoice." (R.V. "All hail!") And well may we rejoice, since the bands of death have been burst asunder. But Christ also said, Peace. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." Hence we are authorised in our wish to appropriate this thought in all its blessing. The Jew has always said, "Peace." The whole Orient has adopted His salutation in the universal "Shalom" of the present day. His deeply religious nature was clearly set off from the volatile, rejoicing, joy-loving nature of the Greek. What, then, is exactly meant by the word? 1. Peace *versus* Nirvana. There are some who think that peace means a sort of Christian Nirvana, a state of abstraction, absorption in the infinite, or self-surrender to nothingness in general and nothing in particular. Peace is consistent and co-existent with the intensest activity. A river may run through the busiest cities without losing its deep steadiness and gentle murmur. Our Lord Jesus was called the "Prince of Peace," and yet He was the most practical of workers. 2. Peace *versus* mere activity. If people escape the error of supposing that peace consists in mere contemplation, they are apt to suppose that it may be found by running about in ceaseless activity. The blessed Master by His Spirit imparts peace. It may not be secured by mere struggle, anxiety, and activity. 3. Peace *versus* compromise. Compromise does not secure permanent or genuine peace. Eli compromised for the sake of peace, and his sons broke his heart. Never take a half-hearted course to avoid turmoil. Of two pains you may choose the less, but never of two evils in the sense of sins. II. "RIVER." Among the quieter objects of nature none is more suggestive of God's power and wisdom, of God's loving presence in the world which He has made, than the river which winds in and out among the hills, steals

quietly through clattering towns, kisses fields and pastures into fruitfulness and verdure, and smilingly bares its breast to be scarred by the countless keels of the world's commerce. Hence the figure of the text gives us at once an idea of what peace is and what it does. It is the inflow of the Divine life, bringing the Divine quietness, patience and power, and resulting in spiritual beauty and fruitfulness. We have hence but to apply our ideas of a river to peace to discover the practical lessons we need to learn. 1. Heavenly supply. Every river has a source, and is dependent upon a constant, renewed supply. This source and supply are always from above. Peace, also, comes from above. Its source is in God. God's resources are infinite, and the supply shall not fail. 2. Useful overflow. Possibly when God made the promise we are considering He had in mind the river Nile, whose regular overflow could be depended upon to enrich Egypt, and bring food to the people. Or He may have thought of the Jordan, which "overflowed all its banks in the time of harvest." Certain it is that the river of peace runs out of its banks, and is useful only when it does. The overflowing heart of the Christian is the sympathetic heart. 3. Progressional expansion. A proper river grows broader and deeper as it progresses toward the sea. Our peace shall grow broader and deeper as we go on in the Christian life. III. "HEARKEN." This is the most important word of all, when we consider that it contains the condition of the promise God makes as to peace. All God's promises are conditional. If we fulfil our part of the contract He will not fail in His. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." The trouble with most of us is that we do not "let" the Holy Spirit do in us and for us what He yearns to do. Some Christians complain that God does not supply them with peace when their hearts are so choked and their lives so clogged and cumbered that the river cannot flow in. Let us pursue the thought a little to see how we may dredge the channel and secure the blessing. 1. Blasting out deep-rooted rocks. This is the arduous part of the engineer's work when a river channel is to be deepened. Some such work as this, deep and heroic, needs to be done by us if we are to offer a free course to the river of peace. Deep-rooted prejudices against the truth must be loosened and cast out of our minds. Hidden loves and yearnings for the world must be explored and destroyed. Pride is a great rock whose adamantine sides must be pierced. Love of excitement is another. Other rocks in the river's course are mentioned in Col. iii. 8. God's Word furnishes the dynamite by which they may be uprooted. 2. Rip-rapping to prevent dissipation of power. There have been heavy rains in the mountains, or the snows have suddenly melted and a mighty freshet comes tearing down the stream. The soil composing the banks is loose and loamy, and some protection must be afforded where the bends occur and the cities are built. Then the men set to work, and great nets of boughs and branches of trees are built, and these are made stable by rocks and bags of sand, and so the "rip-rap" is formed and the waters are kept in their course. We are constantly in danger of losing spiritual power through the broadening of our energies and the dissipations of our forces. A proper overflow of blessing to others is necessary; yet the river is not to run entirely out of its channel and waste itself fruitlessly and even harmfully. The love of Christ is to "constrain" us—keep us within limits. Let us not be afraid of being "narrow" in this sense. A river is powerful only when properly narrow,—otherwise it becomes a bog and a stench. 3. Guarding against the formation of sudden sand-bars. Those who dwell near sandy rivers or harbours formed by river mouths know what an amount of careful piering and dredging is necessary to keep the channel clear. Let us learn a lesson from the pains taken by the engineers. If we find a place in our spiritual life where sudden bars are apt to form, disturbing or retarding the flow of peace, let us at once protect the spot by special prayer. (*W. J. Harsha, D.D.*) *Peace and righteousness sacrificed*:—I. HERE ARE THE PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S PEOPLE. Peace like a river; righteousness like the waves of the sea. The very same blessings which are said in the New Testament to constitute the kingdom of God (Rom. xiv. 17). 1. This blessed peace is of two kinds—peace with God, and peace within themselves. This peace is compared to a river. The comparison is very beautiful and significant. Look at a river. What are you struck with? (1) The stillness and the smoothness of its course, so striking as contrasted with the noise and the disturbance which are so often heard upon its banks. So still is the course of the real Christian when compared with the troublesome world through which he moves. (2) Look again at the deep river. What an idea does it give us of fulness and abundance! And what an emblem then, in this respect, of the abundance of the Christian's peace! "The

Lord of peace Himself gives him peace always, by all means." "Always"—in prosperity and in adversity—in health and in sickness—in ease and in pain—in abundance and in want—in joy and in sorrow—in the midst of friends and in the midst of enemies—in life and in death. And "by all means"—for by how many instruments, through how many channels, does the Lord send peace into His people's hearts! By His Word—by His ordinances—by His providences—nay, by a thousand things which might seem, at first sight, more likely to mar their peace than to promote it. (3) Take another view of a deep river. How long has it been flowing? How long will it flow? And how long will the peace of the Lord's people last? "As long as the moon endureth" (Psa. lxxii. 7). Yea, longer far (Isa. xxxii. 17, liv. 10). 2. "Righteousness." The people of God are clothed in the merits of their Saviour. Now, of this righteousness it may well be said that it is "like the waves of the sea." Behold the sea, and the idea it gives us is that of vastness and immensity—an almost boundless mass of waters. And what is the height, the length, the breadth, the depth of the righteousness of Christ! The waves of the sea are a fit emblem of power and might—who can withstand them? who can rebuke them? And who can lay anything to the charge of those whose righteousness is that of their Redeemer? II. WHY DO NOT THE BLESSINGS WE HAVE SPOKEN OF BELONG TO EVERYONE? It is impossible to enjoy God's peace in the midst of the world's sins. III. WHAT TENDERNESS THERE IS IN THE TEXT! what commiseration of the sad estate in which sinners have reduced themselves! (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *The desire, plan, and regret of the Eternal*:—I. AN EARNEST DESIRE OF THE ETERNAL. 1. He desires for man an abundance of peace. The word "peace" stands for something more than freedom from national war or moral agitations. It stands for happiness in its widest and deepest import. The happiness desired, then, is not a little happiness, not a few drops, not even a copious shower that soon passes away, but a "river." (1) Ever augmenting in fulness. (2) Ever increasing in calmness. The deeper and fuller the river becomes, the more calm. (3) Ever approximating to its consummation. 2. He desires for man an abundance of spiritual prosperity. "Thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." "Righteousness" must also be taken in a general sense as standing for rectitude of soul and holiness of character. Those waves, how majestic in aspect! how resistless in flow! how unconquerable in energy! The Eternal does not wish us to have a little religion, but to "comprehend with all saints what is the length," &c. II. AN UNALTERABLE PLAN OF THE ETERNAL. The plan is that happiness should only come through obedience. "O that thou hadst hearkened," &c. 1. The constitution of the human soul shows this. The sum of all God's commandments has been reduced by Christ to love—supreme love to God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart." Now, the nature of the soul shows that there can be no true and perfect happiness without this. (1) Nothing but a supreme love for Him can draw out harmoniously the soul's powers. (2) Nothing but supreme love for Him can satisfy the soul's conscience. 2. The order of society requires this. All are members of a social system, and each has a mission to fulfil, not only in relation to himself, but in relation to others. For society to act in harmony it is necessary that there should be one will worked out by all. Where each follows his own will there must be eternal collisions and anarchies. 3. The history of the world manifests this. Every chapter in the world's history shows that the disobedient have been miserable, whilst the obedient have been happy. 4. The Word of God declares this. III. AN INEXPRESSIBLE REGRET OF THE ETERNAL. "O that thou hadst hearkened unto My commandments." Such Divine exclamations are not altogether unusual. Such expressions of Divine feeling indicate two things—1. The immense evils involved in disobedience. God alone knows the evils connected with disobedience to the individual, society, the universe. And seeing the dark and turbulent ocean of miseries springing from disobedience, He seems to sigh over it. His heart seems to break into commiseration. Fools may laugh at sin, but God is solemn over it. 2. That restoration to obedience is man's deepest necessity. God does three things to restore man to obedience. (1) Presents His law in the most attractive forms; not in characters on stone, in dry propositions, but in the lovely life of Jesus. (2) Presents the most powerful encouragement to obedience. The Gospel abounds with motives from heaven, earth, and hell, from time and eternity, to follow Christ. (3) Offers the Divine Spirit to help to obedience. Mark the pivot on which thy destiny hinges. It is obedience. (*Homilist.*) *What might have*

been:—What is a commandment of God? We are too commonly inclined to regard it merely as the expression of the wish of God. It is more than that. It expresses a law of life. To disobey a commandment is not merely to go against the will of God; it is to violate eternal law. Every commandment is the expression of a fundamental law, which it is our welfare to observe, and our destruction to ignore. A parent says to her child, "Thou shalt keep thyself clean." There is a commandment. But why? Because it is thy parent's wish? Yes, but more than that. Because it expresses a law of life, the condition of physical health. It is even so with all the commandments of God. The Ten Commandments are just ten laws, proclaiming what are the conditions of a healthy moral life. 1. Let us hear our text again. "O that thou hadst hearkened when I made known to thee the laws of moral and spiritual health. I have instructed thee what laws to observe in building a house; I have instructed thee what laws to observe in building a life. O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments." "Hearkened." The word is full of intentness; it is suggestive of quick apprehension. It means to prick the ears, as some hare or rabbit pricks its ears and listens at the slightest movement in the thicket, or at the sound of a footfall in the distant field. 2. But they had not hearkened. They had not pricked their ears and listened. They turned a sort of indolent and indifferent ear, and pursued their own way. Now, what happens when a man will not hearken to God's commandments, when he shapes his life in utter indifference to the revealed law? Two things happen, and they are as inevitable as death, for they are the forerunners of death—spiritual restlessness and spiritual feebleness. (1) Let a man hearken to the commandments of physical health, and all the many organs of his body will work together in a smooth harmony, as though they were not many but one. But now let the man refuse to hearken to the commandments of health, what then? The harmony will be broken, the brotherhood will be changed into anarchy, one after another the organs will rise in mutiny, and the man's bodily life will become the abode of restlessness and pain. Defiance of physical law produces physical restlessness. It is even so with those spiritual organs which inhere in the soul. Let a man hearken to God's commandments, let him obey the laws of spiritual health, and all his spiritual organs will form a holy brotherhood; conscience, will, affection, emotion, reason, shall all work together in the harmony which we name peace. But let a man defy the laws of God, and the soul will become a scene of civil strife; conscience, will, reason, and desire will be pitted one against another, and the whole soul of man, like to a little kingdom, will suffer the nature of an insurrection. (2) Defiance of spiritual law also produces spiritual feebleness. Every time I disobey a commandment of God I weaken my moral resources. Is it not to this process of gradual impoverishment that we refer when we say of some man, "Poor fellow, he has got no will left"? 3. But now, see what might have happened. "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments," five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, or forty years ago: instead of spiritual restlessness and spiritual weakness, "then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." (1) Peace like a river! I don't think it is the figure we should have chosen as a symbol of peace. I rather think we should have taken some lonely mountain tarn, some sheet of glassy water, hidden away in the bosom of the everlasting hills, as our symbol of peace. "Peace like a river." The mountain tarn is a symbol of ease; the flowing river is the symbol of peace. The river, deep and full and progressive! The Apostle Paul declared that he had the peace which is the gift of Christ. Then it was peace like a river. Was it? Listen to the old man: "I am content," there is peace—full, deep, rich contentment. But listen again—"Not that I am already perfect, . . . I press toward the mark." Peace, but like a river! Fulness with progress! Contentment with aspiration! Life at rest, but moving on to the perfection of God! (2) But more than that, instead of thy present spiritual feebleness, thy righteousness would have been "like the waves of the sea." Take your stand upon the shore, and watch the waves roll in, like an army of white-crested warriors, shaking their snowy plumes, and riding forth to battle. Do you remember that Old Testament figure which describes the strength of the pure—"terrible as an army with banners"? I have sometimes been reminded of the figure as I have stood upon the beach, and watched the great waves rolling in and tossing up their snowy foam—"terrible as an army with banners." "Thy righteousness like the waves of the sea," a conquering and jubilant army! Have you ever tried to stop a wave

of the sea? It cannot be stopped. "Thy righteousness like the waves of the sea"—nothing shall check it. No threats shall hinder it. No bribe shall allure it aside. Temptations shall be only like those sand-castles which our little ones build along the shore, and thy righteousness shall sweep them away with joyful ease. 4. It would be a poor and melancholy business for a preacher to get up and merely tell his people what might have been; it would be a funeral dirge rather than a Gospel. If the Gospel of God has a tender and inspiring note for anybody, it is for those souls which are burdened with a depressing sense of what might have been. "What might have been" must be followed by "what may be," if souls are to be lifted out of bondage and darkness into liberty and light. Still, if you can get a man to sigh for what might have been, you have laid the foundation for what may be. A sigh for the past is a prayer for the future. Hope may be born out of sorrow, as diamonds are born out of slime. What do we need? Well, first of all we need to know that we have another chance, that we can begin again. Don't let anyone fall into that fatal snare of believing that God has cast them off. God never hides His face. It is we who obscure it. Go down into the West Riding of Yorkshire, and look at those tall mill chimneys as they pour out dense volumes of coal black smoke, which hangs like a dark pall between the inhabitants and God's sky. What would you think if some poet, living in one of these towns, were to begin to cry, "Hide not thy face from us, O blue sky"? The blue sky is not hiding its face; it is your own black smoke that obscures it. Can the obscuring cloud be removed? "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The outline of the ideal in every man's life*:—If you have ever been at St. Andrews, and have looked at the ruins of that great cathedral, you have seen not only the massive walls that are left in a small part of it, but you have seen just the appearance above ground, the whole shape of the cathedral—nothing more than that: you can just form an idea of what it would be if it stood there in all its grandeur. Well, there is left in every man something of this kind. Sin depraves, but it does not obliterate the organic powers and the natural peculiarities and tendencies of the individual. What I might have been—that is not a picture which has altogether vanished in the air; there is some outline of it left, an outline in each man. Of course, these differ very much among themselves, just as pictures differ in a gallery or as human faces in a crowded street, all of which, perhaps, you will find to have a general resemblance, but none of which are exactly alike. The ideal of another person would not be mine, nor mine his. There are diversities. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *God's appeal to man*:—I. AN APPEAL OF GOD TO MAN. 1. The appeal made by the Almighty to the Jew, and also to the Gentile, is full of pathos and the most intense affection. It tells us how unwilling God was and is that any man, or any body of men, should perish; should pass away from His love and care and protection, and that if anyone did so, it would be their own fault; and that such a consequence of disobedience would be necessary for the upholding of the Divine laws. 2. The manner of the appeal, too, indicates that the commandments of God had not been properly regarded, and therefore there is a tone of sorrow and regret. The case reminds us of Christ weeping over the doomed city of Jerusalem. If we are neglecting our first and foremost duties with respect to God, if we are so taken up with the world, its different callings, its pleasures, its ambitions, its cares, and its disappointments, as to keep out of view the imperative duty of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and of working out by self-denial and constant obedience to the Almighty will our own personal salvation, then the words of our text, with all their force of meaning, may be applied to ourselves. 3. But such an expression of grief with God is generally predictive of judgment. It was so with the tearful words of the Redeemer. II. THE RESULTS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN; or those which follow obedience to the commandments of God. 1. On the condition of hearkening to or obeying the Divine commands there would follow a peace as full and deep and calm as to be like a river. 2. This latter comparison of righteousness is very striking. Like the waves of the sea for constant activity, for breadth and depth, for a wide circuit of influence, for sublimity, power, and greatness. And such is Christian life and character when considered in their relative bearings on ourselves and society at large. (*W. D. Horwood.*) *National peace and righteousness*:—The words are addressed to a nation; the images before us are images of national life; the peace—that is, the outward prosperity of the people—shall flow like a river; the righteousness of the united people shall be

like the prevailing unity, the accumulated power, the forceful, restless energy of the sea waves. (*W. S. Davis.*) **Thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.**—*Righteousness*:—1. Religion being the supreme act of the soul, it is not strange that its highest product should claim the grandest symbol in the vocabulary of God for its utterance. Isaiah, whose mind was more ocean-like in grand unity and rich variety of colour than any other prophet, saw so deeply into the nature of righteousness that not the plain, or sky, or mountain, with which he was familiar, offered him so complete a definition of its quality, or so full a suggestion of its life in the soul, as the wonderful sea. Poets have always sought the melodies of ocean to reinforce and complete their own especially when the deeper and larger experiences and hopes of man are touched. 2. Innocence is not righteousness, though many a soul thinks because it has not been stained by sin it is righteous. Innocence has no waves, no perils, no tragedies, no gulf streams, nothing so stormy as a plunging breaker. Innocence is a plain of white snow. The rosy hues of sunset do not glimmer down into its deeps! No one is engulfed in its splendour; no one can sail upon its bosom. It is passionless, without a yearning or a song. Righteousness is like a sea, full of currents; it is restless and restful with living energies. It has perils, and means storm and stress, as well as peace and beauty. It offers opportunities to its sailor for heroisms and enterprises of soul. A mountain can describe justice; it is its portrait, hard, unmovable, grand, crystalline. But righteousness is mobile, just as grand, but full of movement. 3. Even Jesus sought the seaside because He felt most of all souls how something above His soul influenced it as the moon influences the ocean. All nation-builders, poets, great achievers of the intellectual and spiritual wealth of the race know that not from within, or from beneath, but from above the long, sweet influences work to lift the life to its sublime heights. Part of the secret of a strong and blessed life lies in knowing the tides, in counting upon them, and in relying on the fact that these influences from above will do more for our exaltation and joy than any of our own efforts may do. At low tide, with a fresh east wind, a white-capped wave seems to try to reach some beautiful place on the shore. It yearns and strains and fails. Let it wait till the moon-drawn tide comes under it with soft, strong advances, and lo, the walls of the land are washed to jasper, and the wave has mounted where it never could have reached alone. Wait until God sends His tide and you will reach your highest goal. 4. Righteousness has majestic unity and richest variety, like the waves of the sea. Men would often make one type or aspect of righteousness the judge of all others, and call it alone perfect. The sea is so much like man's soul because it is so much a changeful unit; so like man's righteousness because every man's righteousness takes on all the hues of his personality. At all moments of the day and night the sea is a palette of colours, yet one sea rolls in all this marvel of changing tints. Righteousness is equally variant; it takes on the sky's hues above the soul, and the wonderful tints of the bottom of the sea. The sea is a challenge to man's sense of infinity. It whispers of eternity. So does all genuine righteousness, for it is ageless, and seems to rely on the life everlasting. Its whole mission is to fling us out on the forever of God and the soul. So the sea shall be no more when we have learned its lesson. (*F. W. Gunsaulus, D.D.*) *Righteousness as the waves of the sea*:—God would have a man's righteousness to be like the waves of the sea; that is, He would have him to be possessed of a goodness that cannot be measured, and that can never end. For if we want the symbol of strength, of variety, of voluminousness, abundance, and endlessness, we have it, not in the grand mountains that are called everlasting, but in these ever-fluent never-resting waves of the sea. The waves of the sea! why, they have made all the strata of the world nearly; they have immersed every continent in turn again and again and again; they have been lapping and chafing the shores of this world through ten thousand ages, and roaring in answer to the winds all over the lengths and breadths of the ocean, and yet now, to-day, they are as fresh and young and buoyant as they have ever been before. Well, this is the emblem which God takes to set forth the beauty and glory of man's life. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Righteousness as the waves of the sea*:—Walk along the coast-line when the tide has ebbed, mark the wastes of sand, the muddy ooze, the black unsightly rocks. Not thus did God intend that any of His children should be. It was never His will that their righteousness should ebb, that there should be wastes and gaps and breaks in their experience, that there should be the fatal lack of strength and purity and virtue. The Divine ideal of the inner life is mid-ocean,

where the waves reach to the horizon on every side, and there are miles of sea-water beneath. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Righteousness:*—1. Is not the first idea of the waves of the sea their multitudinousness? Righteousness, then, like these waves of the sea, would mean an unfailing movement, an active goodness, strong or gentle, reaching over the boundless surface of life, breaking in pure foam and music on every beach. It would mean a kind of limitless and incalculable force, too, not contracted like waters in a pool or pond, but issuing out of vast depths and distances, and swayed by cosmic impulses, so that there is no end, no pause, no exhaustion—a sense of the infinite, a promise of eternity. 2. The second idea must be that of the beauty of the waves of the sea. That is not a modern sentiment; it occurs in the earliest poetry of the world. It was Æschylus that coined the exquisite phrase, "the countless smile of the many-sounding sea," and a poet like Isaiah must have felt that poetry of the sea as you have done. 3. May we add a third suggestion, which would hardly occur, perhaps, to those who knew only the tideless Mediterranean, namely, the beneficence of the waves of the sea. They are for ever washing the land. Our righteousness is intended to have a cleansing effect on the shores of earth. Not like the troubled waters, which throw up mire and dirt—they are intended to ring human life with a belt of ozone, to wash out into the depths the corruptions of the earth, and to fling high upon the shore the sting and the strength of the salt. To influence the world for good is a thought to thrill you with hope and desire, to be good, to do good, to make good. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Vers. 20, 21. **Go ye forth of Babylon.**—*Summoned to an exodus:*—There has never been an era in which God's people have not been face to face with a great principle of evil, embodied in a city, confederation, or conspiracy of darkness. Always the same spirit under differing forms. This great system is as strong to-day as when the massive walls of Babylon enclosed their millions, and proudly dominated the world. Some have identified it with the Church of Rome, or the spirit of ecclesiastical assumption, but it is better to consider it as that element which is ever working through human society, which is spoken of as "the world." We are therefore warranted in applying to present surroundings every item in the description given of the olden foe of Israel, and of heeding the summons to go forth. I. SENT TO BABYLON. God's ideal for the chosen people is set forth under a beautiful similitude (ver. 18). This ideal is within the reach of everyone who will hearken to God's commandments. But if we refuse, we may have to pass, as Israel did, into the furnace of suffering in the Babylon of the world. II. LIFE IN BABYLON. The mighty city was called the Lady of kingdoms. We must think of her with massive walls, broad spaces, colossal bulls guarding the entrances to vast temples with flights of stairs and terraces; with pyramids, towers, and hanging-gardens; her wharves receiving the freights of the Indian Ocean; her marts thronged with the merchants of the world; her streets teeming with tributary populations. But right across her splendour ran the fatal bars of cruelty, luxury, wickedness, and devil-worship. Amid such scenes the Jews spent the weary years of their captivity. But through this awful discipline there was slowly emerging a nobler, loftier ideal, which was fostered by the ancient words that foretold their destiny. It was not possible that they should be long holden by their captors. Were they not the elect people of God, destined to bless the world? Yes, they might be in Babylon, like many another captive people, but they had a great hope at their heart. And in the light of that hope, under the searching fires of their anguish, they for ever abandoned their love for idolatry. Some are now in their Babylon. They look back to a sunny past, which might have continued had they not stepped out of the narrow path of obedience. Let such still hope in God: they shall still praise Him; let them repent of their sins and put them away; let them learn the deep lessons which God's Spirit is endeavouring to teach; let them dare to praise God for the discipline of pain. Presently the clarion call of the exodus will ring out. III. EXODUS FROM BABYLON. The old order was changing and giving place to the new. From the ruins of the mightiest city that, perhaps, the world has ever seen, the Jews are bidden to go forth. The summons for an exodus rings out to the Church of the living God. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

CHAPTER XLIX.

VERS. 1-6. **Listen, O isles, unto Me.**—*A forecast of the universal religion* :—In the previous chapters we find very glorious things spoken of the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon. But in this chapter we seem to commence a new departure, to rise to a higher strain, and to launch out into broader and grander predictions. A larger audience is invoked—"Listen, O isles, unto Me." A greater than the prophet is the speaker—"The Lord hath called me from the womb," &c. And the calling of the Gentiles to a share in the blessings of the greater redemption is clearly indicated. "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth." (*D. Howell, B.D.*) *The ideal servant of Jehovah* :—Here, not only does the language describe apparently the acts of an individual person, but the servant is expressly distinguished from the historic nation; and part of the servant's office is to consist in the restoration of the historic nation, and (ver. 8) the re-allotment of its desolated land. At the same time, the servant is still in some sense "Israel"; for the term is directly applied to Him (ver. 3) . . . Israel, from this point of view, is delineated by [the prophet] as an ideal personality, and projected upon the future as a figure displaying the most genuine characteristics of the nation, and realising them in action with an intensity and clearness of aim which the historic Israel had never even remotely attained. It is a great ideal creation which the prophet constructs, a transfigured reflection of the historic people, a figure conscious of the colossal task allotted to it, but impeded by no moral slackness, or other deficiency, from undertaking it. And so vividly is this wonderful creation a figure present to his imagination, that it exhibits all the concrete traits of an individual person. (*Prof. S. R. Driver, D.D.*) *The servant of Jehovah* is the kernel of the kernel of Israel, Israel's inmost centre, Israel's highest head. (*F. Delitzsch, D.D.*) *The speaker* :—Who is this that speaks in the Hebrew tongue, and presumes to address the world as his audience? We had thought the Jew-speech too exclusive, too conservative, too intolerant of strangers, to care to make itself heard beyond the limits of Judaism. Whence this sudden interest in the great family of man? Ah! these are the words of the Messiah, the ideal Jew; speaking in the name of the elect race, and representing its genius, not as warped by human prejudice, but as God intended it to be. "He said unto me, Thou art My servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified." There can be no doubt that this is the true way of considering these noble words. They were expressly referred to Jesus Christ by His greatest apostle on one of the most memorable occasions in his career (Acts xiii. 47). But, it may be asked, how can words, so evidently addressed to Israel, be appropriated, with equal truth, to Jesus Christ? It is sufficient to say that He was the epitome and personification of all that was noblest and divinest in Judaism. When, in spite of all that they had suffered in their exile, they for a second time failed to realise or fulfil their great mission to the world; when under the reign of Pharisee and Scribe they settled down into a nation of legalists, casuists, and hair-splitting ritualists—He assumed the responsibilities which they had evaded, and fulfilled them by the Gospel He spoke and the Church He formed. In the mission of Jesus, the heart of Judaism unfolded itself. What He was and did, the whole nation ought to have been and done. As the white flower on the stalk, He revealed the essential nature of the root. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *A polished shaft* :—We are justified in referring this paragraph to the Lord Jesus, as the ideal Servant of God. And we may get some useful teaching as to the conditions of the loftiest and best service which, following His steps, we may render to His Father and our Father. I. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE IDEAL SERVANT. 1. A holy motherhood. "The Lord hath called me from the womb." The greatest and best of men have confessed their indebtedness to their mothers; and not a few have, without doubt, enshrined in their character, and wrought out in their life, inspirations which had thrilled their mothers' natures from early girlhood. It is from their mothers that men get their souls. To make a man, God begins with his mother. Few of us realise the immense importance attaching to the education of girls. 2. Incisive speech. "He hath made My mouth like a sharp sword." Speech is the most God-like faculty in man. Christ did not scruple to be called the word or speech of God. This regal faculty is God's chosen organ for announcing and establishing His kingdom over the earth. Our mouth must be surrendered to God, that He may implant there the sharp two-edged sword that proceeds from His own lips (Rev. i. 16).

3. Seclusion. "In the shadow." We must all go there sometimes. The photograph of God's face can only be fixed in the dark chamber. 4. Freed from rust. "A polished shaft." Weapons of war soon deteriorate. Rust can best be removed by sand-paper or the file. Similarly we must be kept bright and clean. For this purpose God uses the fret of daily life, the chafe of small annoyances, the wear and tear of irritating tempers and vexing circumstances. II. APPARENT FAILURE (ver. 4). This heart-break seems inevitable to God's most gifted and useful servants. It is in part the result of nervous overstrain, *e.g.* Elijah (1 Kings xix.). But in part it results from the expanding compassion of the soul. There are three sources of consolation. 1. That failure will not forfeit the bright smile of the Master's welcome nor the reward of His judgment-seat. He judges righteously; and rewards, not according to results, but to faithfulness. 2. The soul leans more heavily upon God. "My God is become My strength" (ver. 5). 3. We turn to prayer. How sweetly God refers to this, saying, "In an acceptable time have I answered thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee" (ver. 8). Thus God deals with us all. He is compelled to take us to the back side of the desert, where we sit face to face with the wreck of our fairest hopes. There He teaches us, as He only can, weaning us from creature-confidence, and taking pride from our hearts. III. ULTIMATE SUCCESS. When Jesus died, failure seemed written across His life-work. But that very Cross, which man deemed His supreme disgrace and dethronement, has become the stepping-stone of universal dominion. Thus it may be with some. They are passing through times of barrenness, and disappointment, and suffering. But let them remember that the Lord is faithful (ver. 7). He will not suffer one word to fail, one seed to be lost, one effort to prove abortive, one life to be wasted. (*Ibid.*) *Service; call and qualifications*:—I. THE CALL TO THE SERVICE APPOINTED US OF GOD. "The Lord hath called me from the womb." 1. To every human life that enters the world there is a special call, and a distinct sphere of duty. Jeremiah was called from his birth (Jer. i. 5), and so was St. Paul (Gal. i. 15). These are types, not exceptions. Their call teaches us that every human life is a real and distinct entity, a thing complete in itself, as much so to the eye of God as the grandest object in any sphere of created life. Behind all secondary causes there is a design and a purpose to each separate existence, which gives it a dignity, and makes it a necessity in the government of God. This truth is not one easy to realise. An individual is so insignificant a thing among the millions inhabiting the surface of this globe, while the globe itself is only as a grain of sand on the seashore beside countless other worlds, that it is with no mock modesty we ask, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou so regardest him?" This is true, but it is none the less true that each individual life has a meaning and a mission in the plan and purpose of God; and to realise this is no unimportant element in fitness for service. Two opposite errors there are which have gone far to ruin countless human lives. One is the overestimating and the other the underestimating our importance as individuals. 2. The question naturally arises, how is the Divine call to be discerned? The natural predilections of a man may, to some extent, be taken as pointing the direction in which his sphere of action lies. There are, besides, his aptitudes, his special endowments. There is, also, the concurrent direction of circumstances. Nor should a light stress be laid on the opinions of those whose experience of life, and unbiassed judgment, qualify them to give sound advice. Nor again, should the conscious promptings of some power within us, compelling us to face, perhaps, an unwelcome prospect, be ignored. But at no crisis in life is humble, submissive, patient, trustful waiting upon God of greater importance than when we are responding, definitely and finally, to the call of circumstances, of inclinations, and of qualifications in the choice of life's sphere of duty. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." And when the call comes, it is at our peril that we hesitate to obey it. II. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR IT (ver. 2). This was emphatically true of our Lord Jesus Christ. When, in the fulness of time, He was revealed to the world, His own words were, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword." Moreover, in the apocalyptic vision, the description given of His ascended and enthroned Majesty is that of one "out of whose mouth there went a sharp two-edged sword." The same figure is also applied to the third person of the Holy Trinity, of whom it is said, that the "sword of the Spirit is the Word of God"—and never should it be forgotten, that Bible truth, in mind, and heart, and life, and at ready command for use, is pre-eminently the instrument of power for

effective service. Now the sword is the symbol of authority, as well as of war, and is intended to vindicate the true as well as to slay the false. For this we need, not only a sword, but a sharp sword. There are great and vital interests to be vindicated, the interests of truth, and of humanity. We also need a sword, and a sharp sword, to cut down errors and abuses. But for effective service we need not only to be as sharp swords, but also as "polished shafts." A polished shaft is a symbol of cultivated gifts, of trained endowments, and of aggressive power at its best. The call and the gifts come from God; while the response to that call, and the due cultivation and employment of the gifts depend upon man, and if he neglects to do his part, what can his life be but a disastrous failure? Definiteness of purpose is an essential condition of success in earthly affairs. Moreover, in all true service there must be the element of sacrifice—not merely the sacrifice of time, thought, pleasure, profit, preference, but, above all, of self. One more element in fitness for service must I mention, viz., that moral chivalry which goes by the name of disinterestedness. (*D. Howell, B.D.*)

Ver. 2. **And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword.**—*A sharp sword:* —1. God does not undo, in His relationship to us as Re-creator, the work which He has already performed as Creator. He does not strip us of our natural faculties, and endow us with others altogether distinct from these. Our natural faculties are in themselves neither good nor bad, but in every case are capable of development, either in the direction of good or of evil. When first the grace of God finds us, the powers of evil have more or less infected our nature, and most of our faculties (if not all of them) have exhibited a downward inclination; our members have become "instruments of unrighteousness," the weapons which Satan has used to do his own fell work. It is upon these dishonoured faculties that God lays His hand when He enters and takes possession of the new-created soul. What He demands on our part is, that these members should be surrendered to Him, as they formerly were to the powers of darkness. 2. The prophet here speaks of one important faculty which exercises an influence for good or evil second to none that affects society—the tongue. The faculty of speech is one of the noblest endowments of humanity, distinguishing us, as it does, from all the lower animals, rendering social life possible, and binding humanity into one. How much of evil originates with the tongue! And yet what a mighty engine for good language may be! Surely God has put no small honour on human speech when He permits His own Son to be described as "the Word" of God. 3. How many of us have endeavoured to use our tongues in the service of God, and yet our efforts have been singularly weak and unsuccessful. Let us not be discouraged, but listen to this word of power: "I have made thy mouth a sharp sword"—sharp no longer for sarcasm and cutting scorn. The withering scoff, the poisoned slander, the bitter reproach, are no longer to proceed, like a sharp two-edged sword, from those consecrated lips of thine; but, if thou wouldst but believe it, a new power has been communicated, in virtue of which that very member, which was of old so keen-edged a weapon in the hands of the destroyer, is now to be equally sharp and pointed in the grasp of its Divine Master. But have we yet begun to be discontented with our want of sharpness? Are we ready to be used by God as a sharp sword? Have we counted the cost? Are we prepared for the consequences? If we are, our weakness matters not. God can use us. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; I will make thee a sharp threshing instrument, having teeth, and thou shalt break in pieces the mountains." How many of our well-meant efforts fail for want of teeth! 4. What is required in order to render us efficient instruments in the hands of God? (1) Definiteness of purpose. The man whose mouth is a sharp sword will speak, not for speaking's sake, nor to ease his conscience, but to reach the heart. (2) Incisiveness of language. Our words need not be ungentle nor severe, and yet they may be pointed. (3) Earnestness. (4) One other characteristic will be embodied in the word "now." The man who speaks for God will ever remember that "the King's business requires haste." "The Holy Ghost saith, To-day"; and he who speaks in the Spirit will speak as the Spirit. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *A sharp sword in God's hand:*—Two young men were educated together in an American university. The one was possessed of very considerable talents, and subsequently became the popular minister of a large and fashionable congregation; the other was a man of humble abilities, but possessed by an ardent desire to win souls, and therefore ready to adapt his means to the attainment of this

end. Years rolled on, and the popular preacher had occasion to pay a visit to the parish of his old acquaintance. After witnessing all that was going forward in connection with his friend's congregation, he could no longer repress his astonishment. "I cannot understand how it is," he said, "that everything in your district and congregation seems to flourish. Your church seems full of really converted souls. The number of your communicants is astonishing, and the amount of work that seems to be going on all round fills me with amazement. How can it be that I, preaching the same truth, yet see scarcely any definite result of my labours? I can scarcely point to any who have been turned from darkness to light as the result of my ministry." After much conversation, his friend requested him to try an experiment. "Will you," he said, "take one of my sermons (which in style and composition are by no means to be compared to your own), and deliver it to your own flock? Make it a matter of prayer beforehand that God will make use of it, not only for their good, but as a lesson to you in your own ministry, if it is intended to be so. Then watch the results." He agreed to do so, and on returning to his flock, delivered with much feeling one of his friend's fervid discourses. The effect was evident, and to him astonishing. It was clear that many in the congregation were deeply stirred by what they had been listening to. At the conclusion of the service he was sent for by a lady, whom he found remaining behind in the church, in a state of considerable agitation. "If," she exclaimed, "my dear sir, what I have heard from you to-day is true, then I am all wrong!" "My dear madam," he replied, with great consternation, "what is the matter? I hope I have said nothing that has hurt your feelings!" (*Ibid.*) *The Word of God as a sword:*—1. Because it pierceth the very heart (Acts ii. 37, vii. 54). 2. Because it separateth between virtue and vice, by teaching what is good and what is evil. 3. Because it cutteth off sin, by the threats which are therein contained against sinners, and by the promises which are thereby made to those who forsake sin. 4. Because it cuts off error and heresy by teaching the truth. (*W. Day, M.A.*) **In the shadow of His hand hath He hid Me.**—*Seclusions:*—These words refer in the first place to Him who is the central figure of all prophecy, the coming Messiah. Perhaps they point to His pre-existent state, and denote the concealment of the Eternal Word before it was made flesh. Or the words may contain an allusion to certain aspects and experiences of Christ's earthly history, and notably the first thirty years of it. What holds good with regard to the Master, holds good also with regard to the servants. As He was in this world, so are they. It is not so much the expression of a general and abiding relationship we have here, as of a special and occasional experience. Every believer lies locked in the closed hand of God, nor shall any pluck him out of it. But it is not of a hiding such as this that the text speaks. It is rather of what is temporary and repeated. What, then, are some of the ideas involved in the special figure of the text? I. We have God's love brought before us as an influence to PRESERVE AND PROTECT. And it preserves us in a special way, it protects us through a special process—by withdrawal. That, of course, is not always God's plan. He has other ways of arranging in providence for the safety of His people, than by removing them from the sphere of their danger. When opposition threatens or temptation assails, He may keep men face to face with the foes that encompass, and seek to educate and to strengthen them by the process. At such times as these they are called to comport themselves as good soldiers of Christ. But at other times it is not incitement that the Christian needs, nor the strength that enables him to do and to dare. It is shelter, screening, quiet, and removal. And when such seasons are needed, they are given. And what a hand it is to retreat to! Think of all that the Scripture reveals to us of its power. II. The text leads us to think of God's care as a PREPARING influence. It trains, as well as protects. He quenches not the smoking flax; on the contrary, He fosters and fans it. And for this end He covers it with the shadow of His arched hand, till it brightens from a smouldering spark to a clear and steady flame. Sometimes these seasons of concealment take place at the beginning of a man's life-work. Take Paul, the newly-converted. When the due time came, and study and seclusion, meditation and silence, had accomplished their work, the hand was unclosed, the shadow was withdrawn. God drew the shaft He had polished from its quiver, and Paul came forth from his retreat, ready to do and to speak, to suffer and to dare for the cause of Christ. And what happens at the outset of a believer's life, happens often in its course; and many an active Christian life

has been cleft in twain by the silence and the pause it imposes. There is a special illustration in the history of Luther. The man had attained the very climax of his immense activities. The nations had wakened from the sleep of ages at the thunder of his lips. Hither and thither he had been moving; here attacking, there defending, yonder restraining. And now every nerve was strung to tenseness by the strain, every faculty wrought to fever in the whirl. And what does God do with him? He suddenly bears him off out of view, takes him from pulpit and from councils, hushes and encloses him in the Wartburg, and leaves him there in imprisonment and isolation for a time. Had God no purpose in view, in thus plunging His servant into the darkness awhile—apart from the work that he loved so well? Assuredly He had. The Church of Christ was all the better of this temporary withdrawal of its one outstanding defender. It was reminded thereby that the cause was God's and not man's. And it was taught that the cause could go on, though the man who was its agent was removed. Luther himself was all the better of the discipline too. And when Luther emerged from the shadow, in God's good time, to achieve and withstand, to struggle and to conquer, once more, he did so as a stronger, because a wiser and a calmer man. And a year's or a month's time spent in quiet waiting in the shadow of His hand, may do more to ripen the soul for its future existence with Himself than half-a-century of busy labour amidst the outward activities of life. The believer passes from the sphere of active work to the sphere of quiet waiting, that the discipline of service may be supplemented by the discipline of submission, and the God of peace be enabled through the training to sanctify him wholly. The shadow where the life disappears is only the shadow of the hand. And when the hand is unclosed on the other side death, the light it has covered will be found to be all the more steady and brilliant for the discipline, and shall shine in God's holy place, as the stars in the firmament, for ever and for ever. III. Pass from the protecting and preparing influences of God's hand, to its CHASTENING. For you have the idea here not only of isolation, but of pressure; pressure and pain. It does not always lie gently round about us, this hand of God. There are times when it contracts more tightly, darkens more deeply, impinges more closely. And it does so in many ways—does so even when we are least ready to realise the source whence the pressure arises. If ever a Christian is tempted to think his trials come from another source than the wise and tender Fatherhood of God, it is when they shape themselves in the words and deeds of sinful men. Yet the shadow which they cast on the life is only the shadow of the hand, and the pain the experience gives us only its contracting pressure. And of other trials than these, it is still the same. There are complications of adversity at times so persistent and perplexing that they almost seem to argue the operation of some malignant fate. You are in dark places? But it is only the shadow of the hand. Lie quiet, and bear it as well as you can. And He who at present contracts His hand will in due time open it, and set you in a large room once more. IV. The text speaks of the INDIVIDUALISING influence of God's care. While I rest in the shadow of the hand, God of course has the whole of me; but there is another side to the relationship: I have the whole of God. V. The text reminds us of the hand of God in its REMOVING influences. When lover and friend are put far away from us, and our acquaintance are hid in darkness, they are only removed by the same loving hand, and covered awhile in its shadow, but blessed and safe where they rest, awaiting the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body. And what of the body itself? (*W. A. Gray.*) **A polished shaft.**—*A polished shaft*:—I. The prophet speaks of the servant of the Lord under the figure of A POLISHED SHAFT. There are not wanting some who, in their eagerness to deliver their souls, and to be faithful to their responsibilities, outstep the limits of Christian courtesy. They have their own blunt way of working for God, and they are disposed to flatter themselves that it is the best way, because it is most in accordance with their own natural dispositions; but the Lord seeks polished shafts for His quiver. No sword was ever so sharpened as were the words of Jesus; and yet how gentle He was, how considerate! But, you say, we have all our natural peculiarities, and we must continue to be what nature has made us. Not so, my dear brother. Thou art to be perfected by grace, not by nature. Cut a rough stick from a hedge: if it be tolerably straight, and a spike be stuck in the end of it, it may serve, on an emergency, in the place of an arrow at a short range. But every little notch, every distinguishing peculiarity, of that rough stick is an impedi-

ment to its flight. We need not fear for the skill of the Great Archer who keeps His saints in His quiver; but we must remember that when we assert our natural peculiarities of disposition, instead of surrendering ourselves to Him to be polished according to His will, the fault is ours, not His, if we miss the mark. We have no right to be content with doing the Lord's work in a "rough and ready," bungling, clumsy fashion, effecting perhaps a little good and a great deal of harm. "He that wins souls is wise"; he that seeks merely to relieve his own conscience can afford to do things in a blundering way. What does it matter to him, so long as it is done? But surely if the work is to produce its proper effect, we need much tact, much delicacy of feeling, much tenderness of sympathy; we need to learn when to hold our tongues, and when to speak. It is quite true that God may bless our very blunders when He sees they are committed with true sincerity of purpose, and arise rather from ignorance and bad taste than from wilful carelessness; but that does not warrant us in continuing to blunder, still less in regarding our blunders as almost meritorious, and reflecting self-complacently that it is "our way of working." We shrink from the polishing process; but He who desires to see us so polished that we shall reflect His own glory, not exhibit our own peculiarities, will take care that the means for our polishing are forthcoming. It is by friction that the arrow is polished, and it is by friction that our idiosyncrasies are to be worn away. This friction is provided in different ways. Perhaps it will be supplied by failures and disappointments, until, like Gideon of old, we are ready to say, "If the Lord be with us, why is it thus with us?" Perhaps it will be supplied by the violent and bitter antagonism which our inconsiderate roughness and unwisdom has stirred in the hearts of those whom we seek to benefit. Sometimes it is provided in our common intercourse with others, not unfrequently in our intercourse with fellow-Christians. Possibly He may subject us to the severest discipline of trial before the work of polishing is complete; but polished in one way or another the shafts must be which He is to use for His own glory. II. THE SHAFT IS POLISHED ONLY TO BE HIDDEN. It might seem that when once the process of polishing had been completed, the arrow would be a proper object for display, and here is a peril which even polished shafts are exposed to. There is so much of the beauty of the Lord impressed upon some of His servants, that men cannot withhold their admiration. Christians are lavish of their love, and there are hidden perils concealed under this favourable esteem. Sharpened and polished, how apt are we to display ourselves, even as the Assyrian axe of old "boasted against him who hewed therewith." "But," says the great apostle (himself a polished and sharpened arrow), "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." And so it is that the polished shaft has to be hidden. Your attention is not directed to the arrow while it is waiting to be used; it is concealed within the quiver. The eye is not caught by it when it is in the hand; it is hidden under the shadow of the hand. Another moment, it rests on the bow; another moment, and it speeds to the mark. Neither in the quiver, nor in the hand, nor on the bow, nor in its flight, is the arrow conspicuous. The more swiftly it flies, the more invisible it is. Thus the archer wins all the applause, and the arrow is nothing; yet it is by the arrow that he has done his work. And while man is not attracted to the arrow, the great Archer Himself is. It is upon it that He bends His eye. It is to it that He gives the credit of the victory: "Thou art My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Yes, there is a special joy in His heart when He can truly say of us, "Thou art My servant." How near we are to His sacred Person when we are thus hidden in God's hand, concealed in His quiver! And how much truer and deeper the joy of such service than the momentary excitement of human applause! And then the thought that it is possible for God to be glorified in us as the archer is glorified in the arrow, that the intelligences of heaven shall gaze down and admire the work that God hath wrought by instruments once so unpromising, and shall praise Him for it; that men on earth shall be constrained to admit that this is the finger of God, and to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus; that the devils in hell shall recognise in our lives the presence of Omnipotence, and tremble as they see the mighty Archer draw us from the hiding-place within the quiver! "Hidden in God's hand!" Hidden from the grasp of Satan. He fain would snatch us out of God's keeping; but his hostile hand can never touch those who are concealed in God's quiver. Hidden from the desecrating touch of the world to which we no longer belong. Hidden above all from ourselves—our morbid self-consciousness, our inflated self-esteem,

our gloomy self-depression. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *The pride that apes humility*:—I remember once overhearing the remark from the lips of one whom long experience and keen observation had taught more of the subtlety of the human heart than most men ever discern: "Ah, my dear brother, the truth is that we are all full of self; only some of us have the good taste not to show it, and some have not." The words may appear almost cynical, but a little reflection will show us how true they are. (*Ibid.*) *A polished arrow*:—Mark Guy Pearse says that the crest for the Lord's worker is "an arrow" polished and feathered, content to be in the quiver until the Master uses it; lying on the string for His unerring fingers to send it forth, then going strong, swift, sure, smiting through the heart of the King's enemies, and with this for the motto, "I fly where I am sent."

Vers. 3, 4. **And said unto me, Thou art My servant.**—*The service of man the manifestation of God's highest glory*:—How numerous are God's servants! All things in heaven and upon earth, all worlds, all elements, and all creatures are His servants, which obey His word, and declare His greatness and glory. But of all God's servants in this world man ranks highest, and through his service God is glorified in a sense that He could not be glorified through the service of any other creature. Israel was God's servant in a pre-eminent sense, whether the word be taken to mean the nation as God's chosen people or an individual as God's messenger to do His will. But the ideal of God's servant in this book was realised only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Man appears greatest when he serves, and there is no way to true greatness but through service. And God appears greatest when He condescends to serve. The Son of God looks more Divine on the Cross of His humiliation than on the throne of His glory, for on the Cross that which was deepest in His nature became visible. And it may be said that in every good man God becomes incarnate, and takes upon Himself the form of a servant, and by so doing bestows upon him the highest greatness. God says to every one of His faithful children, "Thou art My servant, in whom I will be glorified." The way to glorify God is by serving man. I. WHAT IS MEANT BY GOD'S GLORY? With glory we associate the ideas of purity, beauty, and sublimity; and God's glory is the energetic expression of His holiness in all His works, in myriad different forms and ways. II. THE SERVICE OF MAN AS THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S HIGHEST GLORY. Man has been created for the revelation of the highest glory of the Divine nature, and when he serves God faithfully, God breaks forth into glory in his character and work. This is the glory of His moral attributes, the glory of His love, mercy, compassion, and tenderness, which is infinitely greater than all the glory of the material universe. You can never learn the character of God from the facts of nature, any more than you can learn the character of the artist from his paintings, of the architect from the buildings he has planned, or of the builder from his work. In every gentle and kind word spoken to the afflicted, in every look of compassion, in every tear of sympathy, and in every deed of kindness, God breaks into glory that would make you tremble and adore if you were spiritual enough to see it. How the Divine glory shone in the life of the apostle Paul! In a dark age, when the superstition of the Papacy covered the land, God called Martin Luther, and said, "Thou art My servant, in whom I will be glorified." And in Rowlands, Whitefield, Wesley, and others, God's glory broke forth in a similar manner. In the only-begotten Son was revealed the glory of God as the Eternal Father (John i. 14). Before the same glory shines forth in us we must become something more than professed Christians, we must become Christ's. (*Z. Mather.*) *God's servants*:—Painters, poets, and musicians are God's servants, and in their masterly productions the Divine glory bursts forth. Raphael was God's servant, and in the Transfiguration God's glory broke forth. Handel was God's servant, and in his *Messiah* God's glory broke forth. Milton was God's servant, and in his *Paradise Lost* the Divine glory majestically broke forth. Statesmen, reformers, and philanthropists are also God's servants, and He says to each one of them, "Thou art My servant, in whom I will be glorified." But the shining of the Divine glory is not confined to the highly gifted, but breaks forth in those who faithfully serve God in obscure spheres of labour, unnoticed by the world. (*Ibid.*) *The threefold experience of Christ*:—I. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF A HIGH VOCATION. "He said unto Me, Thou art My servant," &c. Just as the words, "Out of Egypt have I called My son," never found their full significance until they were applied

to God's greater Son, so the name "Israel" was never fulfilled finally in Jacob, who first bore it, nor even in the nation that has borne it after him, but has found its ultimate fulfilment in Him who is pre-eminently a "Prince with God," and our Prince, because He is our Saviour. We have, therefore, here a prediction of the consciousness of a high mission which possessed the Christ, and brought Him to this world of ours. Some of us will never forget the day when we were conscious for the first time of the inspiring fact that God had spoken to us, and through that experience of ours we may be able—as, indeed, the prophet through his experience was supremely able—to understand something of the ecstasy with which Christ, conscious of His glorious mission, came to this world of ours. It was that that Christ remembered throughout His life, and it was that which sustained Him throughout His personal ministry in the face of opposition and discouragement of every kind. He knew that He was doing His Father's will, and it was this consciousness that found expression in the prayer which He uttered on the eve of His great passion, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." It was this assurance, too, that He sought to give to His disciples as the mainspring of all their heroism. "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." "Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Scholars are divided here in opinion. Some say that this ought to be translated, "In whom I will burst forth into glory." This is a translation that charms me. Jesus was indeed "the effulgence" of the Father's glory—the shining forth of the light which had ever been the light, but which would have been largely invisible to man apart from the Incarnation. Then there is the other translation, "In whom I will beautify"—or "glorify"—"Myself." In harmony with this Jesus exclaimed near the close of His life, "Father . . . glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." Did not the Son glorify the Father by the very outburst of light which distinguished His life among men? II. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF APPARENT FAILURE. "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." We trace this consciousness at times even in the Master in Gospel story. His disappointment in the face of human unbelief, His sorrow over human sinfulness and ingratitude, the apparent waste of the Divinest life that was ever lived among men in precept and example—these weighed heavily upon Him. In this respect, as in many others, He was touched with the feeling of our infirmity. III. THE ASSURANCE OF FINAL VINDICATION. "Yet surely My judgment is with the Lord, and My recompense with My God." In other words, He knows the motives which have prompted Me, and what led Me on step by step. Whether life be a failure or not, whether My self-sacrifice appear fruitless or not, He knows what is the root of all. Yea, I know more than that—I know not only that He will vindicate Me and the motives which prompted Me; but I also know that My work must find its reward; that all that is apparent failure is only apparent; that My toil must bring forth fruit—"Surely . . . My work is with My God" (or, according to the R.V., "My recompense is with My God"). Here again there is the double meaning, and therefore a special wealth of significance. The word denotes more than the "work," and more than the "recompense." It denotes the work and its result; all that the work meant: the toil of saving men, and the reward of seeing them saved. Thus the Christ Himself, amidst all the ignominy and anguish of the Cross and Passion, fell back upon the assurance of the Father's final vindication. These, then, being pre-eminently the words of the world's Redeemer, are surely an example and an inspiration to us to follow His example. (*D. Davies.*)

Ver. 4. **Then I said, I have laboured in vain.**—*Christ in prophecy*:—These prophetic sayings go to Christ, not outside of and separate from man's struggle, but in and through it. As all true Christians are living over again, in an imperfect way, the details of Christ's own experience, so were all true godly men, before His coming, feeling their way into it, being guided by Christ's spirit, and having the throb of His life, which is the life of God, already palpitating in their bosoms. (*J. Ker, D.D.*) *The complaint for frustrated aims*:—These words bring before us a feeling that belongs to the human heart in all places and times—the complaint of man for frustrated aims. It is not easy to say in what distinct form it is present to the mind of the original speaker here. Sometimes he appears to express the feeling as his own personal experience—a man among his fellow-men—and sometimes he seems to personify the nation to which he belongs. Probably both are struggling together in his heart. The people of

his race were selected by God for a great purpose—to hold up His name and knowledge pure and unsullied in the midst of the world's defections. But the purpose is, for the while, an apparent failure. The world has corrupted those who should have purified it, and God's judgment has fallen on their unfaithfulness till they are scattered among the heathen and ready to perish. It seems as if Israel's history were labour in vain. For himself, the prophet thought that he had been chosen to bring back his people to the way of truth and righteousness. But the people have erred, the prophet has failed, and he speaks both for himself and for the best part of the nation, the true Israel of the Covenant. (*Ibid.*) *Apparent failure*:—I. SORROW FOR THE FAILURE OF LABOUR. In thinking of this we may go down to a still lower stage than that from which these words sprang in the heart of this man of God. The complaint is made by many who have never sympathised with his high aim or shared in his Divine work. 1. Take the first of the two great objects that call man to labour—the gratification of self. How few prizes are drawn for the many blanks! When some one spoke to Napoleon of his Italian campaign, and asked if that marvellous part of his career did not give him exquisite pleasure, he replied: "It did not give me one moment of peace. Life was only incessant strife and solicitude. The inevitable battle of the morrow might annihilate all memory of the victory of to-day." We may call to mind the saying of poor Keats when dying: "I have written my name in water"; nor would it probably have comforted him much more at that time to think he had engraved it in marble. Even affection and sympathy —how often are they not reciprocated, or returned with ingratitude, or felt to be not of the deep kind the heart had yearned for! 2. The second is God and the good of His world. The higher a man's idea of what the condition of the world should be—of what a reign of righteousness and happiness there might be if God had His due place—the more likely is he to be depressed at times by the view of things around him, and the slow way in which all our effort is bringing us to the goal. II. SOME OF THE TEMPTATIONS TO WHICH THIS SORROW FOR THE FAILURE OF LABOUR IS SUBJECT. 1. Take first, again, that class of men who have set before them in life some personal object, and have been disappointed in it. The great temptation in such cases is to brood over and magnify their disappointment. 2. Then, as to those who have a higher aim in life than any mere personal one—who are truly seeking the glory of God and the good of their fellow-men—they have also their temptations under failure. We are so ready to judge of the plan of the world by our own little share in it, and to think all the war is lost when our small detachment suffers a check. III. THE RESOURCE WE HAVE IN THE MIDST OF THIS SORROW FOR FAILURE. "Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." There are two things this speaker fixes upon, and they are a powerful stay if we can bring them as clearly and confidently to God as he did. "My judgment is with the Lord." I can appeal to His decision for the character of my motive. It was, so far as I knew it, pure and true. "My work is with my God." I can cast on His decision the result of my labour. I do not say that any mere man can do this with a perfect assurance that all is right with him, and that He who searches the hearts, and tries the reins, can absolve him as faultless; but I do say that there are men who, by the grace of God, can appeal to God Himself for the sincerity of their aim. Let us see how it should influence both the classes we have been considering. 1. Those men who have been seeking some personal object in life, and have failed in it, may learn much here. Let us take it for granted that there was nothing sinful in your aim, and that you did not wish for any good, inconsistent with the rights and the happiness of your fellow-creatures. It seems very hard to you that you should be denied what many of them enjoy, and you can scarcely help comparing your lot with theirs, with a sense of bitterness, at least of regret. Here is a more excellent way of it. Instead of putting your life beside theirs, refer yourself to God's judgment. If you can put the case truly before the Judge and Controller of life, you may find something in your life to correct, and something also that will give comfort. May it not be that you have been making the aim of your life too narrow, even as it concerns your own welfare? You have been thinking, perhaps, of worldly position and acknowledgment, more than of the building up of your character in what is true and pure and godlike—more of your outward than of your inward and real life. These failures may be to teach you to begin again, and to aim at a wider basement and a higher top-stone—to take into your edifice the soul's

interests, and to let its front look Godward and heavenward. And you have been making, perhaps, the aim of your life too narrow as it concerns your fellow-men. You have made self too exclusive. If you come, after all the failures of life, in this submissive spirit to God for His judgment, He will give you not only means of correction, but comfort. Though you may have lost what you once reckoned the good of life, there is another and higher good still open to you, not merely hereafter, but here. God can teach you how to build on the ruins of former hopes—nay, He can show you how you may take the very stones of them that have fallen and lie scattered around, and may joint them into a new and most beautiful and enduring structure. You may never in this world have the keen thrill of joy your heart once panted for, but a conscious and deep peace will recompense its absence,—more satisfying and more abiding. 2. There is a resource here, also, for that nobler style of men, who have laboured for the cause of God and their fellow-creatures, and have failed to find the success they sought. It may seem strange at first sight that there should be such failures. Yet there are some things which make it not so strange, if we will but reflect. Are we sure that our motives are always as high as we ourselves fancy, and may not failure be meant to send us back to sift and purify them? Our very despondency may arise from our having looked too much to success and too little to duty. God must have standard-bearers who are ready to make a shroud of their colours, and how can they be known but in hours of defeat? And, though our motives are pure, is our work always wise? Are Christians to expect that carelessness and rashness will succeed, simply because of good intentions? After all, however, the great resource we have is to fall back on this appeal, "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Man judges by success, God by simplicity of heart; and many an unnoticed effort and inarticulate prayer that never seemed to touch the conflict shall share in the full triumph of the victory. Those who have failed to find position or comfort, fame or sympathy in the world, may have One who can bear His share with you here, who chose this place in life, which you call loss, that He might be nearer you, and show you that life has greater things than all you have coveted. Those of you who complain that you have laboured for your fellow-men and God with small return, have One here who gave up infinitely higher things, and met from men a more cruel award. Let all be done under the cover and trusting in the strength of Him who alone "works all our works in us." Let the sinful past come under this shadow to find forgiveness; the narrow and selfish life, to find a new and lofty aim; and all our fears and griefs and disappointments, to find comfort and hope in Him who entered the world to redeem it from fall and loss, and to make every true life succeed at last, even where it seemed to fail. (*Ibid.*) *The glorification of civic life*:—Think of the worth and greatness of a human life in that elect society and holy city which is the servant of God. If the corporate consciousness of the city should become a judgment and recompense with God; if the sense of God and His holy presence should envelop the whole city in its power, and reach every man in it, even as the morning light comes into every home; if the city should awake with God; if, throughout the day, in the mind of the city, the thought of God should have its dwelling-place, and if in the government of the people the law of God should have its throne; if some awe of the Divine righteousness should pervade the business of the city, and some deep sense of Divine blessedness, like a fountain of life, should well up and abound in the happiness of the city, and some greatness of the Divine purpose should enlarge all the work of the city, and make the least faithfulness a service of God; if some peace of the Divine eternity should rest upon all life's changes in the city, and the hope of some Divine event bend over every new-made grave, and the comfort of some Divine omnipresence fill as with an all-pervasive love every heart in the city that had been left in loneliness of grief;—if, in one word, a whole city should become, what Isaiah beheld in the far future, a city of God, a Messianic city, the elect servant of God,—think you that in that city "Sought out, a city not forsaken," any human life could seem to be a life for nought, and its labour in vain?—a worthless thing to be trodden under foot, or only a moment's flash of pleasure?—a life not to be prized and kept as a sacred, immortal trust? Would not every least life in a city of God, full of the consciousness of God, become a life of moral worth, a birth into an immortal consciousness, a part in some universal good, a fellowship with something celestial, an anticipation and a share in some eternal triumph and joy of life? (*N. Smyth, D.D.*) *The ineffective-*

ness of Christ's personal ministry, a man-revealing fact:—Assuming that these words express Christ's experience, they cannot be taken in an absolute sense. He laboured in vain, compared with what the kind and amount of agency employed were suited to effect. We shall look at this fact as revealing certain other facts in relation to human nature. I. IT REVEALS MAN'S FREEDOM OF ACTION. We cannot conceive of a mightier moral energy being brought to bear upon mind than that which Jesus brought to bear upon the Jewish mind, and yet it was resisted. The Jews resisted moral omnipotence. He appealed in the most powerful way to three of the most influential principles in our nature. 1. Belief. If you want to influence men, you must take your stand upon their faiths. There were, especially, two faiths which Christ appealed to; the one instinctive, and the other attained. The former was, that miracles are the works of God; the latter, that their Scriptures predicted a Messiah. Christ appealed to these predictions. 2. Conscience. His character, doctrines, and precepts bore directly on the conscience. 3. Interest. He revealed the judgment-day, unfolded heaven, uncovered hell. Thus He assailed their souls; and yet they resisted. Do not say that man has no moral power; he has proved himself, by the comparative ineffectiveness of our Saviour's labours, to have power to resist the mightiest moral influences of God. II. IT REVEALS MAN'S PERVERSITY OF CHARACTER. The possession of the capacity to resist the highest moral influences is the gift of God. It is neither subject for blame nor praise, but for thankfulness to God. But the using of that capacity to oppose holy and Divine influences is our guilt and ruin. There were three perversities in the Jews that led to this resistance. 1. Perversity of judgment. (1) Their judgments were sensuous. They "judged after the flesh." In the Scriptures they read of a coming king, priest, conqueror; they identified that king with pageantry—that priest, with flowing robes and sacrifices—that conqueror, with mighty armies. When the true King, Priest, and Conqueror came, He had none of these, and they would not have Him. (2) Their judgments were servile. The Scribes and Pharisees were their theological masters. They allowed them to manufacture their creed. Christ came and denounced their great leaders as heretics and hypocrites, and they waxed indignant. This sensuous, servile judgment in religion is ever an obstruction to the spread of truth. 2. Perversity of feeling. There were two perverse feelings, especially, that led them to reject Christ. (1) An undue reverence for the antique. They loved the antiquity of Judaism. Men who tie themselves to precedents rather than principles, can never advance. (2) An undue respect for worldly greatness. They thought a deal about worldly wealth and pomp; Christ had none. 3. Perversity of life. Josephus informs us that so corrupt was the Jewish nation in the time of Christ, that had not the Romans come and destroyed them, God would have rained fire from heaven, as of old, to consume them. These perversities of judgment, feeling, and life, have ever been impulses stimulating man to oppose Christianity. III. IT REVEALS MAN'S EXCLUSIVE SUPPORT IN HIS HIGHEST LABOURS. The highest labour is that in which Christ was engaged. What was His support? Not adequate success; for He complains of not having it. Here it is, "Surely My judgment is with the Lord, and My work with My God." Two supporting ideas are here involved—1. That the cause in which we are engaged is the cause of God. "My work is with my God." 2. That the reward of our efforts is from God. "My judgment" (reward) "is with the Lord." The good will be rewarded, not according to the success of their labours, but according to the purity of their motives, and the devotion of their power. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Apparent failure sometimes the truest success*:—1. This is just the language which we find at times forcing its way from the lips of most of those great men who have felt most conscious of having a mission from God. Those who have most deeply and radically influenced for good the minds of their generation have been usually distinguished by fits of profound melancholy; regret that they have ever entered on their heroic course; weariness at the opposition which they meet with; distrust of their own fitness for the task; doubts whether God has really commissioned them to act on His behalf. Why is this? It is because God's results are for the most part secret. A man who sets a great example is hardly ever conscious of the effect which his example produces. If his plans are not carried out precisely in the way and to the end which he had originally contemplated, he persuades himself that they have been an utter failure, that no good can have arisen from them; whereas the truth is, and other persons see it, that the particular plans were from the

outset worthless, in comparison with the exhibition of character by which the very attempt to execute them was accompanied. 2. The Cross of Christ is the true guide to the nature and value of real success. What a failure was the life of Christ, if we measure it by immediate results! No wonder that the Cross was to the Jews a sore stumbling-block, and to the cultivated Greeks utter foolishness, just as it would now appear to most of us. For even we, the heirs of eighteen centuries of faith in the Crucified One, seem hardly yet to have learned the lesson that the suffering, self-sacrifice, devotion to principles, and heedlessness of immediate consequences, are the indispensable foundations of all permanent success. (*H. M. Butler, D.D.*) *Comfort under self-depreciation*:—1. Some persons give themselves much unnecessary pain by underrating their real service in the world. The question of good-doing is one of great subtlety. The quiet worker is apt to envy the man who lives before society in a great breadth of self-demonstration. It is as if the dew should wish to be the pattering hail, or as if the soft breeze should disquiet itself because it cannot roar like a storm. We forget that whirlwind and earthquake, fire and cloud, tempest and silence, have all been God's messengers; and it would be foolish of any of them to suppose that it had been of no use to the world. 2. The text shows the true comfort of those who mourn the littleness and emptiness of their lives. "My judgment is with the Lord," &c. God knows our purposes, our opportunities, and our endeavours, and He will perfect that which concerneth us. The intention of the heart, which it was impracticable to realise, will be set down to our favour, as if we had accomplished it all. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Discouragement*:—Each epoch has its special temptations and trials. For Christians of to-day, one of these maladies is discouragement. Discouragement! not in that acute and passionate form which strikes us in the bitter and despairing complaints of the prophets and believers of other centuries. We suffer from a less violent ill, less dangerous in appearance, but dull, slow, and treacherous. 1. Many causes explain it to us. The human mind, in its progressive march, passes by turns through phases of assurance and disturbance. (1) At an epoch when analysis is carried to excess, the vital powers of the soul become weak and are in danger of dying. One of the first fruits of this tendency in religious minds, will be languor. How can one love, act, and believe, when at each of its aspirations the soul finds planted before it a "perhaps"? If this spirit of analysis is destructive to individual enthusiasm, it acts in a still more enervating manner upon the collective life. Every one asserts his independence, his right to examine; and often the spirit of party alone replaces the unity which disappears. (2) Our age has another character—it wants to be practical. A scorn scarcely dissembled confronts inquiries, which reach beyond the world of sense or of pure logic. The supernatural passes for mysticism, and this word, with many, is a condemnation without appeal. This tendency reacts on the Church. It is certain that the same utilitarianism is invading it. (3) Add to these causes the influence of certain tendencies of spirit and temperament, causes entirely physical, which act in a mysterious but powerful manner on the moral state. Add to these that inclination which the most serious minds have to look on the sad side of human things. Add those tendencies which exist in all ages, but which, in the general condition I have described, develop with much more power and rapidity;—and you will comprehend why nothing is rarer in these days than that joyous, heroic, serene faith which characterised other ages. 2. In certain circles it is sought to escape from it by excesses of feverish zeal. The imagination is excited by the prospect of the immediate realisation of the promises of prophecy. These fictitious but intermittent flashes only terminate in changing this languor into incredulity. What must be done then? Build up your life on another foundation than that of your passing impressions; fix it upon the central, eternal truth which dominates over the fluctuations of opinions and beliefs; live in Jesus Christ; and upon the heights to which this communion lifts you, breathe the vivifying air which alone can give you strength. Then only can you oppose faith to sight, the eternal to the transitory, and thanksgiving to discouragement. But this is to tell you that you must be, must (it may be) become again, Christians. Now this remedy is not to be reached in a single day. 3. In going to the bottom of things I discover two principal causes of the discouragement of the Christian. The first is the greatness of the task which God sets before him; the second is his inability to accomplish it. (1) We are so constituted that every time the ideal of love and holiness to which the Gospel calls us is presented to us in its sublime beauty, our heart vibrates with

a profound assent, and we feel that it is for this end that we were created. But when we must not only admire but act, then we measure with dismay the distance which separates us from it, and discouragement seizes us. It prescribes for us not only that love of our neighbours, which is after all only an enlarged selfishness, but charity, and, if need be, charity which goes even as far as sacrifice. (2) The ill success of his labour is the second cause of the Christian's discouragement. What Christians mourn the most deeply over the ill success of their efforts? They are almost always the most active and advanced Christians. It enters into God's plan to conceal from us almost always the results of what we do for Him. Why does God will it? Doubtless, that faith may be exercised. God does not wish to be served by mercenaries. He often hides from His children the fruit of their labours, to the end that they may work for Him and not for themselves; He hides it from them in order that they may find in Him their recompense, and not in the result of their work, nor in the outward success which would take the place of His approbation, nor even in the progress of a sanctified life, for perfection apart from Him might become an idol. It is also to humble us. How seldom is it that man can bear success, and not bend under its weight! He teaches them, moreover, gentleness and compassion. Success alone will never develop these. However, this fruit is only hidden; it will appear in due time. No one in serving the Lord has the right to say, "I have laboured in vain." Even when the indifference of the world shall seem to conceal for ever your labours and your sacrifices, there will be left you the consolation of the prophet, "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." (*E. Bersier.*) *Ideal and realisation* :—Draw near to those giants of the spiritual order, those workmen of God who in different ages have been called Elijah, St. Paul, Chrysostom, St. Bernard, Luther, or Whitefield, and who confound you by the immense work which they have accomplished, you will hear them groan under the small results of their works. Elijah cries out to God: "Take away my life; I am not better than my fathers." Isaiah pronounces the words of my text: "I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain." St. Paul trembles in fear of having been a useless labourer; St. Bernard expresses in his last letters the painful feeling of having accomplished almost nothing. Calvin, dying, said to those who surrounded him: "All that I have done has been of no value. The wicked will gladly seize upon this word. But I repeat it, all that I have done has been of no value, and I am a miserable creature." What must we conclude? That these men did nothing? No, but that, in the presence of the ideal which God has put in their heart, their work appeared to them almost lost. (*Ibid.*) *Labour in vain, yet not in vain in the Lord* :—I. A LAMENTABLE COMPLAINT, wherein our Lord complaineth, that although He came to the house of Israel, where He published the Divine doctrine, wrought many miracles, and showed admirable holiness of life, yet for most part He had lost His labour. "I have laboured in vain," &c. II. A CONSOLATION of Himself upon this complaint, wherein He reareth up Himself with the consolations of God in the midst of all those oppositions that were made against Him, and all His lost labour. "My judgment is with the Lord, and My work with My God." III. A CONFIRMATION of this consolatory part, by three arguments—1. From the assurance of His calling. "And now thus saith the Lord that formed Me from the womb to be His servant." 2. From His own faithfulness. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord"; I do My duty faithfully. 3. From the faithfulness of God. "My God shall be My strength": as if He had said, I know that God called Me to this office, and that I am faithful in it, and therefore He will assist and stand by Me, and reward Me. (*T. Taylor, D.D.*) *Apparent failure* :—Of Livingstone, on his last journey, his biographer, Dr. Blaikie, says: "During all his past life he had been sowing his seed weeping, but so far was he from bringing back his sheaves rejoicing, that the longer he lived the more cause there seemed for his tears. In opening Africa, he had seemed to open it for brutal slave-traders, and, in the only instance in which he had yet brought to it the feet of men 'beautiful upon the mountains, publishing peace,' disaster had befallen, and an incompetent leader had broken up the enterprise. After twenty-three years of labour, he wrote: 'By the failure of the Universities Mission, my work seems vain. No fruit likely to come from J. Moffat's mission either. Have I not laboured in vain?'"

Vers. 5–7. **And now, saith the Lord.**—*Paradoxes of prophecy* :—I would weigh

with you two of those larger, and at the same time intense paradoxes of prophecy, which run throughout the prophetic word, and which Isaiah, in these wonderful words concentrates in one. 1. That He, who was foretold should Himself be the light and salvation of those who knew not God unto earth's utmost bound, yet should fail as to those to whom He should first come, the prophet's own nation, the people among whom alone, before He came, He was looked for, hoped for, believed in. 2. That He, whom to adore should be the glory of kings, before whose presence they should "arise" from their thrones and bow down before Him, should be first "despised of man, abhorred by the" Jewish "people," be in the power of the rulers of this world, as a slave is in the power of his masters. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant.**—*The evangelical prophet: his wide outlook*:—In the whole of this prophetical book there is not a single verse in which the character of the evangelical prophet is more conspicuous than it is here. How must he have been transported beyond himself—how far must he have been raised not merely above the vulgar passions and prejudices, but above the noblest and purest aspirations of his contemporaries—how deeply must he have been permitted to enter not only into the secret purpose, but into the heavenly spirit of the Divine counsels, before he could have given utterance to such words as these! Try to realise in some measure the import, the power, the charm of those names—the names of Jacob, of Israel, in the mind of every faithful Israelite. Think how not only his human affections, but his deepest religious feelings, were centred in the prosperity of Zion and the peace of Jerusalem. Think of the grief and the longing, the prayers and the tears of the exiles in their captivity, when they remembered Zion. What joy could there be to such an one comparable for a moment to the joy of raising up the tribes of Jacob, and bringing back the preserved of Israel? And yet he was called upon by the voice of God to regard this as a light thing, and in comparison with what was it a light thing? What object was so far to transcend that which must have appeared in his eyes as the greatest of all? It was that he should be given as a light to the Gentiles, and that he should be the bearer of God's salvation unto the ends of the earth. How doubly strange must such a commission have seemed to the prophet who received it! Like every child of Abraham, he had been wont to look down with mingled aversion and contempt on the mightiest and wisest of the nations. He had directed his bitterest sarcasm against their idols; he would have held himself defiled by sitting down at the board even of their nobles and princes. Yet now the honour and welfare of the Gentiles is to be set far above the deliverance and exaltation of the chosen people. He must break the bands of prejudice, and learn a new estimate of life. (*Bp. Perowne, D.D.*) *Missions to the heathen*:—I. I venture to say, looking at the diffusion of Divine truth and its attendant blessings which are shadowed forth in the words of the prophet, EVEN OUR NATIONAL GREATNESS AND GLORY IS A LIGHT THING. Consider what is the true test and measure of real glory. I am not now speaking of it as it appears in the sight of Him by whom the nations are counted as the small dust of the balance, and who taketh up the isles as a very little thing. I would have you look at it from a human but still manly and reasonable point of view as it appears in the estimate of strangers, in the eyes of posterity, in the pages of history, in your own sober judgment, when applied to other instances where you are not under the bias of personal feeling or national prejudice. Take the case of an individual. Would you seriously count it a glorious thing for a man to have amassed great wealth, to have risen to a high station, to have acquired extensive authority? Or, do you think it necessary to inquire what use he has made of these advantages, what traces he has left of his passage through the world? It is not a sufficient title to glory that our name, our race, our possessions, our power, our influence have been extended to the end of the earth, and that every quarter of the globe has yielded its tribute to our arms, our industry, and our commerce. There still remains the question, What use have we made of all our gifts and opportunities? What are the things we have carried with us abroad in exchange for those which we have brought home? What are the tokens and monuments of our presence in the land where we have settled and borne rule? The ampler our means, the greater our power, the more commanding our influence, the greater is our responsibility and the stricter the accounts which we must render at the bar both of Divine and of human judgment. It is the proper object of a Christian State to encourage all efforts

for the extension of Christ's kingdom, to place no obstacles in the way of that extension. II. But how is it as regards the Church? There can be no question that THE SENDING FORTH OF THE GOSPEL BELONGS TO THE PROPER WORK OF THE CHURCH. It may truly be said, in a certain sense, that all the rest is a light thing in comparison with this. Let us suppose a Church pure, sound, and flourishing in all other respects. But if a Church thus favoured puts forth no expansive energies, if she is content merely with the enjoyment of her internal prosperity, then the fulness of these blessings only renders the deficiency in its outward action the more glaring and reprehensible. Whatever appearance there may be of health or vigour in a motionless Church, all such indications must be hollow and fallacious. Such a Church deceives herself, like that of Laodicea, saying, "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing"; being, in truth, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And lukewarmness is the cause, at once, of the misery and the self-delusion. It was such a Church that received the warning. "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Is that too much to say of a Church which, so far as regards those who are without, is deaf and dumb and blind and palsied?—without an ear for her Lord's commission, without a voice to proclaim His message, without an eye for those whom He came to seek and to save, without hand or foot to stir in His service—or rather, to speak more plainly, without faith to trust His Word, without hope to abide His time, without love to spend and to be spent for His cause. (*Ibid.*) *The missionary enterprise*:—1. To look at the question, even from a comparatively lower plane, is there not something elevating in the whole history of missionary enterprise? Is it not a good thing, an inspiring thing, to have lifted up before our eyes the noble examples of the men who have gone forth sacrificing their earthly prospects and encountering privation and suffering and the martyr death that they might preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ? They have gained no earthly reward; they have looked for none. They have reformed men sunk in the lowest depth of degradation, misery, and crime. They have exhibited the Christian graces of domestic purity and truth and love. They have, indeed, enriched the world; they have been the pioneers in civilisation. The splendid heroism of our missionary martyrs has given us a loftier conception of duty, and made our hearts throb with holier emotions, and put to shame the weakness, the cowardice, the selfishness of our lives. Surely on this ground alone we may say that the work of the Church at home is a light thing compared with the mission work of the Church abroad. 2. This mission work abroad gives us new impulses and new motives, because it is done in simple obedience to the command of our risen Lord, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," and a simple trust in His promise, "Lo, I am with you." 3. This mission work is a greater work because of the grandeur and far-reaching compass of its conception, as putting no limits beyond those of the habitable globe to its aims; greater, because it is not bounded by the bounds of a parish or Church; greater, because it bears in its bosom the inspiring truth that the kingdom of God is one, and that all work for Christ is essentially one in its range, and power, and objects, however manifold it may be in the forms which it assumes, or in its application to the various phases of society, and the infinite diversity of the needs which it meets. 4. It is greater because, as all experience shows, it breathes a new life into all the work at home. It is a sovereign antidote to that selfishness which is so often a canker in our work. 5. The missionary work of the Church is a greater work because of its regenerating power in the revival of the whole Church. No one can question this who has watched the development of missions and the relation of that development to the work of the Church at home. It must often have awakened our surprise that at the great Reformation which shattered the fetters of superstition and brought out a nation beloved of God into the glorious liberty of her children, and gave them the Word of life, no attempt was made to carry the precious treasure to the rest of the world. It may be that the work they had to do at home was the work to which God had called them, and that it so absorbed all their thoughts and interest, it left no room for anything else. There is no more striking instance of the reflex action of missionary efforts than this, that it has been made in God's hand the instrument of a mighty revival in the Church at home. Compare it with that other revival which dates from Oxford some sixty years ago. The earlier Evangelical revival, striking as were its results in the awakening of souls, and turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, left out of sight the corporate

unity of the Church. Its weakness was there. It was mighty in its spiritual intensity, but it forgot that Christ came not to convert individuals only, but to establish a Church. The Oxford Movement on the other hand dwelt too exclusively on this aspect of the truth. Ritual darkened the spiritual life. The work of God the Holy Ghost held a subordinate place in its teaching. The power of the Great Commission has gone forth. The Church is sending forth missions, and it is the reflex action of missions which is not only winning fresh victories for Christ abroad, but is breathing a new life into the Church at home. It does not despise sacraments or ordinances, but it puts them in their proper place. (*Ibid.*) *Redemption, an eternal purpose*:—A capable artist can find no worthier exercise for the highest order of powers, than in depicting the scene in the cabinet-council of some earthly monarch, at the moment when it is determined to risk the hazard of war, in offence or in defence, to unsheathe the sword, with the consciousness that the earthly fates of many kingdoms may hang upon the issue, and that the sword may not return to its scabbard until it be bathed red, and made drunk in the blood of myriads of slain. But in this august conference, it is not the fate of one or two kingdoms that is at stake, but of the world in all its extent, and in all its generations, and it may be, of far more than this world; for it seems probable, that, whilst Christ, in His coming into this world, laid not hold of the nature of angels to redeem them, all the intelligent creatures of God have had their condition and destiny modified by the incarnation, and life, and sufferings, and death, and resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. (*T. Smith, D.D.*) *The Gospel for all*:—I. THE FIRST CLAUSE DOES NOT SEEM TO US TO DECIDE, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THE QUESTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN OFTEN PUT AS TO THE FUTURE DESTINY OF THE JEWS. The acceptance of the Gospel by the Jews as a nation, or by the great body of the people, were comparatively a small matter, if it were placed instead of the diffusion of the Gospel all over the world, and the gathering of the elect out of every people. The two are ever to be viewed as great and important parts of a greater and more important whole, and they are so joined together by the appointment of God, that the one could not be effected were the other neglected. The times of the fulness of the Gentiles are appointed to be the times of Israel's gathering. II. Although it seems to be represented as if God had made the offer of the Gospel to the Gentiles conditional upon its rejection by the Jews, this must certainly be understood as spoken after the manner of men, and NOT AS IF GOD HAD MADE THE EVANGELISATION OF THE WORLD DEPEND UPON A CONTINGENCY. III. THE TERMS IN WHICH CHRIST'S OFFER TO THE GENTILES, AND THE DIFFUSION OF HIS GOSPEL AMONGST THEM, ARE DESCRIBED. He is to be "a light" and "salvation" to them. This implies their condition without Christ as one—1. Of darkness. 2. Of perdition. IV. THE ADAPTATION OF CHRIST'S GOSPEL TO REMEDY THE EVILS, AND SUPPLY THE WANTS OF THE GENTILE WORLD. The perfect catholicity of the Christian system is one of the grandest guarantees of its Divine origin. (*Ibid.*) *God's salvation a light to the Gentiles*:—The subject of this chapter is "Messiah God's Light" to the ends of the earth (John viii. 12). In order fully to enter into our text, we will illustrate its meaning by St. Paul's own words (Acts xxvi. 18). Comparing both these passages, we find the design of God's salvation to be that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs (Eph. iii. 6). I. THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN THIS SALVATION. 1. To make men to inherit the kingdom of God and home of the Redeemer. 2. To offer this glory to the Gentiles. II. THE GROUND ON WHICH THIS SALVATION IS OFFERED. "My salvation," or, as in Acts xxvi. 18, "By faith that is in Me." 1. The object of this faith. "In Me." Jesus Himself. 2. The nature of this faith. Believing in His life and work; receiving for our own salvation His offer of mercy; trusting Him wholly. III. THE NATURE OF THE SALVATION THUS OFFERED. 1. "To turn them from darkness to light," *i.e.* conversion. 2. Forgiveness of sins. (*H. Linton, M.A.*) *Israel God's conduit-pipe*:—"That thou mayest be My salvation," &c. That thou mayest be the conduit-pipe of My salvation to convey it to the end of the earth. (*W. Day, M.A.*)

Ver. 7. **Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel.**—*The Redeemer of Israel*:—Israel shall be raised from the deepest degradation to the highest honour. The verse is remarkable as anticipating the main idea of chap. lii. 13–liii. 15. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*) *Christ's future reign*:—I. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE MESSIAH. 1. As despised, rejected, and contemned by men. 2. As abhorred by the Jewish nation. 3. As "a servant of rulers."

Though He was Ruler of all worlds, He voluntarily submitted Himself to human power, and yielded obedience to human rulers—the constituted authorities of His day. He conformed to the institutions of His country (Matt. xvii. 27, xxvi. 52, 53). He submitted to an unjust trial and verdict. II. THE PURPOSE OF GOD RESPECTING THE MESSIAH'S REIGN. 1. He is chosen of God to accomplish the world's salvation. 2. All shall bow to His sceptre. Kings shall see the fulfilment of the Divine promise, by which He is destined to be the Light of the nations, and they shall rise up with demonstrations of respect and reverence; they shall render Him honour as their Teacher and Redeemer. They shall do homage to the great King-Saviour. 3. God, in His faithfulness, will accomplish His gracious purpose. Conclusion—1. What a glorious period is approaching! 2. What encouragement have all Christian workers! The success of our efforts is certain. 3. What is your relation to this great King-Saviour? (*A. Tucker.*) *Kings rendering homage to Jesus:*—Kings, being usually seated in the presence of others, are described as rising from their thrones; while princes and nobles, who usually stand in the presence of their sovereigns, are described as falling prostrate. (*Hitzig.*)

Vers. 8–13. **Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time.**—*The world given to Christ:*—The prophet was looking forward to the Messiah and His times. It was customary for some kings to grant to favoured ones whatever they requested (Psa. ii. 8). God's kingly Son is represented as having asked, and this is the answer. I. THE PROMISED UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION OF THE GOSPEL. 1. It was commenced in the apostolic age. 2. It has been continuing through the ages to the present hour. 3. It will be fully accomplished in "the fulness of time." What reasons have we for believing this? (1) The faithful and unerring promises of Jehovah. (2) The adaptation of Christianity, above all other forms of religion, to be universal. (3) The present aspect of the world furnishes much reason to hope that the accomplishment of this promise is drawing nigh. II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO SHALL EMBRACE IT (vers. 9, 10). The promise includes—1. Abundant provisions. 2. Careful protection. 3. Unerring guidance. III. THE EXULTANT PRAISE WHICH SUCH GLORIOUS PROSPECTS SHOULD AWAKEN (ver. 13). We should raise this song—1. Because of the glory which the fulfilment of this promise will bring to the triune Jehovah. 2. Because of the blessings the Gospel will bring to humanity. Conclusion—Has this Gospel come to you in saving power? (*A. Tucker.*) **I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people.**—*Christ the covenant of His people:*—I. WHAT THIS COVENANT TOUCHING MAN'S REDEMPTION IS. A covenant, in the general acceptation of the word, is an agreement between two parties in any thing, or end, upon certain articles or conditions, which both freely consent to. "The covenant of grace," or "of redemption," is an eternal transaction between the Father and Christ; a consultation and agreement between these two glorious Persons, how man should be saved out of the ruins of the fall, in a way becoming God (Zech. vi. 13). II. SUCH A COVENANT HATH PASSED BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON BEFORE ALL WORLDS. 1. There were terms made, or work demanded of the Mediator. (1) That Christ should take the name of His covenant-people upon Himself, and become their representing Head. (2) That He should become man. (3) In this body Christ was to fulfil God's whole law. (4) That Christ should seal all His obedience with His blood. 2. There were promises given. Christ thus firmly and freely consenting, and binding Himself to perform these terms and conditions, the Father makes promises to Him. (1) That He would fit Christ for His work (Isa. xi. 1, 2; John iii. 34). (2) To assist Christ in His work (Psa. lxxxix. 21, 22). (3) To carry Christ safely and honourably through His work (Isa. xlii. 1, 4; Psa. lxxxix. 26). (4) The Father promised Christ "a seed to serve Him"; and great glory after this His work was ended (Isa. liii. 10). 3. There were mutual trusts which the glorious parties reposed in each other. III. WHO ARE THE PEOPLE FOR WHOM CHRIST WAS GIVEN AS A COVENANT. 1. Such as are brought to seek happiness and life purely upon the footing of this covenant. 2. The "messenger of the covenant" is their delight (Mal. iii. 1). 3. Such as have the Spirit of the covenant in their hearts. Wherever the Spirit is given, He comes as a Spirit of grace and supplication. He is a Spirit of liberty. A Spirit of holiness. IV. WHAT ARE THE BLESSINGS REDOUNDING TO THE PEOPLE BY THIS COVENANT? 1. Their calling is secured. 2. All grace is treasured up for them. 3. Fellowship and communion with God. 4. Eternal life is given

(Titus i. 2). V. USES BY WAY OF DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE. 1. Christ and His seed are comprehended in one and the same covenant. 2. That which is a covenant of grace to us, is a covenant of works to Christ. 3. We learn the meaning of those phrases wherein God is said to make "a covenant" with man. 4. We see the ground of the salvation of Old Testament saints. They were justified and saved upon the foot of this covenant. 5. The substance of the covenant was the same, under both testaments; only the dispensation of it varies. The covenant made with Abraham, Jacob, David, &c., was a covenant, not of works, but of grace. 6. Why Christ is called the "covenant" of His people. It is because He is all in all in this covenant. Practical uses—(1) Admire the love and grace of this covenant. (2) Look more at Christ in every covenant-blessing. (3) This may be improved for the believer's comfort, whatever his wants are; it is a sure covenant, an ordered covenant, a full covenant; Christ is thy covenant, therefore in all thy dangers, weaknesses, snares, thou art safe; in all thy wants thou art provided for; in all thy fears thou art prevented. (*J. Hill.*) *Christ in the covenant:*—We believe that our Saviour has very much to do with the covenant of eternal salvation. We have been accustomed to regard Him as the Mediator of the covenant, as the Surety of the covenant, and as the scope or substance of the covenant. I shall dwell on Christ as one great and glorious article of the covenant which God has given to His children. I. Here is a GREAT POSSESSION—Jesus Christ by the covenant is the property of every believer. 1. Jesus Christ is ours in all His attributes. He has a double set of attributes, seeing that there are two natures joined in glorious union in one person. He has the attributes of very God, and He has the attributes of perfect man; and whatever these may be, they are each one of them the perpetual property of every believing child of God. 2. In all His offices. Is He a Prophet? He is thy Prophet. Is He a Priest? He is thy Priest. Is He a King? He is thy King. Is He a Redeemer? He is thy Redeemer. Is He an Advocate? He is thy Advocate. Is He a Forerunner? He is thy Forerunner. Is He a Surety of the covenant? He is thy Surety. In every name He bears, in every crown He wears, in every vestment in which He is arrayed, He is the believer's own. 3. In every one of His works, whether they be works of suffering or of duty, they are the property of the believer. "Circumcised in Christ." "Buried with Christ in baptism unto death." I die in Christ. I am buried with Christ. We are "risen together with Christ." He hath made us "sit together in heavenly places." 4. In the person of Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "And of His fulness have we received, and grace for grace." All the fulness of Christ to restrain thee, to preserve thee; all that fulness of power, of love, of purity, which is stored up in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is thine. 5. The very life of Christ is the property of the believer. "Because I live ye shall live also." "Ye are dead; and your life"—where is it? It is "hid with Christ in God." 6. Best of all, the person of Jesus Christ is the property of the Christian. II. FOR WHAT PURPOSE DOES GOD PUT CHRIST IN THE COVENANT? 1. In order to comfort every coming sinner. 2. To confirm the doubting saint. 3. Because there are many things there that would be nought without Him. His great redemption is in the covenant, but we have no redemption except through His blood. His righteousness is in the covenant, but I can have no righteousness apart from that which Christ has wrought out, and which is imputed to me by God. My eternal perfection is in the covenant, but the elect are only perfect in Christ. In fact, if you take Christ out of the covenant, you have just done the same as if you should break the string of a necklace; all the jewels, or beads, or corals, drop off and separate from each other. 4. Christ is in the covenant to be used. III. Here is A PRECEPT, and what shall the precept be? Christ is ours; then be ye Christ's. Show the world that you are His in practice. When tempted to sin, reply, "I cannot do this great wickedness, for I am one of Christ's." When wealth is before thee to be won by sin, touch it not: say that thou art Christ's. Are you exposed in the world to difficulties and dangers? Stand fast in the evil day, remembering that you are one of Christ's. Are you in a field where much is to be done, and others are sitting down idly and lazily doing nothing? Go at your work, and when the sweat stands upon your brow and you are bidden to stay, say, "No, I cannot stop; I am one of Christ's." When the syren song of pleasure would tempt thee from the path of right, reply, "Hush your strains, O temptress; I am one of Christ's." When the cause of God needs thee, give thyself to it, for thou art Christ's. And now, I must say one word to those who

have never laid hold of the covenant. I sometimes hear it whispered that there are men who trust to the uncovenanted mercies of God. Let me solemnly assure you that there is now no such thing as uncovenanted mercy. Mayhap, poor, convinced sinner, thou darest not take hold of the covenant to-day. "I dare not come; I am so unworthy," you say. Hear, then: my Master bids you come, and will you be afraid after that? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 9. **That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth.**—*Out of darkness into light* :—When Jesus comes to the soul, He delivers us from that direst of all bondages, fetches us out from that cruellest of all slaveries, the bondage of the spirit, the slavery of the heart. Then we are told that, if there are any who are in a worse state than that of mere captivity, namely, in darkness as well as in bondage, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to them, and says, "Show yourselves; rise, and come out of the darkness; hide away no longer, come forth into the light, and enjoy it." I. I have to try to FIND OUT THE CHARACTERS mentioned in the text: "Them that are in darkness." 1. They were not always in darkness. She was a bright young spirit once, after a fashion; and he,—I know him very well,—he seemed to be everything that mirth could make youth to be. But, on a sudden, there came a cloud in the sky, both to her and to him. It may be that a death happened in the family, or sickness came, or if it was neither of these things, at any rate, the mind suddenly grew strangely quiet, and a stillness came down upon the spirit, and with that stillness there fell a gloom over the whole being. What were those thoughts that brought such a sobering influence into the life? I can tell you about them from my own experience. I thought, "I have not lived as I ought to have lived. God made me, yet I have never truly served Him. He is my mother's God, but I have forgotten Him; my father's God, yet I have never sought Him. What shall I do? God must punish me," &c. I seemed plastic as wax towards evil, yet hard as cast-iron or steel towards anything that was good. Then I grew sad in soul. I read my Bible a great deal, and the more I read it the more the darkness thickened about me, &c. This is the gateway into a joy that will be worth your having. 2. Besides this, a sense of sin has settled upon you. 3. The soul I am describing is in the dark, and the darkness settles down in conviction of sin. You have no hope. 4. You fear future and eternal night. It is to people in such a state that the Gospel of Christ is sent. II. I am going to REPEAT THE EXHORTATION of the text: "Show yourselves." 1. It means that you are running away from Divine justice, and that your wisest course will be to go and deliver yourself up. Do you not know that you are not really hidden? God sees you wherever you are; there is no hiding away from Him. That is the very first thing for you to do; to submit yourself to God, to lie at His feet pleading for mercy. 2. The next way of showing yourselves is somewhat different: "Say to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves"; that is, you are very lonely, and you have been avoiding your best friends. Come out of your retirement. If you cannot speak to any mortal man, yet speak to the Immortal Man; go and tell out all your sorrow to the best of friends. 3. This passage may be applied to you who are sick, who are concealing your disease. I want every man who is troubled about the state of his heart, and every woman too, to come and show themselves to Christ, just as they are, in all their sin. 4. The next thing you have to do is to show yourselves as healed ones, bound to confess Him who has cured them. 5. But I am going to carry the text a little farther yet. There are some young men, perhaps some young women also, who have been saved; they are no longer in the dark, and God has given them grace, and talents, yet still they are hiding themselves away. They are chosen ones loth to take their place of service. If the Lord has saved you, and if He is pleading for you in heaven, it is time you began to plead for Him on earth. 6. Our text applies also to persecuted ones who shall be owned and honoured of God. There will come a day when God's people, who have long been in the dark through persecution, slander, and misrepresentation, shall hear the Lord speaking to them out of heaven, and saying, "Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." "Say to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves." What a change will come for God's poor despised people in that day! 7. These words also relate to dead ones called to resurrection. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **They shall feed in the ways.**—*The returning captives* :—This is part of the prophet's glowing description of the return of the captives, under the figure of a flock fed by a great shepherd. We have seen a flock of

sheep driven along a road; some of them hastily trying to snatch a mouthful from the dusty grass by the wayside. Little can they get there; they have to wait until they reach some green pasture in which they can be folded. This flock shall "feed in the ways"; as they go they will find nourishment. That is not all; the top of the mountains is not the place where grass grows. There are bare, savage cliffs, from which every particle of soil has been washed by furious torrents, or the scanty vegetation has been burnt up by the fierce "sunbeams like swords." There the wild deer and the ravens live, the sheep feed down in the valleys. But "their pasture shall be in all high places." The literal rendering is even more emphatic: "Their pasture shall be in all bare heights," where a sudden verdure springs to feed them according to their need. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Feeding in the ways*:—Whilst this prophecy is originally intended simply to suggest the abundant supplies that were to be provided for the band of exiles as they came back from Babylon, there lie in it great and blessed principles which belong to the Christian pilgrimage, and the flock that follows Christ. 1. They who follow Him shall find in the dusty paths of common life, and in all the smallnesses and distractions of daily duty, nourishment for their spirits. Do you remember what Jesus said? "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." We, too, may have the same meat to eat which the world knows not of. That is a great promise, and it is a great duty. (1) It is a promise, the fulfilment of which is plainly guaranteed by the very nature of the case. Religion is meant to direct conduct, and the smallest affairs of life are to come under its imperial control, and the only way by which a man can get any good out of his Christianity is by living it. (2) But this is a great duty as well as a great promise. How many of us Christian people have but little experience of getting nearer to God because of our daily occupations! Therefore we need times of special prayer and remoteness from daily work; and there will be very little realisation of the nourishing power of common duties unless there is familiar to us also the entrance into the "secret place of the Most High," where He feeds His children on the bread of life. 2. Further, my text suggests that for those who follow the Lamb there shall be greenness and pasture on the bare heights. Strip that part of our text of its metaphor, and it just comes to the blessed old thought, that the times of sorrow are the times when a Christian may have the most of the presence and strength of God. "In the days of famine they shall be satisfied." Our prophet puts the same thought, under a kindred though somewhat different metaphor, in another place in this book where he says: "I will open rivers in high places." That is clean contrary to nature. The rivers do not run on the mountain-tops, but down in the low ground. 3. May I turn these latter words of our text a somewhat different way, attaching to them a meaning which does not belong to them, but by way of accommodation? If Christian people want to have the bread of God abundantly, they must climb. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 10-26. **They shall not hunger nor thirst.**—*Promises of Christ to His people*:—The people of God are represented as a flock of sheep travelling under the care of their good shepherd, in the heat of summer, through a barren and dry wilderness, towards a land of plenty, security, and everlasting rest. Under such circumstances, what would this flock require? What might they expect from the hand of a faithful shepherd? There are doubtless three things which they would want and might look for—provision, protection, and refreshment. Such are the blessings promised by Christ in the text. I. PROVISION. "They shall not hunger nor thirst." Christ will furnish them with all things necessary both for life and godliness; that is, with a sufficiency of all temporal and spiritual blessings. II. PROTECTION. "Neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them." His people are exposed to the fire of persecution; but by His almighty power, by providential interpositions, He defeats the purposes, restrains the malice, and wards off the stroke of their persecutors. They are exposed, also, to the fiery darts of the wicked one; but here, again, the Lord protects His people. III. REFRESHMENT. "Even by the springs of water shall He guide them." Springs of water would be peculiarly refreshing in the sultry deserts, both as allaying the thirst of the flock, and as also furnishing on their banks fresh and verdant pasture, in which the sheep might repose and renew their wearied strength. Such and similar is the refreshment which Christ vouchsafes to His people. (*E. Cooper.*) *The love that will not let us go*:—This chapter is strewn with assurances

to the chosen people on the eve of their return from Babylon. Jehovah's voice takes on a tone of unusual tenderness, and speaks as He only can. Let us heed His successive assurances of comfort and compassion. I. HE WILL LEAD WITH A SHEPHERD'S CARE. II. HE WILL MAKE OBSTACLES SERVE HIS PURPOSE. "I will make all My mountains a way" (ver. 11). Mountains are prohibitory. The student of the geography of Palestine cannot fail to be impressed with the strong barricade of mountains with which God fenced in the Land of Promise on its southern frontier. Similarly, the mountains of Switzerland have sheltered liberty and those of Afghanistan have made conquest difficult to impossibility. There were great mountains between Israel and home, yet God does not say that He would remove them; but that they should form a pathway, as though contributing to the ease and speed of the return. "I will make all My mountains a way." We all have mountains in our lives. There are people and things that threaten to bar our progress in the Divine life. Patience can only be acquired through just such trials as now seem unbearable. Submit thyself. Claim to be a partaker in the patience of Jesus. Meet thy trials in Him. Thus shall the mountains that stand between thee and thy promised land become thy way to it. Note the comprehensiveness of this promise. "I will make all My mountains a way." The promise is in the future tense. When we come to the foot of the mountains we shall find the way. III. GOD'S LOVE IS MORE THAN MOTHERHOOD (ver. 15). Many devout but misguided souls have placed the Virgin Mother on a level with God, and worship her, because they think that woman is more tender, more patient, more forgiving than man. "The love of woman" was David's high-water-mark of love. And of woman's love, none is so pure, so unselfish, so full of patient brooding pity, as a mother's. Such love is God's. Indeed it is a ray from His heart. If a mother's love is but the ray, what must His heart be! But there is sometimes a failure in motherhood. "They may forget." But God can never so forget. IV. GOD TREASURES THE THOUGHT OF HIS OWN (ver. 16). The Orientals had a custom of tattooing the name of beloved friends on the hand. That is the reference here. Thou art photographed where God must ever behold thee, on His hands, on His heart. Not on one hand only, but on both. Not tattooed or photographed, the marks of which might be obliterated and obscured; but graven. The graving tool was the spear, the nail, the cross. Glass will not give up its inscriptions, nor the onyx stone its seal, nor the cameo its profile; but sooner might they renounce their trust, than the hands of Christ. Not Zion's ruins, but Zion's "walls" were ever before Him. Our ideal self; what we are in Jesus; what we long to be in our best moments; what we will be when grace has perfected its work and we are comely in the comeliness He shall put upon us—this is the ineffaceable conception of us that is ever before God. What a contrast between Zion's wail about being forsaken and forgotten, and God's tender regard! V. GOD'S LOVE IS STRONG ENOUGH TO CARRY OUT ITS PURPOSE (ver. 24). Such is the question of despondency, asked by Israel, from the heart of the mighty empire, in which she was a helpless captive But Jehovah had well calculated his resources (ver. 25). VI. GOD'S LOVE WILL NOT PUT AWAY (chap. l. 1). (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 11. **And I will make all My mountains a way.**—*God's mountains*:—Since the world was, mountains have been the obstructors of ways, the natural frontiers between nations, the barriers that have kept people separate, disunited, and hostile. And yet even in the natural sphere the fact of the existence of mountains has ever initiated the stimulus required to surmount them. The physical and moral strength of the race is possibly invigorated by the very opposition of mountains, and man, God's vicegerent in the work of subduing the earth among all lands and among all peoples, has made the mountains a highway for commerce and travel and discovery, until at last the inspired utterance comes to be a motto in man's re-creation. There is a fascination, a challenge to the imagination, in mountain scenery, through which He, who is always appealing to the Divine secret in man, makes His mountains a way to gaze into His face, to think into His heart, to hope into His promises. Those eternal up-pointing fingers challenge you against despondency. None but the soulless or the blind can be amongst the up-pointing fingers of the everlating hills and not hear what the mountain saith; for it echoes the voice of the everlasting God, when to man's poor heart He repeats His splendid promise, "I will make all My mountains a way." Is there not in this inspired prophecy the Divine solution of a mystery, and the impregnable assurance of a

victory? The greatest moral mountain in this perplexing world is the existence and permission of evil. The silence, the awful silence of God, the pitiable failures in the best lives, the crushing heart-sorrows, the beds of suffering, the new-made graves, the occasional irresistible questioning whether such a world as this can in truth be under the control of a Divine and omnipotent Ruler—these are the moral mountains that hem us in. Against them we hurl ourselves sometimes in vain: they hide from us the Fatherhood, they separate us from one another. But mark! God says, "My mountains." I care not how black they seem, they are God's mountains. It is a splendid step heavenward when you are first able to shake yourself free from the miserable pagan dualism which, in order to avoid a difficulty, ascribes half the creation to a good God, and half to some malignant demiurge whom the good God seems powerless to destroy. It is the Lord; let Him do as seemeth Him good. The mountain of moral evil cannot be insurmountable without denial of the truthfulness or obliteration of the omnipotence of our Father, who is greater than all; and when we tremble at the hideous misery in the world and the dread possibilities of evil with which we are only too familiar in our own hearts, it is well to hear the message, "Fear not, child of earth, only believe." I think the very briefest analysis of human history will prove that what men call evil has ever been a stimulus of social action, material enterprise, aggressive discovery. Before Copernicus, people believed that the earth was the centre of the solar system, and they had to learn that the little speck of star-dust which they thought was the centre of the universe, was only one of the thousands of worlds going round the sun. People believed in geocentric motion when they should have believed in heliocentric motion. Similarly, conventional religion, sometimes very religious indeed, is in danger of being autocentric. "I am here to save my own soul." Well, it has to be converted into Theocentric. You have to see that God is the centre, that the purpose and will of God, as it has been revealed through Christ for the whole race, is that around which your little life is to revolve. (*Canon Wilberforce.*)

Ver. 12. **Behold, these shall come from far.**—*Gathered from afar*:—Whatever bearing this prophecy may have had upon the time of Isaiah, or the time immediately after him, it has an important bearing on the time of the Messiah, and the course of His kingdom. The sentiment is that the redeemed Church of Christ shall come from every part of the earth. This sentiment is in accordance with—I. THE GENIUS OF THE GOSPEL. II. THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY. III. THE COURSE OF EVENTS. Conclusion—1. This subject recognises the brotherhood of man. 2. It imposes a stupendous obligation on the Church. (*J. Rawlinson.*) **The land of Sinim.**—*The land of Sinim*:—As coming after the reference to the west, it is naturally looked for in the far east, and so has very generally been understood of the Chinese. The common designation of China among nations of South Asia outside of China is Tsin, and in the form of Sin this name had been introduced among the Arabians and Syrians. It is also observed that the Chinese dynasty of Tsin began to reign about B.C. 255. For ten centuries before Christ the Chinese had commercial relations with the west. (*J. Macpherson, M.A.*) *The land of Sinim* (the Sinites):—The last word is a hopeless enigma. As the only proper name in the verse the writer must have had some special reason for mentioning it; and the only reason that can be plausibly imagined is that Sinim lay on the utmost limit of his geographical horizon. This would exclude two suggested identifications: (1) the Canaanite Sinites of Gen. x. 17, and (2) Sin (Pelusium), on the nearest border of Egypt. (*Prof. J. Skinner, D.D.*)

Vers. 14–16. **But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me.**—*The more than parental love of God*:—I. ZION'S BUILDING. "Zion" here signifies the true Church. Elsewhere she is called Jerusalem; and very frequently is she spoken of as a city or building. 1. If we inquire who is her builder, we find that there is but one who can properly be called by this name. The founder of the true Church is He by whom God made the worlds; therefore she is called "The city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. lx. 14). The plan of Zion's building is older than the world itself. The Lord buildeth up Zion, and He alone. Whenever He uses any of us as His under-builders, He first makes us sensible of our own weakness; the excellency of the power is of Him, and not of us. 2. If we inquire concerning the foundation of the true Church, an apostle meets us with an answer: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 3. If

we consider the building itself, it consists of lively stones. 4. The "operations" of the great Master-builder are not uniform, but marked by "diversity." Some stones are separated from their quarry, and brought off by a preparatory process, in a gradual and gentle manner. Others again, are shivered from their worldly holds, as by the explosion of rocks. If we closely inspect the building, we find the lively stones admirable for their unity, evenness, and mutual conformity. II. ZION'S COMPLAINT. We have heard of Zion, the city and dwelling-place of our God: and that "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion" (Psa. lxxxvii. 2). But how faithfully and ardently He loves her, she herself does not always consider. Why else that complaint which now comes under our notice? It is acknowledged that circumstances may arise, under which nothing may appear more just than this complaint of Zion. III. GOD'S PROMISE. "Can a woman forget," &c. (*F. W. Krummacher, D.D.*) *The complainings of Zion silenced*:—I. WHAT THERE IS IN OURSELVES TO MAKE US FEAR LEST GOD SHOULD FORSAKE US. Our very fears have often a great show of reason in them; though they may be excessive, they are not wholly unfounded. As—1. When we recollect how often we have forgotten and forsaken Him. 2. When the aspect of providence is dark and mysterious. 3. When the mind appears to be bereft of its ordinary supports and consolations. 4. When a great and prevailing doubt obtains as to the safety of our state after all. II. WHAT THERE IS IN GOD TO CONVINCE HIS CHURCH THAT HE NEVER WILL FORSAKE HER. 1. It is contrary to His nature—as contrary to His nature to forget and forsake His Church, as it is contrary to the nature of a kind and tender mother to forget and forsake her child. Our Lord teaches us to reason from the less to the greater. "If ye, being evil, know how to give, how shall not your Father," &c. 2. It is contrary to His promise. "Yet will I not forget thee." 3. It is contrary to the character of His dispensations, for He never has forsaken His Church. 4. It is contrary to His people's own sober expectations. For Zion does not in her heart believe her own prophetic forebodings. She still speaks of Him, not only as "the Lord" in one part of the verse, but as "my Lord" in the other—which she would never do, as a reasonable person, had she finally forgotten or forsaken God, or believed that God had finally forgotten and forsaken her. (*S. Thodey.*) *The saints' final perseverance secured by the love of God*:—I. THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT OFTEN CONDUCE TO SUSPICIONS ON THE PART OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD CONCERNING THE LORD'S GOODNESS. 1. Times of deep affliction; of dark and mysterious providences; days in which there is no light. 2. These are seasons oftentimes, in which, through our frailty, imperfection, sin, and sinfulness, the weakness of our faith and the strength of unbelief, the believer may be led to form some suspicions concerning the goodness of God. 3. Besides this, there may be periods of deep spiritual temptation. 4. Some laxity in the walk will oftentimes bring strength to a man's suspicions here. 5. He may be in a state of spiritual captivity. II. THE GREAT SECURITY THAT IS HERE PLACED BEFORE US. "Can a woman forget her sucking child," &c. There cannot be a figure more tender, more comprehensive. It is the figure of a helpless babe: there is the tenderness of the tie; there is the helplessness of the child; and there is the very posture of the child; and they are all full of great and important truth; and yet according to those last words—"they may forget; yet will I not forget thee"—this is not enough. As though the Lord would say, If My love were not more than this, it would not be enough to secure thee. III. GOD DOES GIVE PROOF THAT THIS TENDER LOVE DOES NOT FORGET. "They may forget; yet will I not forget thee." He does not forget their persons. "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." They are borne upon the heart of the great High Priest. He forgets not the work of grace that is in them. He forgetteth not the trials of His saints. He forgetteth not the returns of His people. He forgetteth not the walk of His saints. He forgetteth them not in death. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *A mournful complaint and satisfactory answer*:—What a difference is there between the judgment of God, and the judgment of men! We have a very striking instance of this in the passage before us. I. A MOURNFUL COMPLAINT. "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me," He exercises no care over me; "and my Lord hath forgotten me." He feels towards me no affection. Let us look into this. The wicked think too much of the goodness of God; they mistake the evidences of His general bounty for the evidences of His peculiar friendship. While they live regardless of His praise, they yet hope in His mercy, and persuade themselves that He will not be rigorous to mark what they have done. The very reverse of this is the disposition of all the subjects of Divine grace. They know that self-deception is tremendous;

and therefore they are afraid of self-deception; and they often carry their solicitudes here beyond the point of duty, and in reading and in hearing they will apply to themselves what was intended only for others; for, as an old divine says, "There is no beating the dogs out without making the children cry." Let us try to trace up this complaint to its source; and to see the wretchedness that conclusion must produce in the minds of all God's people. There is a philosophical notion, which is of a semi-infidel character, which supposes that the providence of God is general, and not particular. He regards the whole, and therefore must regard the parts; for the whole is always made up of parts; and He does regard the most minute parts. It is a religious despondency that affects Christians. It is not the influence of infidelity, but it is the influence, first, of unbelief, or weakness of faith. It arises also from ignorance. It springs sometimes from the suspension of Divine manifestation. We may also mention conflicting with the troubles of life. We remark once more, the delay of God in the accomplishment of prayer. But who can find language properly to describe the wretchedness that such a conclusion as this, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me," must ever produce in the minds of the godly? The misery that the child of God feels from such a conclusion, may be accounted for by three things. 1. That he loves God. 2. He entirely relies upon Him. 3. He has enjoyed Him already. He has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and therefore prays, "Evermore give us this bread." II. THE SATISFACTORY ANSWER. 1. The improbability of the fear. This is metaphorically expressed: "Can a woman forget her sucking child," &c. There are two supposable cases here. She may be bereft of reason, or not survive, and so not be able to remember it. She may be criminally, unnaturally, led to hide herself from her own flesh. 2. The certainty of the assurance, "Yet will I not forget thee." 3. The all-sufficiency of the truth established, *i.e.* the perpetual regard of God towards us. Conclusion—1. Distresses and discouragements are not incompatible with religion. 2. How concerned God is, not only for His people's safety, but for their comfort also. 3. Let His people fall in with His designs. Let them be humbled, and mourn over their ignorance, perverseness, impatience, and unbelief; that they have entertained such hard thoughts of God; that they have so often charged Him foolishly, and unrighteously, and unkindly. 4. Do not take the comfort belonging to a gracious state, unless you are the subjects of a gracious character. (*W. Jay.*) *Unworthy doubts of God* :—How common is this weakness of unbelief in man; how natural are these unworthy doubts of God to us. Nor is it difficult to perceive the sources from which this inability to trust in God's goodness springs. 1. There is the guilt of which we are conscious in our own hearts; the sense of evil desert in ourselves. 2. Then there comes in the undeniable fact of suffering in himself and all around him, which apparently, at first sight, justifies this attitude of mind, and certainly confirms it. 3. We thus discover a third source from which distrust in God springs; the perversions which have been substituted for the pure Gospel by different branches of the Christian Church. (*J. N. Bennie, LL.B.*)

Vers. 15, 16. **Can a woman forget her sucking child?**—*Unforgetting love* :—1. As Jehovah had just been announcing His purposes of world-wide mercy—salvation "to the ends of the earth"—we may take these words, in the first instance, as the plaint of literal Israel: "The Lord has chosen the Gentile, and in doing so, He has forgotten me. The wild olive has been grafted in; will not the natural olive be rejected?" 2. Or it may be taken as the wail of the Church universal, prompted in times of rebuke and blasphemy, defection and apostasy, cruelty and persecution, when blood is flowing and martyr-fires are lighted; or worse, when faith is weak, and love is waxing cold, and knees are bowing to Baal. 3. Or again, the utterance may be regarded as the exclamation of the individual soul, amid frowning providences and baffling dispensations. In all the three cases Jehovah's reply is the same—the assurance of His inviolable, unchanging, everlasting love. This He enforces by two arguments. I. THE MOTHER'S INSTINCTIVE FONDNESS FOR HER BABE. II. THE GRAVER'S ART (ver. 16). (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Maternal love and tenderness* is the strongest and most enduring of instincts. It holds potent sway even in the brute creation, and among the lower tribes of animated being. We see it exemplified in the timid bird hovering with wailing cry over the threatened or despoiled nest, and, despite its feebleness and weakness, ready to give battle to the invader. We see it in the familiar scriptural emblem of the hen gathering her brood of chickens under

her wings in threatening storm, or in the hour of danger. We see it in the bolder watch the mother of the eaglets keeps over her young in the eyry on cliff or mountain-side, as she disputes, with ruffled plumage, the assault of the plunderer. We see it in the proverbial fierceness of the "bear robbed of her whelps," or in the maddened roar of the lioness bereaved of her cubs, as she lashes her sides with her tail, and makes mountain and forest "ring with the proclamation of her wrongs." But it is the mother and her infant babe (the human parent) in whom this deep-seated instinct has its highest, truest illustration. (*Ibid.*) *Maternal affection the most appropriate image of Divine benevolence*:— I. MARK SOME STRIKING POINTS OF RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE COMPASSION OF A MOTHER AND THE COMPASSION OF GOD. 1. The first distinctive feature in the affection of a mother is, that it is coeval with the maternal character. It springs at once into existence, vigorous and perfect, and becomes henceforth a permanent and essential part of her constitution. Other affections are produced, and nourished by degrees. Love to parents, gratitude to benefactors, sympathy with the afflicted, and benevolence to our kind, are all, in a very considerable degree, the offspring of instruction and of association. But of maternal tenderness, it may be truly said that it is an instantaneous creation; the stamp of heaven, impressed upon a mother's heart, and acting in all its vigour the moment she hears the cry of helplessness. Just, but fair, representations of that love of God, which is far above all similitude, as it passes all understanding! In implanting this affection in a mother's bosom, He has furnished the best and most winning image of His own benignity; and by interweaving it in her constitution, He intends to show that His own love is not a feeling, adventitious or fluctuating; but an unchangeable attribute of His being—that predominating principle, of which His other attributes are nothing more than varied ramifications. A mother, however, is frail and fallible. She may forget even her sucking child. But God cannot forget to love. 2. The next quality distinctive in the love of a mother is that of all affections with which we are acquainted it is the purest in its source, and the most disinterested in its exercise. No created being can, in any way, be profitable unto God, for He is independent and unchangeable, both in nature and in happiness. All the life which He communicates; all the means of enjoyment which He spreads through creation; every faculty and every affection that ennobles and blesses the rational soul in its highest advances to perfection, springs from the exhaustless source of unmixed and unbounded benevolence. 3. The last quality I shall remark as peculiarly striking in the love of a mother is, that its exertions and sacrifices are not only disinterested, but, beyond every other example, patient and persevering. And as the love of a mother is not overcome by provocation, neither is it chilled by absence. Such is the almost unconquerable patience of a mother's love. Still it may be conquered; and she may cease to have compassion. But God cannot forget His children. How beautifully do the temper and conduct of Jesus display the riches and the perseverance of Divine love! It is said of Him by an evangelist, "that having loved His own, He loved them to the end": and the remark is verified by His whole life. II. DRAW FROM THE SUBJECT SOME PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS. It is impossible not to advert to the design and uses of this wonderful affection, as indicating, in the most striking manner, the unbounded wisdom and benignity of Providence. If we had but this one evidence, it would be sufficient to convince a reflecting mind that a paternal care is exercised in the government of the world, and that the tender mercies of God are over all His works. Take away the strong instinctive feelings of a mother, and what becomes of the living creation? But whilst man, in common with other animals, owes to this instinctive feeling, the preservation, growth, and vigour of his body, he owes to it, what is still more important, the commencement of those moral affections which constitute, in their progressive development, the strength and the glory of his moral and social life. It is in the bosom of a mother that these affections are generated. Accustomed to look to that bosom for nourishment, protection, and pleasure, it raises thence its infant smiles; it catches answering smiles of complacency and joy; its heart begins to dilate with instinctive gladness; its sensations of delight are gradually modified into those of fondness and gratitude; and as it continues to mark the love of a mother, it learns from her the art of loving. Reflections—1. As we owe everything to a mother, we should be as unwearied in paying the debt, as she was in the acts of tenderness by which it is contracted. 2. Let us learn to form just conceptions of the Divine nature, and of the great

ends of the Divine government. (*J. Lindsay, D.D.*) *Better than a mother*:—Our subject is the superiority of an "utter" over an "almost" impossibility. 1. ALMOST AN IMPOSSIBILITY. If it is not an impossibility for a woman to forget her sucking child, it is certainly next door to one, and the Lord could not have obtained any higher earthly illustration of His tenderness and love. In order to show it you will see the Lord has pressed into His service a variety of words, all serving to increase the beauty of the simile. 1. "Woman." God who made the heart of woman as well as man, knows that there is a tenderness in her disposition exceeding that of man's, and therefore He chooses the highest type to illustrate His sympathy. 2. It is not merely the tenderness of the woman, but the tenderness of the woman who is a "mother." God not only employs the highest type, but the highest specimen of that type. Mother! What associations of loving tenderness are in the very name. The word touches a secret spring in the heart, and conjures back scenes of the past. It brings to view in the dim distance a sweet face that used to bend over our little cot at eventide, and impress a kiss upon our brow. It reminds of one who used to smile when we were happy, and weep when obliged to correct us. It calls to remembrance one who always seemed interested in our little tales of adventure, and never laughed at our little sorrows that seemed to us so large. It was her face we gazed last upon when we went away to school, and it was into her arms we first rushed when the holidays brought us home. It was thought of her that kept us in the house of business, and held us back from sin with unseen silken cords; and when those dark locks of hers became silvered with advancing age, we only thought an extra charm had crowned her brow. You forget not the love that was strong as death, and escaped from her dying lips in words you treasure to this day. Her name has still a magic power. There is one feature in a mother's love that must be mentioned, as it constitutes the chiefest beauty of the type. Her love is not love drawn forth by prosperity or dispelled by adversity. She loves her son not because of what he has, but because of what he is. 3. There is yet one other delicate touch in the picture which gives to it the perfection of beauty. The tenderness described is not only that of a woman, or even that of a mother, but of a mother towards her "sucking child." This crowns the description, and should drive away the last remnant of unbelief. I can imagine a mother sometimes forgetting her grown-up son, who has long since attained the age of manhood, and is himself the head of a family. I can believe that the daughter, married into some other family and well provided for, is not always in the thoughts of her mother, but it is almost impossible to conceive the sucking child for a moment forgotten. Its very life is dependent on the mother's thoughtfulness, and its utter helplessness becomes its security. Yea, she could not forget it even if she desired; nature itself would become a sharp reminder, and her own pain would plead her infant's cause. Behold, how God has strengthened His illustration by every possible means. Then comes the question, "Can she forget?" There is a moment's pause, and the answer is heard, "She may." Mothers may forget their sucking children, either literally, or by acting as if they did. II. AN UTTER IMPOSSIBILITY. The true magnitude of an object can only be understood by comparison, and it is by contrast the mind grasps the reality. "God only knows the love of God." Its height and depth, its length and breadth defy all measurement. "They may forget." "Yet," and it is this word that shoots aloft beyond all human sight, "will I not forget thee." 1. His nature forbids it. "God is love." Not "loving," poor mortal can be that, but love itself. 2. His promises forbid it. 3. The travail of the Redeemer's soul is alone sufficient argument, that they for whom it was endured shall be remembered. 4. His honour renders it an utter impossibility. (*A. G. Brown.*) *God's love greater than a mother's*:—I. A MOTHER'S LOVE FOR HER CHILD IS BUT A FRACTION DERIVED FROM GOD'S LOVE FOR MAN. II. THE STRONGEST AFFECTION OF A MOTHER IS SUBJECT TO MUTATIONS. 1. The conduct of the mother may cool or even quench this spark within her. In some cases debauchery, intemperance, and vice have extinguished this sacred fire, and the parent has become unnatural and cruel to her offspring. 2. The conduct of the child may cool or even quench this spark within her. But the affection of the Eternal is subject to no such mutation. "Who, then, shall separate us from the love of God," &c. III. THE OBJECT OF THE MOTHER'S LOVE IS NOT SO NEAR TO HER AS THE OBJECT OF THE DIVINE AFFECTION. 1. The mother is not the owner of the child. His limbs, faculties, being, are not hers. But God is the absolute proprietor of man. "All souls are His." 2. The mother is not the

life of the child. Her life is distinct from that of her offspring. But God is the very life of man. IV. THE FAILURE OF THE MOTHER'S AFFECTION TOWARDS HER OFFSPRING WOULD NOT BE SO TERRIBLE AS THE FAILURE OF GOD'S AFFECTION TOWARDS THE GOOD. If God forsakes a man, he is ruined inevitably, and for over. (*Homilist.*) *A mother's love*:—The following touching incident was related by the Rev. Norman Macleod, of Glasgow:—His father was preaching on the love of God, and to illustrate his subject, referred to a poor widow in Scotland, who, being distressed for rent, resolved to go, carrying her helpless babe with her, and borrow of a friend that lived ten miles from her home. The journey lay across a bleak mountain, and the day was rough and snowy. Soon after her departure, the neighbours felt it would be impossible for her to reach her destination, and feared that her very life was endangered by the snowstorm that was rapidly gaining in violence. Twelve strong men resolved to go in search; far away on the mountain they found the poor woman lying in the snow, sleeping the sleep of death. Where was the babe? In a sheltered nook in the rock, close by, warm and alive, because wrapped in the garments of which the mother had deprived herself. *A mother's love unchangeable*:—As I was walking down our street the other day, I saw a woman, good and pure, refined and cultured, walking with a man whose face was red with drink, whose form and look bore marks of deepest dissipation. I stepped to her side, and said, "Woman, why are you with this man?" She little heeded me at first, as she supported his unsteady steps. "Woman, why do you not hand him over to the police?" She drew herself up, and with a righteously indignant anger, mixed with pathos, said, "Sir! I am his mother." (*C. S. Macfarland, Ph.D.*)

Ver. 16. **Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.**—*God's loving regard for His people*:—It is not only the name of Zion which is engraved on His hands, but her picture. And it is not her picture as she lies in her present ruin and solitariness, but her restored and perfect state. "Thy walls are continually before Me." (*Prof. G. A. Smith, D.D.*) *Reality*:—This is faith's answer to all the ruin and haggard contradiction of outward fact. Reality is not what we see: reality is what God sees. What a thing is in His sight and to His purpose, that it really is, and that it shall ultimately appear to men's eyes. To make us believe this is the greatest service the Divine can do for the human. It was the service Christ was always doing, and nothing showed His Divinity more. He took us men and He called us, unworthy as we were, His brethren, the sons of God. He took such an one as Simon, shifting and unstable, a quicksand of a man, and He said, "On this rock I will build My Church." A man's reality is not what he is in his own feelings, or what he is to the world's eyes; but what he is to God's love, to God's yearning, and in God's plan. If he believe that, so in the end shall he feel it, so in the end shall he show it to the eyes of the world. (*Ibid.*) *The writing on God's hands*:—These words are a singularly bold metaphor, drawn from the strange and half-savage custom, which lingers still among sailors and others, of having beloved names or other tokens of affection and remembrance indelibly inscribed on parts of the body. Sometimes worshippers had the marks of the god thus set on their flesh; here God writes on His hands the name of the city of His worshippers. I. Here we have set forth for our strength and peace A DIVINE REMEMBRANCE, MORE TENDER THAN A MOTHER'S (ver. 15). When Israel came out of Egypt, the Passover was instituted as "a memorial unto all generations," or as the same idea is otherwise expressed, "it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand." Here God represents Himself as doing for Israel what He had bid Israel do for Him. They were, as it were, to write the supreme act of deliverance in the Exodus upon their hands, that it might never be forgotten. He writes Zion on His hands for the same purpose. The text does not primarily refer to individuals, but to the community. But the recognition of that fact is not to be allowed to rob us of the preciousness of this text in its bearing on the individual. For God remembers the community, not as an abstraction or a generalised expression, but as the aggregate of all the individuals composing it. We think of "the Church," and do not think of the thousands of men and women who make it up. We cannot discern the separate stars in the galaxy. But God's eye resolves what to us is a nebula, and every single glittering point of light hangs rounded and separate in the heaven. There is no jostling nor confusion in the wide space of the heart of God. They that go before shall not hinder them that come after. That remembrance which

each man may take for himself is infinitely tender. The echo of the music of the previous words still haunts the verse, and the remembrance promised in it is touched with more than a mother's love. "I am poor and needy," says the Psalmist, "yet the Lord thinketh upon me." But do not let us forget that it was a very sinful Zion that God thus remembered. II. THE DIVINE REMEMBRANCE GUIDES THE DIVINE ACTION. The palm of the hand is the seat of strength, of work; and so, if Zion's name is written there, that means not only remembrance, but remembrance which is at the helm, as it were, which is moulding and directing all the work that is done by the hand that bears the name inscribed upon it. For His Church, as a whole, He does more amidst the affairs of nations. You remember the grand words of one of the psalms. "He reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm." It is no fanatical reading of the history of earthly politics and kingdoms, if we recognise that one of the most prominent reasons for the Divine activities in moulding the kingdoms, setting up and casting down, is the advancement of the Kingdom of heaven and the building of the City of God. "I have graven thee on the palms of My hands," and when the hands go to work, it is for the Zion whose likeness they bear. But the same thing applies to us individually. "All things work together"; they would not do so, unless there was one dominant will which turned the chaos into a cosmos. "All things work together for my good." III. THE DIVINE REMEMBRANCE WORKS ALL THINGS, TO REALISE A GREAT IDEAL END, AS YET UNREACHED. "Thy walls are continually before Me." When this prophecy was uttered, the Israelites were in captivity, and the city was a wilderness; "the holy and beautiful house where the fathers praised Thee was burned with fire," the walls were broken down; rubbish and solitude were there. Yet on the palms of God's hands were inscribed the walls which were nowhere else! They were "before Him," though Jerusalem was a ruin. It means that Divine remembrance sees "things that are not, as though they were." In the midst of the imperfect reality of the present condition of the Church as a whole, and of us, its actual components, it sees the ideal, the perfect vision of the perfect future. So, the most radiant optimism is the only fitting attitude for Christian people in looking into the future, either of the Church as a whole, or of themselves as individual members of it. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *God remembering His people*:—This figure suggests—I. CONSTANT REMEMBRANCE. It is impossible not to observe that which is written on the hands. If writing were on the face, it would not be seen, on the breast it would not be observed. But the hands are always before us. II. DEVOTED HELP. The hands are for work, and the Almighty wishes us to infer that His people are not only remembered, but helped. III. PERMANENT CONSIDERATION. "I have graven thee." Writing will wear off. That which is graven will and must remain. IV. PAINFUL EFFORT. To engrave on the hands evidently refers to the process of engraving, which causes pain. Has God made no sacrifices for His people? Is not every redeemed soul written in crimson marks in the palm of the hands and the feet of the crucified Redeemer? (*Homilist.*) *A precious assurance*:—God's promises are not exhausted by one fulfilment. They are manifold mercies, so that after you have opened one fold, and found out one signification, you may unfurl them still more and find another which shall be equally true, and then another, and another, and another, almost without end. I believe that the text belongs primarily to the seed of Israel; next, to the whole Church as a body; and then to every individual member. I. I intend to CONSIDER OUR TEXT VERBALLY, pulling it to pieces word by word. Every single word deserves to be emphasised. 1. We will begin with the word, "Behold." "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." "Behold" is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation. Here, indeed, we have a theme for marvelling. "Behold" in our text is intended to attract particular attention. There is something here worthy of being studied. 2. We pass on now to the next word, "I." The Divine Artist is none other than God Himself. Here we learn the lesson which Christ afterwards taught His disciples—"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." No one can write upon the hand of God but God Himself. Neither our merits, prayers, repentance, nor faith, can write our names there. Nor did blind chance or mere necessity of fate inscribe our names; but the living hand of a living

Father, unprompted by anything except the spontaneous love of His own heart. Then, again, if the Lord hath done it, there is no mistake about it. If some human hand had cut the memorial, the hieroglyphics might be at fault; but since perfect wisdom has combined with perfect love to make a memorial of the saints, then no error by any possibility can have occurred. 3. Take the next word, "have." Not "I will," nor yet "I am doing it"; it is a thing of the past, and how far back in the past! Oh, the antiquity of this inscription! "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God"; from everlasting to everlasting Thou art the same, and Thy people's names are written on Thy hands! Yet, methinks, there may be a prophetic reference here to a later writing of the names, when Jesus Christ submitted His outstretched palms to those cruel graving-tools, the nails. Then was it surely, when the executioner with the hammer smote the tender hands of the loving Jesus, that He engraved our names upon the palms of His hands. 4. But the next word is "graven." The Rev. John Anderson, of Helensburgh, told me that while travelling in the East he has frequently seen persons with the portraits of their friends upon their hands, so that wherever they went, as one in this country would carry the portrait of a friend in a brooch or a watch, they carry these likenesses printed on their palms. I said to him, "Surely they would wash out." They might by degrees, he said, but they frequently had them pricked in with strong indelible ink, so that there, whilst the palm lasts, there lasts the memorial of the friend. Surely this is what the text refers to. I have graven thee in; I have not merely printed thee, stamped thee on the surface, but I have permanently cut thee into My hand with marks which never can be removed. That word "graven" sets forth the perpetuity of the inscription. 5. Shall we take that next word? "Thee." It does not say, "thy name." "Thee." See the fulness of this! I have graven thy person, thine image, thy case, thy circumstances, thy sins, thy temptations, thy weaknesses, thy wants, thy works; I have graven everything about thee, all that concerns thee; I have put thee altogether there. It is not an outline sketch, you see; it is a full picture, as though the man himself were there. Darest thou dream that God forgets thee? 6. We have hitherto taken every word, but we must now take the next two or three. We are engraven, where? Upon His "hands." We are not graven upon a seal, for a seal might be slipped from the finger and laid aside, but the hand itself can never be separated from the living God. It is not engraven on the huge rock, for a convulsion of nature might rend the rock with earthquake, or the fretting tooth of time might eat the inscription out; but our record is on His hand, where it must last, world without end. Not upon the back of His hands where it might be supposed that in days of strife and warfare the inscription might suffer damage, but there upon the palms of His hands where it shall be well protected. The tenderest part shall be made the place of the inscription; that to which He is most likely to look, that which His fingers of wisdom enclose, that by which He works His mighty wonders, shall be the unceasing remembrance, pledging Him never to forget His chosen. It does not say, "I have graven thee upon the palm of one hand," but "I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." There are two memorials. His saints shall never be forgotten, for the inscription is put there upon the palm of this hand, the right hand of blessing, and upon the palm of that hand, the left hand of justice. I see Him with His right hand beckon me—"Come, ye blessed," and He sees me in His hand; and on that side He says, "Depart, ye cursed," but not to me, for He sees me in His hand, and cannot curse me. Oh, my soul, how charming this is, to know that His left hand is under Thy head, while His right hand doth embrace thee. II. CONSIDER THE TEXT AS A WHOLE. 1. God's remembrance of His people is constant. The hands, of course, are constantly in union with the body. In Solomon's Song we read, "Set me as a seal upon thine arm." Now this is a very close form of remembrance, for the seal is very seldom laid aside by the Eastern, who not being possessed with skill in the art of writing his name, requires his seal in order to affix his signature to a document; hence the seal is almost always worn, and in some cases is never laid aside. A seal, however, might be laid aside, but the hands never could be. It has been a custom, in the olden days especially, when men wished to remember a thing, to tie a cord about the hand, or a thread around the finger, by which memory would be assisted; but then the cord might be snapped or taken away, and so the matter forgotten, but the hand and that which is printed into it must be constant and perpetual. Oh, Christian, by night and by day God is always thinking

of you. 2. This recollection on God's part is practical. We are engraven upon His heart—this is to show His love; we are put upon His shoulders—this is to show that His strength is engaged for us; and also upon His hands, to show that the activity of our Lord will not be spared from us; He will work and show Himself strong for His people; He brings His omnipotent hands to effect our redemption. What would be the use of having a friend who would think of us, and then let his love end in thought? The faithfulness we want is that of one who will act in our defence. Do you see the drift of it? If He moulds a world between His palms, and then sends it wheeling in its orbit, it is between those palms which are stamped with the likeness of His sons and daughters, and so that new work shall minister to their good. If He divides a nation, it is always with the hand that bears the remembrance of Zion. Scripture itself tells us, "When He divided the nations, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." The great wheel of providence, when God makes it revolve, works for the good of His people. 3. This is an eternal remembrance. 4. This memorial—how tender! We have heard of one, an eastern queen, who so loved her husband that she thought even to build a mausoleum to his memory was not enough. She had a strange way of proving her affection, for when her husband's bones were burned she took the ashes and drank them day by day, that, as she said, her body might be her husband's living sepulchre. It was a strange way of showing love, and there was a marvellous degree of strange, fanatical fondness in it. But what shall I say of this Divine sympathetic mode of showing remembrance, by cutting it into the palms? It appeareth to me as though the King had said, "Shall I carve My people upon precious stones? Shall I choose the ruby, the emerald, the topaz? No; for these all must melt in the last general conflagration. What then? Shall I write on tablets of gold or silver? No, for all these may canker and corrupt, and thieves may break through and steal. Shall I cut the memorial deep on brass? No, for time would fret it, and the letters would not long be legible. I will write on Myself, on My own hand, and then My people will know how tender I am, that I would sooner cut into My own flesh than forget them." 5. This memorial is most surprising. Scripture, which is full of wonders, yet allows a "Behold" to be put before this verse—"Behold!" 6. It is also most consolatory. When God would meet Zion's great doubt—"God hath forgotten me," He cheers her with this—"I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." There is no sorrow to which our text is not an antidote. III. And now we come to EXCITE YOU TO THE DUTY WHICH SUCH A TEXT SUGGESTS. 1. Is it not your duty to leave your cares behind you to-day? 2. If you must not have cares, you should not have those deep sorrows and despairs. 3. If this text is not yours, how your mouths ought to water after it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Neither forsaken nor forgotten*:—I. THE FEAR EXPRESSED, which led to the utterance of our text (ver. 14). 1. This fear has been felt by very many. 2. It has sometimes been very plaintively expressed. 3. And some, too, are very obstinate while they are in that condition, for the passage contains a very unreasonable complaint. Read verse 13, "Jehovah hath comforted His people," &c. Yet, in the teeth of that double declaration Zion said, "Jehovah hath forsaken me," &c. 4. I suppose Zion came to this conclusion because she was in banishment. 5. Yet I think that there is some measure of grace mingled with this fear. Let me read you this passage straight on: "Jehovah hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted. But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." She did not say that till God had visited her. There is in your soul a longing after God. This is the work of His Holy Spirit! Besides, although the text is a word of complaint, it has also in it a word of faith: "my Lord." Did you notice that? Zion calls Jehovah hers though she dreams that He has forsaken her. I do love to see you keep the grip of your faith even when it seems to be illogical. Hold on this assurance with a death-grip. If you cannot hold on with both hands, hold on with one; and if sometimes you can hold with neither hand, hold on with your teeth. II. THE COMFORT BESTOWED. "I have graven thee," &c. What is it that makes it so certain that God cannot forget His people? 1. God remembers His eternal love to His people, and His remembrance of them is constant because of that love. God's suffering love secures His memory of us. 2. By the expression, "I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands," God seems to say, "I have done so much for you that I can never forget you." 3. When a memorial is engraven on a man's hand, then it is connected with the man's life. III. AN INSPECTION INVITED. "Behold."

IV. A RETURN SUGGESTED. 1. Does Christ remember us as I have tried to prove that He does? Then let us remember Him. "This do ye in remembrance of Me." 2. Let us not only remember Him at His table, but let us remember Him constantly. Let us, as it were, carry His name upon the palms of our hands. 3. Practically. We ought so to wear Christ on our hands that whatever we touch should be thereby Christianised. 4. Let the name of Christ, and your memory of it, become vital to you. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 18–23. **Lift up thine eyes round about.**—*Promises for the Church* :— I. THE PROMISED INCREASE OF THE CHURCH. 1. In number. 2. In honour. 3. In triumph. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT IT AFFORDS US FOR MISSIONARY EXERTIONS. 1. God is able to effect this great thing. 2. He has engaged to effect it. 3. The beginnings are already visible before our eyes. Application—(1) Let our expectations of it be enlarged. (2) Let our prayers for it be poured forth. (3) Let our exertions be used. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*)

Vers. 20, 21. **The children which thou shalt have.**—*The Church a mother* :— I. THE CHURCH IS A MOTHER. 1. Because it is her privilege to bring forth into the world the spiritual children of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2. When these little ones are born, the Church's business is to feed them. 3. It is her endeavour to train up her children. 4. She will be always ready to nurse her children when they become sick. II. THE CHURCH IS SOMETIMES BEREAVED. 1. Some of her nominal children she loses by spiritual death. They are not really her children at all. They looked so much like hers that she could hardly tell them. 2. She loses many by death temporal. 3. Sometimes by a trying providence. III. THE CHURCH HAS SOMETIMES TO BE CARRIED AWAY CAPTIVE. How often has this happened to the Church of God in the olden times! The Church has been carried into foreign countries. Sometimes she has been cruelly persecuted. Often, too, the Church has been compelled to seek a refuge in foreign countries. Days of slumber have come over the Church, and days of heresy too. IV. THE CHURCH HAS HAD A MARVELLOUS INCREASE AFTER ALL HER CAPTIVITIES, and all her bereavements have hitherto always worked for her good. Never has the Church lost her children without obtaining many more. 1. The first thing which astonishes the Church when she opens her eyes after her captivity is to notice the number of her children. 2. Also their character—"these." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Church increase* :—I. THERE IS A DECREASE GOING ON IN THE CHURCH OF GOD ON EARTH. Zion is represented here as mourning for the children that she had lost. The Jewish Church in the olden times saw her sons and daughters slain with the sword, or carried away captive. Afterwards, she saw the great majority of the nation refusing Christ, and turning away from Him, and thus the Jewish Church was minished and brought very low. The same thing has happened in many other cases. We must naturally expect to see, in each separate Church of Jesus Christ, a certain process and measure of decrease. 1. Some are being drafted from us to supply the choirs of heaven with fresh minstrelsy. 2. Each separate Church will also have a measure of decrease through the removal of God's servants from one place to another. 3. There is another source of decrease over which we must greatly grieve, and that is the backsliding of many professors. 4. The sifting process by which the chaff is removed from the wheat. II. THERE IS AN INCREASE TO BE EXPECTED IN THE CHURCH OF GOD. There are new converts yet to come in, these children which Zion is to have, after she has lost the others. 1. These new converts are needful. No Church can be healthy without the constant infusion of fresh blood. 2. Therefore, she ought to have every preparation for their reception. 3. All who love the Lord should labour earnestly on their behalf. 4. When we are all pleading and labouring for an increase to the Church, it will come; and when it comes, it is probable that we shall be astonished at the number of those that come. "The children which thou shalt have," &c. 5. The next thing that was a subject for astonishment to Zion was how those converts came to be born at all. "Who hath begotten me these?" 6. But what Zion wondered at next was, how they had been nurtured, for she says, "Who hath brought up these?" 7. A further cause of wonder was, the sudden appearance of this great increase. Zion inquires, "These, where had they been?" Shall I tell you where they had been? Some of them had been in godly families with fathers and mothers praying for them. Some of them had been in the Sunday school, in classes where brethren and sisters love their children, and never rest till they

bring them to decision for Christ. They had been under the influence of Christian wives, Christian children, sometimes Christian brothers and sisters; and so, at last, the gracious influence took effect upon them, by the power of God's Spirit, and out they came. There are great numbers still under those sacred influences, for they also are sure to come in due time, and say, "We are on the Lord's side." Then there were some others. "Where had they been?" They had long been listening to the Gospel, regularly sitting in their pews. But there were others about whom I might well ask, "These, where had they been?" On the Lord's day, at home in their shirt-sleeves; on week-nights, at the theatre or the music-hall, finding enjoyment in the lowest form of amusement. "Where had they been?" Never troubling church or chapel; but God, in His providence, brought them for once to hear the Word, and, as one said to me, "I laid hold of something, and something laid hold of me, and I shall never part with it, for it will never part with me." "These, where had they been?" I cannot tell you where they had all been: some had been at death's dark door, buried in sorrow and in sin, in poverty and in vice. III. ALL THINGS SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE CHURCH TO SEEK LARGER INCREASE. 1. There is the same power to convert ten thousand as there is to convert one. 2. We ought to be encouraged by the fact that the converts come in answer to prayer. 3. Further, since the converts come from all sorts of places, let us carry the Gospel into all sorts of places. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 23. **And kings shall be thy nursing fathers.**—*Princes and rulers should promote the will of God*:—I. PRINCES, OR RULERS, AS SUCH, ARE THE POSITIVE SERVANTS OF GOD, AND THEREFORE ARE BOUND TO PROMOTE, ABOVE ALL THINGS, THE INTERESTS OF HIS REVEALED WORD, AND THE HONOUR OF HIS NAME, IN THE WELFARE OF HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE. It must be a self-evident proposition, that all who are entrusted with the ruling authority are bound to promote the best interests of the people over whom they preside. But the question is, in what do the best interests of a people consist? Do they consist in the extension of territory; the multiplicity of resources; the advancement of the arts and sciences; of wealth and honour; business and trade? We deny the assertion. As our Lord speaks of a man, so we of a nation, prince, or ruler. What is either he or they profited if they gain the whole world and lose their own soul? Or what shall a man, or any number of men, give in exchange for their soul? The soul, then, in all its vast, interesting, immortal, and eternal concerns, is the chief business of man. 1. From whence does the kingly office, or ruling authority proceed? Does it proceed from the people? No. It proceeds from God. 2. We must not omit to notice the manner in which the Lord speaks of princes and rulers in His Word. They are always spoken of in reference to their accountability to Him, and as bound to the execution of His will, and the promotion of His glory. 3. It may be useful here to adduce what is the estimate of our own Church on this subject. II. SUCH A DISCHARGE OR DISREGARD OF THIS OBLIGATION WILL ALWAYS YIELD A SURE TEST OF THEIR OWN STATE AND THE CHARACTER OF THEIR GOVERNMENT, AND WHERE IT PREVAILS IT WILL BE VISIBLE, MORE OR LESS, IN ALL THEIR WAYS AND WORKS. We are to judge of the character and condition of princes and rulers, as such, as we do of private individuals and professing Christians, as such, and of the character of their government as we do of the general tenor of a man's life. 1. There will be deep humiliation before God, coupled with free and ingenuous confessions both of individual and national guilt (2 Sam. vii. 1-29). 2. There will also be a desire to seek the guidance and acknowledge the hand of God in everything. 3. There will also be a fixed determination to banish all wicked men from their presence, and to exclude them from their councils. 4. There will be an anxiety to fill all the offices of the Church and State with men that fear the Lord, love the truth, and who will labour with heart and hand in the same cause for the advancement of true godliness. If the foregoing statements are based on the authority of Divine truth, the following deductions will ensue as some of their most obvious results—(1) It is not an easy office to be exalted to a throne, or to be entrusted with the affairs of a kingdom! (2) How obvious is the connection between the Church and State! An established religion, nationally considered, is nothing more than that "form of godliness," according to God's revealed will, which is selected, supported, and maintained by the State, for the general benefit of all. (3) How great is the guilt of ungodly princes and rulers, and how earnestly should we pray for them that God may bless and direct them in all His ways! (*R. Shittler.*)

They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.—*Waiting upon God:*—I. WAITING UPON GOD signifies—1. A patient expectation of the fulfilment of His Word, whether it be prophecy or promise. 2. A regular attention to the means of grace. II. THE RESULT OF WAITING UPON GOD. Not disappointment and humiliation, but prayers answered, and hopes fulfilled. 1. The penitent. 2. The Christian relying upon the providential help of a covenant-keeping God. 3. The believer waiting for the accomplishment of God's purpose in his sanctification. 4. The Christian waiting for the coming of Christ. (*T. Blackley, M.A.*) "*Wait*":—This is the one word which the Divine wisdom often seems to utter in rebuke of human impatience. Man is eager, hurried, impatient, but God is never in haste. The Divine proceedings are slow—everywhere slow. I. We see it in the realms of NATURE AND PROVIDENCE. 1. The history of the earth. 2. The movement of the seasons. The changes of day and night, &c., how slow, how gradual, how imperceptible! 3. The history of all life and growth. II. REVEALED RELIGION includes much in harmony with these facts. 1. The long interval between the promise of a Saviour and His advent. 2. The manner of His coming (Luke xvii. 20). 3. The history of revealed religion since the advent. 4. The spiritual history of the individual believer. 5. The events which make up the story of a life. With regard to much in our history, we are expected to wait for the revelations of the world to come. (*R. Vaughan, D.D.*)

Vers. 24, 25. **Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?**—*Deliverance from bondage and death:*—I. THE STATE OF FALLEN MAN IS ONE OF MISERY AND BONDAGE. 1. Misery because he is the prey of a mighty tyrant, the devil. 2. Bondage because he is the slave of a terrible master, death. II. JESUS CAN SET US FREE, FOR HE HAS CONQUERED. Jesus has been the Great Emancipator of men. (*T. Bates, M.A.*) "*Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?*"—I. WHO ARE "THE MIGHTY," AND WHO ARE "THE PREY"? The immortal souls of men are the prey, and all the combined powers of darkness are "the mighty." II. HOW SHALL "THE PREY" BE TAKEN FROM "THE MIGHTY"? Nothing short of the almighty power of God is calculated to effect this great and important work. But God is almighty, and God is infinitely able and infinitely willing to rescue the helpless sons of men. Our Lord Jesus Christ is that great and glorious Being who gave, whilst here below, signal manifestations of His power to take "the prey" from "the mighty." III. A MOST DELIGHTFUL AND ENCOURAGING PROMISE. "I will contend with him who contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children." At all times, in every season of trial and difficulty. Let the enemies of God learn an important lesson: "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker!" He will save His Church under all the trials and temptations, the dangers and difficulties of human life. Are the immortal souls of men "the prey"? and are the powers of darkness "the mighty"? What does the ungodly man think of this? (*T. Freeman.*) *The adversary and his defeat:*—I. THE WEAPONS AND RESOURCES OF THE ENEMY. 1. Idolatry. 2. Imposture. Mohammedanism. 3. Papal superstition. 4. The despotic governments of the earth. 5. Crime in its varied forms. 6. A more liberal sort of religion which shall keep the opposition in countenance, and enable them to wield the name and institutions of Christianity against Christianity, sustained by such as live in pleasure, and will not bow the knee to Christ. 7. The corruption of the purity of revivals of religion. 8. The sword. Can such varied and mighty resistance to the truth be overcome? Can the earth be enlightened? Can the nations be disenthralled? Yes! II. HOW SHALL EVENTS SO DESIRABLE BE ACCOMPLISHED? 1. By the judgments of heaven. 2. By the universal propagation of the Gospel. 3. By frequent and, at last, general revivals of religion. 4. By the special influence of the Holy Spirit. 5. By a new and unparalleled vigour of Christian enterprise. But what can be done? There must be in the Church of God—(1) More faith. (2) More intense love for Christ. (3) More decided action. (4) More courage. (5) Efforts to increase the number and power of evangelical Churches. (6) Special effort to secure to the rising generation an education free from the influence of bad example, and more decidedly evangelical. (7) The vigour of charitable effort must be greatly increased. (8) The jealousies of Christians must yield. (9) We must guard against the dangers peculiar to a state of religious prosperity. Conclusion—Will any take side against the cause of Christ? It will be a fearful experiment! (*Lyman Beecher, D.D.*) *The prey taken from the mighty:*—Apply the text—I. LITERALLY—to Israel's release from Babylon. II. SPIRITUALLY—to man's

redemption by Christ. III. EXPERIMENTALLY—to the Christian's deliverance from sin. IV. PROSPECTIVELY—to the blessed resurrection from the dead promised to the people of God. (*S. Thodey.*)

Ver. 26. **And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh.**—*Self-destruction:*—Here is a terrible picture of retributive justice. But the words represent a general principle, which is universal, in the punishment of sin. The sinner is his own avenger. I. TAKE THE DRUNKARD. He is drinking the poison, but is he not at the same time drinking his own life, and consuming his own happiness and peace? II. TAKE THE SPENDTHRIFT. He spends his money, but at the same time eats and drinks his existence, his fortune, his home, his happiness. III. TAKE THE TYRANT. He who wins his throne with blood shall lose it in blood. No one who fights can be without foes, and if he has conquered them at first they will only await their opportunity and in turn conquer him. How few who have raised themselves by the sword have not died by the sword! IV. TAKE THE OPPRESSORS OF THE CHRISTIAN. They think they injure God's people. How does God avenge His elect? By causing them to feed on their own selves—the bitterness of conscience, the remorse of evil doing. These are the portion of the oppressors. (*Homilist.*) **All flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am thy Saviour.**—*An all-sufficient Deliverer:*—I. A WORLD-WIDE NEED. II. AN ALL-SUFFICIENT DELIVERER. (*J. Smith, D.D.*) *The safety of the Church:*—1. God is the Protector of the Church, and no weapon formed against her shall prosper. 2. The Church's enemies shall be distracted in their counsels, and left to anarchy and overthrow. 3. The Church shall rise resplendent from all her persecutions, and shall prosper ultimately, just in proportion to their efforts to destroy it. (*A. Barnes, D.D.*).

END OF VOL. II.

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