

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.
JEREMIAH.

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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

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JEREMIAH.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH.

THE PROPHET'S NAME AND DESCENT.—The name Jeremiah was not uncommon (1 Chron. xii. 13; 2 Kings xxiii. 31; cf. Jer. xxxv. 3). Our prophet is more precisely described as "son of Hilkiah" (i. 1), by whom we are not to understand the high priest of this name who held office in Josiah's days (2 Kings xxii., xxiii.), since, instead of the definite statement which we should then expect, we have only a general account: "of the priests at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin"; the high priest without doubt had his seat at Jerusalem; on the other hand, the priests settled at Anathoth, the old Levitical town (Josh. xxi. 18), the present Anata (a good hour north-east of Jerusalem; according to Josephus, twenty stadia from Jerusalem), probably belonged, according to 1 Kings ii. 26, to the line of Ithamar, not to that of Zadok. (*C. Von Orelli.*) The name of Jeremiah is significant. Some have supposed that it means that he was *exalted* by the Lord. Others assert with more probability that it means *set* by the Lord, as a solid foundation; or *sent forth* by the Lord, as lightning from the cloud, or as an arrow from a bow. Whichever etymology we adopt, the name Jeremiah intimates that, whatever he did and suffered, all was *from the Lord*. He was set by God's hand as a solitary beacon on a lofty tower, in a dark night, in a stormy sea; lashed by waves and winds, but never shaken from his foundations. (*Bishop Chris. Wordsworth.*)

POLITICAL STATE OF AFFAIRS.—His call to the prophetic office came in the thirteenth year of Josiah. Danger was once again gathering round Judah, and to Jeremiah was assigned a more directly political position than to any other prophet. The destruction of Sennacherib's army in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (B.C. 693), though it had not freed the land from predatory incursions, had nevertheless put an end to all serious designs on the part of the Assyrians to reduce it to the same condition as that to which Shalmaneser had reduced Samaria. The danger of Judea really rose from Egypt on the one hand and Babylon on the other. In Egypt, Psammetichus put an end to the subdivision of the country, and made himself sole master in B.C. 649. As he reigned for fifty-four years he was—during the last eighteen or nineteen years of his life—contemporary with Josiah, but it was his successor Necho who slew Josiah at Megiddo. Meanwhile, as Egypt grew in strength, so Nineveh declined, partly from the effects of the Scythian invasion, but still more from the growing power of the Medes, and from Babylon having achieved its independence. Two years after the battle of Megiddo, Nineveh fell before a combined attack of the Medes under Cyaxares and the Babylonians under Nabopolassar. But Nabopolassar does not seem to have been otherwise a warlike king, and Egypt remained the dominant power till the fourth year of Jehoiakim. In that year (B.C. 586) Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish. Having peaceably succeeded his father, he returned to Judea, and Jehoiakim became his vassal. After three years of servitude Jehoiakim rebelled (2 Kings xxiv. 1), and died. Three months after his son Jehoiachin, the queen-mother,

and a large number of nobles and artificers were carried captive to Babylon. The growth of Egypt into a first-rate power under Psammetichus (ii. 18, 36) raised the question of a close alliance with him. The youthful Jeremiah gave his voice against it. Josiah recognised that voice as inspired, and obeyed. His obedience cost him his life at Megiddo; but four years later Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish. On that day the fate of the Jewish nation was decided, and the primary object of Jeremiah's mission then ceased. The ministry of Jeremiah really belonged to the last eighteen years of Josiah's reign. Judah's probation was then going on, her salvation still possible; though each year Judah's guilt became heavier, her condemnation more certain. But to the eye of man her punishment seemed more remote than ever. Jehoiakim was the willing vassal of Egypt, the supreme power. No wonder that, being an irreligious man, he scorned all Jeremiah's predictions of utter and early ruin; no wonder that he destroyed Jeremiah's roll, as the record of the outpourings of mere fanaticism. It was his last chance, his last offer of mercy; and as he threw the torn fragments of the roll on the fire he threw there in symbol his royal house, his doomed city, the temple, and all the people of the land. It was in this fourth year of Jehoiakim that Jeremiah boldly foretold the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar's empire, and the wide limits over which it would extend. This prophecy (chap. xxv.) placed his life in danger, so that "the Lord hid" him and Baruch (xxxvi. 26). When Jeremiah appears again, Nebuchadnezzar was advancing upon Jerusalem to execute the prophecy contained in xxxvi. 30, 31. And with the death of Jehoiakim the first period of Judah's history was brought to a close. Though Jeremiah remained with Zedekiah, and tried to influence him for good, yet his mission was over. He testifies himself that the Jewish Church had gone with Jehoiachin to Babylon. Zedekiah and those who remained in Jerusalem were but the refuse of a fruit basket from which everything good had been culled (chap. xxiv.), and their destruction was a matter of course. Jeremiah held no distinctive office towards them. (*Dean Payne Smith.*)

JEREMIAH'S PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.—The personality of Jeremiah looks out on us from his book in more individual distinctness than that of any other prophet. He reveals himself as a soul of gentle nature, yielding, tender-hearted, affectionate, with almost a woman's thirst for love, with which certainly the iron, unbending firmness and immovable power of resistance belonging to him in his prophetic sphere are in strange contrast. There were in turn two different, widely diverging potencies,—the human flesh in its weakness, yet with all its lawful generous impulses; and the Divine Spirit, with its boundless strength. Though the former was thoroughly subject to the latter, it suffered, sighed, bled under the heavy, almost intolerable, burden laid upon it by God's Spirit and Word. No doubt the youth received the Divine revelations with delighted eagerness (xv. 16); but it went hard with him to be obliged to renounce every joy of youth on account of the "hand of the Lord" that came upon him, and to be obliged to experience and proclaim to his people nothing but wrath, ruin, woe. How utterly all this cut across his natural inclination (xv. 17 f.). Moreover, the office of this witness of Jehovah was in itself highly tragical; he had to preach repentance to a people unfaithful to its God, while knowing that this final call to salvation would pass away unheeded! He had to picture to the nation and its God-forgetting leaders the terrible danger accruing to it from its guilt, and he was not understood, because no one wished to understand him! Thus he himself suffered most under the disobedience of the nation which he loved, without being able to save it. And at the same time he, the warmest, noblest friend of his country, was forced to let himself be counted among traitors, as though in league with the enemy! And yet it was God's inspiration that compelled him again and again to beat down without mercy every deceitful hope to which sinking courage strove to cling; not cowardice, but courage, made him dissuade those eager for war; not treachery, but love for people and city, made him enjoin submission to the conqueror chosen of God. If such a position—in some respects like the one forced on Hosea in the last days of the northern kingdom—would have been terribly hard for any one, for the deeply sensitive Jeremiah, who felt the wounds of his nation as his own, it was almost crushing! That he who interceded with priestly heart for Judah saw himself rejected in his constant intercession before God's throne (vii. 16, xi. 14, xiv. 11, xviii. 20); that he who consumed himself for the salvation of his country, and strove only

to avert the ruin threatened by God, had to listen to the bitterest suspicions and revilings (ix. 1 ff., xii. 5 ff., xv. 10, xvii. 14-18, xviii. 23, &c.), often brought him to despair; nor does he restrain his feelings. Nothing can again cheer him and heal his inner wounds (viii. 18, 21); he wishes he could dissolve in tears for his poor people (ix. 1, xiii. 17); he would fain dwell alone in the wilderness to escape the wickedness of his surroundings (ix. 2); he wishes God had never persuaded him to enter His service, since God's words make him reel like wine (xxiii. 9), and burn in him like fire, when he would suppress them (xx. 7 ff.). Yea, in this conflict between his heart of human feeling and God's inexorable word he wishes he had never been born (xv. 10, xx. 14-18), like Job (iii. 1 ff.). But just because what the Lord announces to him is so painful and contrary to his natural feelings and wishes, he is so certain that a stronger one has come upon him; and he opposes with invincible certainty of triumph the false prophets, who publish the flattering dreams of their own heart as revelations from above. Over against all outward attacks he stands as an iron pillar and brazen wall (i. 18, xv. 20), whilst inwardly mourning the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem as none else does. (*C. Von Orelli*.) Jeremiah has been likened to several characters in profane history—to Cassandra, the Trojan prophetess, whose fate it was never to be believed, though prophesying nothing but the truth; to Phocion, the rival of Demosthenes in the last generation of Athenian greatness, who maintained the unpopular but sound doctrine that, if Athens were to escape worse evils, she must submit peaceably to the growing power of Macedon; to Dante, whose native state, Florence, was in relation to France and the empire as Palestine was to Egypt and Babylon, while the poet, like the prophet, could only protest without effect against the thickening ills. (*A. W. Streane, D.D.*) *Jeremiah faithful as a prophet*:—In the midst of his own sorrow, and even in the deepest despondency, Jeremiah is faithful to his task as a prophet, and bold in declaring the Word of the Lord. Though his message was largely directed to immediate affairs, it pointed forward to a better dispensation, and his words have a meaning for all time. 1. We see fidelity to his calling triumphing over natural timidity throughout his life. See his own words (xx. 8, 9). He seems ever to have been conscious of the assurance given to him at his call (i. 8, xv. 20). And his faith in God's promise is illustrated in his purchase of a field when the ruin of the country was imminent (xxxii.). 2. The truths mainly insisted on by Jeremiah are (a)—That mere attention to worship or veneration for its forms is worthless (iii. 16, vii. 8-11, 21-23). The law must be written on the heart (iv. 4, 14, xvii. 9, xxxi. 33). (b) Consequently the individual rather than the state is the object of Divine regard (v. 1, ix. 1-6, xviii.). (c) In thus condemning the old, Jeremiah anticipates a new order of things. Though he says little of a personal Messiah, he prepares His way (see xxiii. 5-8, xxx. 4-11, xxxiii. 14-26). (*James Robertson, D.D.*)

THE TEACHING OF JEREMIAH.—The distinctive advance of Jeremiah's teaching on that of his predecessors is due to his clear recognition of the fact that the Divine purpose could not be realised under the forms of the Hebrew state, that the continuity and victory of the true faith could not be dependent on the continuity of the nation. Israel must be wholly dispersed, and can only be gathered again by a Divine call addressed to individuals, and bringing them one by one into a new covenant with their God, written on their hearts. Here for the first time in history the ultimate problem of faith is based on the relation of God to the individual soul; and it is to Jeremiah's idea of the new covenant that the New Testament teaching directly attaches itself. (*Chambers's Encyclopedia*.)

JEREMIAH'S LITERARY STYLE.—So far as style can be spoken of in Jeremiah, his style perfectly reflects all the articulations of thought and all the hues of emotion of his mind. His was a nature characterised by simplicity, reality, pathos, tenderness, and a strange piety, but subject to his emotions, which were liable to rise into passions. His mind was set on a minor key, and his temper elegiac. And to all this his language is true. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

ARRANGEMENT OF THE PROPHECIES OF JEREMIAH.—The prophecies of Jeremiah are not arranged in chronological order. The earlier portion (chaps. i.-xx.) has a general character, and is a prelude to the rest. Some of these earlier chapters belong to the days of Josiah (iii. 6); others to the time of Jeremiah (xiii. 18).

But at the beginning of chap. xxi., which is introductory to the second great portion of the book, we are carried forward to the days of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. The prophet hastens, as it were, to the end, and sets before us the fate of that king of Judah, to be delivered into the hands of the Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar; and the fate of Jerusalem, to be destroyed by fire; and of the whole land, to be spoiled by Nebuchadnezzar and by the armies of the Chaldeans (xxi. 1-14). The next chapter (xxii.) contains prophecies delivered in earlier times concerning the predecessors of Zedekiah, namely, Shallum or Joash, the son and successor of the good king Josiah (xxii. 10-12); and Jehoiakim the elder brother and successor of Shallum (xxii. 13-19); and concerning Jehoiakim's son and successor—Jehoiachin, Jeconiah, or Coniah, the immediate predecessor of Zedekiah (xxii. 24, 30). What is the reason of such an arrangement? It was intended to show that Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, had ample notice from God, by the ministry of Jeremiah, with regard to the fatal consequences of his own acts, both to his country and to himself, if he persisted in his rebellion against God, speaking to him by the voice of the prophet. The fulfilment, which Zedekiah himself had seen, of Jeremiah's prophecies concerning his three predecessors on the throne, was a solemn warning to him that unless he himself repented, the predictions of the same prophet concerning himself would be fulfilled also; and it contained also a merciful assurance that if he listened to the prophet's voice, and turned to God with a true penitent heart from his evil ways, he would thus escape the punishments hanging over his head. This is a specimen of the principle on which the prophecies of Jeremiah are arranged; and if we bear this principle in mind, and apply it to the rest, we shall see that these prophecies are not thrown together without method and system, but that they have been disposed in such a manner as to exhibit in a clear light the wisdom, justice, and mercy of God in dealing with His own people, and to justify His dispensations in executing His sentence upon them; which, after His other methods of correction had been exhausted, led at length, by the severe but salutary discipline of their captivity of seventy years, to their conversion from idolatry, and to their restoration to God's favour and to their own land. (*Bishop Chris. Wordsworth.*) The unchronological arrangement of Jeremiah's prophecies is not without its teachings. (1) As showing that during the length of time over which the prophet's work was spread but little care was taken by him to provide for their transmission in any definite order. Like the sibyl of classical antiquity, he gave his writings, as it were, to the winds, careless of their fate, and left it to others, through his long career, to collect, copy, and arrange them as they could. 2. As suggesting the probability that what happened in his case may have befallen the writings of other prophets also, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, whose labours were spread over a considerable period of time; and consequently, as leaving it open to us to deal freely with the order in which we find them, so as to convert them, as we best can, with the successive stages of the prophet's life. (*Dean Plumptre.*) The very lack of order which is displayed here serves a valuable end, in showing that we possess the words of Jeremiah put together in those same troublous times in the course of which they were spoken, not arranged with the care and method which would have been afterwards employed to remodel and fit them to men's notions of propriety. It is not the Book of Jeremiah edited by a future generation, but his words, as they fell from the inspired lips themselves, that are thus in God's providence preserved to us. (*A. W. Streane, D.D.*)

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK. — 1. Chaps. i.-xxi. Containing probably the substance of the book of chap. xxxvi. 32, and including prophecies from the thirteenth year of Josiah (with a long interval of silence) to the fourth year of Jehoiakim. Chap. i. 3, however, indicates a later revision, and the whole of chap. i. may have been added as the prophet's retrospect of his whole work from this its first beginning. Chap. xxi. belongs to a later period, but may have been placed here, as connected by the recurrence of the name of Pashur with chap. xx. 2. Chaps. xxii.-xxv. Short prophecies against the kings of Judah and the false prophets. Chap. xxv. 13, 14, evidently marks the conclusion of a series, and that which follows (chap. xxv. 15-38), the germ of the fuller predictions of chaps. xli.-xlix., has apparently been placed here as a completion to that of the seventy years of exile. 3. Chaps. xxvi.-xxviii. The two great prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem. Chap. xxvi. belongs to the earlier, chaps. xxvii. and xxviii. to the later portion of the prophet's

work. 4. Chaps. xxix.-xxxi. The message of comfort to exiles in Babylon. 5. Chaps. xxxii.-xliv. The history of Jeremiah's work immediately before and after the capture of Jerusalem. Chaps. xxxv. and xxxvi. are remarkable as interrupting the chronological order, which would otherwise have been followed here more closely than elsewhere. The position of chap. xlv. as an isolated fragment suggests that it may have been added by Baruch at the close of his narrative of his master's life. 6. Chaps. xlv.-li. The prophecies against foreign nations, ending with the great utterance against Babylon. 7. Chap. lii. Historical appendix. (*Dean Plumptre.*)

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CHAPTER I.

VER. 2. *To whom the Word of the Lord came.* — *The Word of God* : — Words are often used in two ways—one specific, definite ; the other general, figurative. Thus, when we use the word “heart,” we mean specifically that organ which pumps the blood throughout our being ; on the other hand, we use it broadly as the seat of the affections and centre of highest being. So it is with the term “word.” Primarily, it stands for a written or spoken term composed of letters ; then we enlarge its content and use it in the sense of a message, “What word did our friend send ?” Then as the Psalmist used it, where the heavens have a word for us, a message. Then we go on until we come to find that any expression of God is called a Word of God. This is the use of “word” in the Bible. The Word of God is always an expression of God’s being. I. There is a Word of God for us IN NATURE. The very heavens have a Word of God for us. They tell us that an attribute of His is glory, majesty, far-reaching grandeur. Days and nights all speak of His glory and infinite resource. How many words of God come to us through Nature ! How the writers of the Psalms saw it ! How Jesus saw in Nature the Word of God’s care and watchfulness ! 1. Thus honesty is a Word of God, written on all the face of Nature as an attribute. Nature tells us God is honest, true to Himself, to the laws He has made, to man. The foundation principle of the physical universe is honesty. The stars swing true to their courses. Suns rise and set and do not deceive us. If we did not know this universe was run honestly, we would not dare enter a new day. 2. As we are reading, in these days, more and more deeply into Nature, we are hearing another great Word of God, namely, that God is a God of purpose. This is a great message. Many people think He is not a God of purpose, but that the universe is being run with no end in view. Nature is full of prophecy, life everywhere throbs with expectancy of greater being ; God begins with the simplest and works towards the greatest, He starts with a cell of living matter, and ends with the wonderful human frame, He starts with a spark of life and ends with a spirit in His own image. The best lies before us, the golden age is yet to be. God has great destinies in view for the human soul. II. There has been a distinctive Word of God spoken THROUGH PROPHETS AND STATESMEN who have been wrapped up in the progress of nations. We might see this in the history of any nation, of old or of to-day, but I will take Israel, because we are more familiar with its history and its prophets. One Word of God that came through Israel was justice. God was a just God. He was not like the gods of the Babylonians, fickle, full of whims, acting by impulse, but He was a God who weighed and considered ; who looked at motives as well as deeds ; who meted out rewards and punishments by desert. Another Word of God that came to Israel was that He was a shield and reward, a defender of His people. “The Word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” Ah, how well Israel learned that word in all her devious history ! And how deeply impressed upon her was the word that God was a jealous God—jealous for the welfare of His people, a present help, a refuge, and a strength. Another word that came through Israel was that God was a patient, long-suffering God. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah

were continually giving this Word of God. And every other nation through its people and prophets has some great Word of God to give to the world. For God is not dumb, and His prophets to-day are not deaf. III. It is THROUGH LIFE that God must speak His largest word, make the fullest revelation of His Being. It is life that speaks to life, heart that comforts heart. All the prophets of Israel saying that God is long-suffering will not move a man to see it so much as one soul here exhibiting the forbearance of God. Preachers may preach for ever that God is love, and it will not have the force of one God-filled deed of love. So it is with all the attributes of God. They cannot be revealed in their great, Divine reality except as they are manifest in human life. So when the fulness of time had come God spoke to men through a human soul. Then was His true glory revealed, then His nature made manifest. It was when the word, the expression, the character of God became flesh and dwelt among us that we beheld His glory. Jesus is the living manifestation of the Word of God. Now I have seen Jesus I know God identifies Himself with men. For He has come into our humanity. I ask God what word He has for me in my sorrows and loneliness, and the answer comes to me in the life of Jesus that God is love. I see God living as love before me. I see His love going out to wretched men and women. I see Him serving as only love can serve. I see Him gathering to Himself outcasts and sinners, and recreating them in a new atmosphere of love. I see Him taking little children upon His knee and blessing them. I see Him suffering because He loved the world. What is the nature of God? In Jesus see how He is a Father. See how Jesus' whole life was a living word speaking the Fatherhood of God. How does God treat sinful beings? Look how Jesus treated sinful women who came to Him, and see how God treats sinners. How does God feel over the sins of the world? See Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. Will God suffer to save men? See Jesus giving His rest, and strength, and life, that men may see to what ends God will go to save His children. Let us remember that it was because Jesus was one with the Father that He could be the medium of the Word of God. But when He said, "I and the Father are one," He referred to a spiritual oneness. So wherever there is a soul to-day who is one with the Father, there you will find a living Word of God. There is a very striking scene in George Macdonald's "Robert Falconer" which shows how to-day a Word of God may come through life. Eric Ericson, a poor Scotch student, tramping on to Edinburgh, stops footsore and weary at the "Boar's Head," the inn kept by Letty Napier. After resting awhile, he starts to go on, although so footsore he can hardly walk. But Miss Letty makes him go up to a room and take off his shoes, and let her bathe his feet. He expostulates, for he has not a shilling in the world. But Miss Letty makes him stay three days and rest, while she ministers to him, and then starts him off to Edinburgh, a new man, and a couple of pieces in his pocket. Eric had been a sceptic, but as he walks with Robert he says, with the tears welling up in his eyes, "If I only knew that God was as good as that woman, I should die content." Robert answers, "But surely ye dinna think God's nae as guid as she is? Surely He's as guid as He can be. He is good, ye know." Eric answers, "Oh, yes, they say so. And then they tell you something about Him that isn't good, and go on calling Him good all the same. But calling anybody good doesn't make him good, you know." Yes, poor Eric was right—calling Him good does not make Him good. But when Eric felt love in this godly woman it set him to thinking about the goodness in God. It was a living word from God straight to his heart. So, every time you do a deed of love, you are speaking a word of God. (*F. Lynch.*)

The call of Jeremiah:—It is not to be expected that a superficial gaze will discern the special qualifications that attracted the Divine choice to Jeremiah. But that is no wonder. The instruments of the Divine purpose in all ages have not been such as man would have selected. There were several reasons why Jeremiah might have been passed over. 1. He was young. How young we do not know; but young enough for him to start back at the Divine proposal with the cry, "Ah! Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child." Without doubt, as a boy he had enjoyed peculiar advantages. God has often selected the young for posts of eminent service: Samuel and Timothy; Joseph and David; Daniel and John the Baptist. 2. He was naturally timid and sensitive. By nature he seemed cast in too delicate a mould to be able to combat the dangers and difficulties of his time. He reminds us of a denizen of the sea, accustomed to live within its shell, but suddenly deprived of its strong encasement, and thrown without covering on the sharp edges of the rocks. The bitter complaint of his

after-life was that his mother had brought him into a world of strife and contention. Many are moulded upon this type. They have the sensitiveness of a girl, and the nervous organism of a gazelle. They love the shallows, with their carpet of silver sand, rather than the strong billows that test a man's endurance. For them it is enough to run with footmen; they have no desire to contend with horses. Yet such, like Jeremiah, may play an heroic part on the world's stage, if only they will let God lay down the iron of His might along the lines of their natural weakness. His strength is only made perfect in weakness. It is to those who have no might that He increaseth strength. 3. He specially shrank from the burden he was summoned to bear. His chosen theme would have been God's mercy—the boundlessness of His compassion, the tenderness of His pity. But to be charged with a message of judgment; to announce the woeful day; to oppose every suggestion of heroic resistance; to charge home on the prophetic and the priestly orders, to each of which he belonged, and the anger of each of which he incurred, the crimes by which they were disgraced—this was the commission that was furthest from his choice (xvii. 16). 4. He was conscious of his deficiency in speech. Like Moses, he could say, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." The best speakers for God are frequently they who are least gifted with human eloquence; for if that be richly present—the mighty power of moving men—there is an imminent peril of relying on it, and attributing the results to its magnetic spell. God cannot give His glory to another. He may not share His praise with man. He dare not expose His servants to the temptation of sacrificing to their own net or trusting their own ability. Do not, then, despair because of these apparent disqualifications. Notwithstanding all, the Word of the Lord shall come to thee; not for thy sake alone, but for those to whom thou shalt be sent. The one thing that God demands of thee is absolute consecration to His purpose, and willingness to go on any errand on which He may send thee. (*F. B. Meyer, B. A.*) **In the days of Josiah . . . also in the days of Jehoiakim.**—*Mutations of life*:—When one sea floweth, another ebbleth. When one star riseth, another setteth. When light is in Goshen, darkness is in Egypt. When Mordecai groweth into favour, Haman groweth out of favour. When Benjamin beginneth, Rachel endeth. Thus we are rising or setting, getting or spending, winning or losing, growing or fading, until we arrive at heaven or hell. (*Henry Smith.*)

Vers. 4-10. **Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee.**—*Seven points in Jeremiah's life and call*:—1. God knowing him. "I knew thee." 2. God sanctifying him. "I sanctified thee." 3. God ordaining him. "I ordained thee." 4. God sending him. "I shall send." 5. God commanding him. "I command." 6. God encouraging him. "Be not afraid." 7. God speaking through him. "I have put My words in thy mouth." (*C. Inglis.*) *Childhood prophetic*:—Of Charles Kingsley it is written: "His poems and sermons date from four years old. His delight was to make a little pulpit in his nursery from which, after putting on a pinafore as a surplice, he would preach to an imaginary congregation. His mother unknown to him took down his sermons at the time, and showed them to the Bishop of Peterborough, who predicted that the boy would grow up to be no ordinary man." **I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.**—*Election and mediation*:—The two great blessings of election and mediation are here distinctly taught. God did not speak to the nations directly, but mediatorially. He created a minister who should be His mouthpiece. Observation itself teaches us that men are called and chosen of God to do special work in all departments of life. The difficult lesson for some of us to learn is that we are called to obscurity, and yet this is as clearly a Divine appointment as is the choice of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah. If you look at life, you will see that the most of men are called to quietness, to honest industry, and to what is mistakenly called common-place existence. What of it? Shall the plain murmur because it is not a mountain? Shall the green fields complain that Mont Blanc is higher than they? If they have not his majesty, neither have they his barrenness. To see our calling, to accept it, to honour it, that is the truly godly and noble life! Every man is born to realise some purpose. Find that purpose out, and fulfil it if you would lovingly serve God. We find no difficulty in persuading a man that he is a Jeremiah or a Daniel, at any rate that, under certain circumstances, he might easily have turned out a Hannibal or a Wellington. The difficulty, on the contrary, is to

persuade a man that the lowliest lot, as well as the highest, is the appointment of God; that door-keeping is a promotion in the Divine gift; and that to light a lamp may be as surely a call of God as to found an empire or to rule a world. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The prophet's call and consecration*:—I. THE CALL OF JEHOVAH. Not the product of a reflective musing, nor the result of an inward impulse, but a supernatural Divine revelation, an inspiration, a voice from without. II. HIS DIVINE CONSECRATION. He felt the hand of the Lord touch him: a palpable pledge of His support. Touching his mouth meant endowment. Equipment and qualification for God's work must be from God. III. SIGNS WHICH UNVEIL HIS MISSION. These he saw in spirit, God interpreted them to him as confirmatory tokens of his Divine commission. IV. SUPERNATURAL ASSURANCES OF HELP. God will furnish strength, will make him valiant and impregnable. (*C. F. Keil.*) *Calling to service*:—Like as a sword being committed into the hands of a soldier, by the captain-general, he is not to smite before he be commanded to fight, and before the trumpet be sounded to battle: even so, though a man have excellences given him, yet he is not to execute any function, especially publicly, before he receive a particular warrant and calling from God (Rev. xvi. 1). As the ostrich hath wings and flieth not; so some men have a calling, but they answer it not; they have knowledge, but they practise it not; they have words, but they work not. (*J. Spencer.*) *The ways in which men are called to service*:—It is very remarkable that the ancient prophets always kept steadily before them the exact way by which they were led up to their office, and were always ready to vindicate themselves by a plain statement of facts. It is remarkable, too, that they could trace their heavenly election, as clearly as their earthly parentage; so much so, that, as a rule, they put on record both pedigrees, so to speak, side by side; first, that which was natural; afterwards, that which was spiritual; and the one was as much a living and indisputable fact as the other. Thus Jeremiah said, "Hilkiah was my father, and the Word of the Lord came unto me," two things separated by an infinite distance, yet both matters of positive and unquestionable certainty. Jeremiah would have treated with equal indifference or contempt the suggestion that Hilkiah was not his father and that the Lord had never spoken to him. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *I formed thee*:—Ask what thy work in the world is. That for which thou wast born, to which thou wast appointed, on account of which thou wast conceived in the creative thought of God. That there is a Divine purpose in thy being is indubitable. Seek that thou mayest be permitted to realise it. And never doubt that thou hast been endowed with all the special aptitudes which that purpose may demand. God has formed thee for it, storing thy mind with all that He knew to be requisite for thy life-work. I. THE DIVINE PURPOSE. "I knew thee. . . I sanctified thee. . . I have appointed thee a prophet." In that degenerate age the great Lover of souls needed a spokesman; and the Divine decree determined the conditions of Jeremiah's birth and character and life. How this could be consistent with the exercise of personal volition and choice on the part of the youthful prophet we cannot say. We can only see the two piers of the mighty arch, but not the arch itself, since the mists of time veil it, and we are dim of sight. It is wise to ascertain, if possible, while life is yet young, the direction of the Divine purpose. There are four considerations that will help us. First, the indication of our natural aptitudes; for these, when touched by the Divine Spirit, become talents or gifts. Secondly, the inward impulse or energy of the Divine Spirit, working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Thirdly, the teaching of the Word of God. Fourthly, the evidence of the circumstances and demands of life. When these concur, and focus in one point, there need be no doubt as to the Divine purpose and plan. But in cases where the Divine purpose is not so clearly disclosed, in which life is necessarily lived piecemeal, and the bits of marble for the tessellated floor are heaped together with no apparent plan, we must dare to believe that God has an intention for each of us; and that if we are true to our noblest ideals we shall certainly work out the Divine pattern, and be permitted some day to see it in its unveiled symmetry and beauty. To run errands for God! To be like the angels that excel in strength, and do His commandment, hearkening to the voice of His Word! To resemble the boy messengers in some of our large cities, that wait in readiness to discharge any commission that may be entrusted to them! II. FORMATIVE INFLUENCES. It is very interesting to study the formative influences that were brought to bear on the character of Jeremiah. There were the character and disposition of his

mother, and the priestly office of his father. There was the picturesque beauty of his birthplace, the village of Anathoth, lying on the high road three miles north of Jerusalem, encircled by the famous hills of Benjamin, and looking down the ravine on the blue waters of the Dead Sea, gleaming at the foot of the purple hills of Moab. There was the near proximity of the holy city, rendering it possible for the boy to be present at all the holy festivals, and to receive such instruction as the best seminaries could provide. There was the companionship and association of godly families, like those of Shaphan and Maaseiah, who themselves had passed away, but whose children preserved the religion of their forefathers, and treasured as sacred relics the literature, psalms, and history of purer and better days. His uncle, Shallum, was the husband of the illustrious and devoted prophetess, Huldah; and their son Hanameel shared with Baruch, the grandson of Maaseiah, the close friendship of the prophet, probably from the days that they were boys together. There were also the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah, who were burning as bright constellations in that dark sky, to be soon joined by himself. His mind was evidently very sensitive to all the influences of his early life. His speech is saturated with references to natural emblems and national customs, to the life of men, and the older literature of the Bible. Take, for instance, his earliest sermon in which he refers to the story of the Exodus, and the pleadings of Deuteronomy; to the roar of the young lion, and the habits of the wild ass; to the young camel traversing her ways, and the Arabian of the wilderness; to the murmur of the brook, and the hewing of the cistern. His quick and sensitive soul eagerly incorporated the influences of the varied life around him, and reproduced them. It is thus that God is ever at work, forming and moulding us. The purpose of God gives meaning to many of its strange experiences. Be brave, strong, and trustful! III. THERE WAS ALSO A SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR HIS LIFE-WORK—"The Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth." In a similar manner had the seraph touched the lips of Isaiah years before. And we are reminded that the Lord Jesus promised that the Spirit of the Father should put appropriate words into the lips of His disciples when summoned before the tribunals of their foes. Words are the special gift of God. God never asks us to go on His errands (i. 7) without telling us what to say. If we are living in fellowship with Him, He will impress His messages on our minds and enrich our life with the appropriate utterances by which those messages shall be conveyed to our fellows. Two other assurances were also given. First, "Thou shalt go to whomsoever I shall send thee." This gave a definiteness and directness to the prophet's speech. Secondly, "Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord." IV. GOD VOUCHSAFED A TWOFOLD VISION TO HIS CHILD. On the one hand, the swift-blossoming almond-tree assured him that God would watch over him, and see to the swift performance of his predictions; on the other, the seething cauldron, turned towards the north, indicated the breaking out of evil. So the pendulum of life swings to and fro; now to light, and then to dark. But happy is the man whose heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. There was a period in Jeremiah's life when he seems to have swerved from the pathway of complete obedience (xv. 19), and to have gone back from following the God-given plan. Surrounded by contention and strife; cursed as though he were a usurer; reproached and threatened with death—he lost heart, and fainted in the precipitous path. Immediately he had good reason to fear that the Divine protection had been withdrawn. We are only safe when we are on God's plan. But as he returned again to his allegiance, these precious promises were renewed, and again sounded in his ears: "I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall; and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the Lord. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible." (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) A call to service:—"It was no vision that called me to the foreign field," said a missionary at Clifton Springs, last summer. "I read with intense interest 'All power is given unto Me, go ye, therefore.' This was the foundation-stone of my call to be a missionary. Later, while I was in the seminary, a letter was read from Dr. Butler, asking for five new men for India, 'a chance to put your life to the best use for the Master.' Though I had no outward vision, the illumination of the heart is the best vision one can have, and from that day I have never been sorry, and I have never doubted that God called me

to this work." (*Christian Age*.) **I cannot speak: for I am a child.**—*Fears and comforts in prospect of labour for God*.—I. THE FEAR OF GOD'S SERVANT IN PROSPECT OF LABOUR. 1. He feels his weakness. (1) Having no influence. (2) Having no experience. (3) Being unstable. 2. He feels his ignorance. 3. He feels his unworthiness. 4. He dreads the enmity of man. II. THE COMFORTS OF GOD'S SERVANTS IN PROSPECT OF LABOUR. 1. The assurance they are called to the work. 2. The knowledge of the purpose of God. 3. The promise of the presence of God. 4. The fact that the message was from God. (*R. A. Griffin*.) *A young preacher's oppressive sense of responsibility*.—When I first became a pastor in London my success appalled me; and the thought of the career which it seemed to open up, so far from elating me, cast me into the lowest depths out of which I uttered my "miserere," and found no room for a "gloria in excelsis." Who was I that I should continue to lead so great a multitude? I would betake me to my village obscurity, or emigrate to America and find a solitary nest in the backwoods, where I might be sufficient for the things that would be demanded of me. It was just then that the curtain was rising upon my life-work, and I dreaded what it might reveal. I hope I was not faithless, but I was timorous and filled with a sense of my own unworthiness. I dreaded the work which a gracious providence had prepared for me. I felt myself a mere child, and trembled as I heard the voice which said, "Arise and thresh the mountains and make them as chaff." (*C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*.) *A sense of helplessness as a preparation for ministry*.—How many of the greatest men have been broken under a sense of their insufficiency! That passage in the life of John Livingstone comes back to me as I write. He had spoken at the yearly communion at Kirk o' Shotts on the Sabbath with marvellous power, and had been requested to preach on the following morning, which he promised to do on condition that his friends should spend the night in prayer. But, as he awoke in the morning, he was so overwhelmed with the sense of his incompetence, that he went three and a half miles out of the town, to be brought back, however, and to preach so marvellously that five hundred souls were converted. The writer, years ago, when in great anxiety to learn whether his was a true vocation to the Christian ministry, the Bible opened to this page, and he can bear witness that God has been faithful. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *God achieves His work by seemingly inadequate workmen that the glory may be His*.—In using such ill-adapted tools for the accomplishment of His designs, God shows His own transparent power. That famous well-cover at Antwerp, just opposite the cathedral—one of the finest pieces of wrought-iron that was ever known—is said to have been made by Quintyn Matsys with nothing but a hammer and a file, his fellow-workman having taken away his tools. If it be so, the more praise to him for his consummate skill. All God's works redound to His glory; but when the tools He uses appear to be totally inadequate to the results He achieves our reverence is excited, while our reason is abashed, and we marvel at a power we cannot understand. (*C. H. Spurgeon*.) *Reluctance overcome*.—Farel, alike humble and courageous, had often asked if another would not succeed better than he, and a sort of repentment had bidden him wait in hope for such a man. Calvin was unwilling to undertake the work, he was not made, he said, for such an office. . . . Farel is urgent. . . . Calvin educes fresh reasons, and it seemed as though he wanted to deter Farel by exhibiting to him the defects of his future colleague. Once more he asked that he might be left in obscurity to busy himself in studies. Then Farel broke out, "Thy studies are a pretext. I tell thee that if thou refuse to associate thyself with my works God will curse thee for having sought thyself and not Christ." Calvin was henceforth prompt and sincere in the work of the Lord. **Say not, I am a child.**—*Jeremiah's mission*.—I. HIS OBJECTION NOT UNREASONABLE. 1. Inexperience. 2. Insufficient knowledge. 3. Modest diffidence. 4. Yet his age and defects time would remedy. II. HOW GOD OVER-ROLES HIS OBJECTION. 1. He refers to His pre-ordination. 2. He refers to His commission. 3. He was to speak God's words. 4. Divine presence pledged. 5. Supernatural communication. *Lessons*: 1. God, not man, arranges the affairs of His moral kingdom. 2. God qualifies His instruments. 3. God often selects His agents, not as men would do. 4. God gives His own message to His messengers. 5. The ministry of God's servants is mighty for good or evil. (1) Listen when God speaks. (2) Obey when He commands. (3) Trust when He promises. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *God teaching His prophet*.—I. WHAT IT IS, IN SPIRITUAL LANGUAGE, TO BE A CHILD. This is one of the most comforting of Gospel names, when it unites us with God as our Father, and thus implies that there is the holy

principle of a new birth unto righteousness within us. 1. A child in this sense, is one who has been translated out of his own unrighteous nature into the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ; and this translation takes him at once from under the dominion of the law, and brings him into the glorious liberty of the Gospel. 2. A child, in scriptural acceptation, because he feels himself to be a sinning child, will bear submissively, every trying dispensation that shall be laid upon him, and in a child-like spirit. 3. Every child of God's adoption will study the will of God, and strive to make it his own. II. WHAT INFLUENCES WERE OPERATING UPON THE PROPHETS, WHEN HE SAID, "I CANNOT SPEAK, FOR I AM A CHILD."

1. There was the influence of a fallen and diseased nature. It is a great blessing to be able to look into the drowning sea of our own evil hearts, and to know the things we ought to pray for, and the rocks and quicksands it is our interest to avoid. But it is perilous to linger too long in an enemy's country, and to roll our meditations overmuch through the defiled places; because the very sight and knowledge of what we are, in our natural weakness and deformity, if they are steeped for too long a time in the bitterness of soul humiliation, will be apt to produce a feeling of darkness akin to despair. 2. There was a distrust of God's providence. This is a common sin in very many, who are without a question, children of the covenant. They have a faith, but it is not equal to their emergencies; there is a light in it, but it does not warm them; it staggers and hesitates, when it ought to be going forwards and realising. III. WHAT IT WAS THAT GOD INTENDED HIS PROPHET TO UNDERSTAND, WHEN HE REPLIED, "SAY NOT, I AM A CHILD," &c. 1. First He taught him that His simple word is the best rock for dependence: "Thou shalt go and thou shalt speak." This is the way in which God most loves to teach His children, because it is the simplest, I do not say the easiest lesson, for their faith to embrace. It is a trial for their confidence to improve. 2. But God's word to the prophet, "Say not I am a child," implies more. Jeremiah was to work for God; but God was to work in Jeremiah, and to supply him with a strength fully equal to what he had to do. Here is another link that binds God in His omnipotence to a covenant child in his weakness. (*F. G. Crossman.*) *The Divine mission of children*.—If we judge by inference and analogy from these words, rather than from the circumstances and person to whom they belong, we reach a truth like this: that by a messenger, incompetent because of his weakness, some messages from God come more forcefully to the ears and heart of men. What the prophet was comparatively many are actually, and the same truth holds good throughout, and so we reach a point which may well occupy our thought: the Divine mission and office of children, what they have to say, what they have to do. Is it not wrong to think of children as incomplete growth, of youth as nothing more than incomplete maturity? Such treatment injures them, for it fosters the idea into strength that to-day is nothing, and to-morrow everything, that the present is valueless, and the future holds all hope. Such treatment injures us, for we only exist impatiently till this time shall have passed, and miss all the instruction we might gather from the earliest impulses of life. In the home, and in the Church which is the larger home, there is a place for them to occupy, a mission to fulfil. Take two or three points as hints. I. First the meaning and the power of simple faith. It is a word that some of us perhaps for years have been trying to learn the meaning of. Faith, trust. Have you children of your own, or have you seen such, nestling fearless and trustful at their parent's knee? Your child believes in you, in something more than the fact of your existence. It lives in your love. It trusts your care. Faith is a belief that leads to the committal of the whole being to the hands of One who is our Father, our Helper, our Saviour; and as we grow up into strength, the highest of all motive impulse, at first it may be fear or expectation of good that induces obedience, but no long time can pass, if the relation be truly sustained, before love is the impulse of every action; and because your child loves you it delights to do your will. As such is the truth which appears in the earliest years of children, can it be a mistake to suppose that God intended the truth to be learned from such illustration of His word? 2. Does there not come to us in this self-same way, too, a hint of the folly and wrong of distractive anxiety? What good could the child do by puzzling its little brain with such questions as belong necessarily to the chiefs of the family? What slight would be cast upon the parents' love if the child should becloud its life and be sad because no way out of supposed difficulties presented itself! Would you not say or think, my child, I stand higher and see farther; what is an inscrutable problem to you is none to me; my strength removes the hindrance,

my wisdom solves the riddle? 3. And this leads us to another thought: that those things which seem to us all-important, upon which our whole interest is often apt to centre, to which, indeed, we look as to the source of our happiness in life, may be the merest trifles after all. What a small matter changes the child's light to darkness! In what an instant, by what a trivial cause, is laughing changed to crying, or the reverse! You say the child will grow, that now it speaks, thinks, acts as a child, but when it becomes a man it will put away childish things. God expects the same thing of us, and we well may ask ourselves, Am I growing into a higher life, and is it manifest by my interest in things of superior moment? Spiritually, have we come to see what is the noblest aim that may be set before us? Having learned the principles of the Gospel of Christ, are we going on to perfection, coming closer up to our Father in likeness, reflecting proof of our sonship, ready to follow everywhere He leads, and to be quite sure that as we would give our child all that is good, and not willingly or needlessly cause one pang of pain, so in much intenser and tenderer love does our Heavenly Father deal with us? 4. The last thought is the influence of kindness and refreshing which is shed from the life of children. Their presence in the home makes the life less artificial, more true; and such may be their influence in the Church. We hold out the hand of encouragement for them to confess the name of the Saviour whom they may love. Let first impulses toward Christ, instinctive they will be, be nurtured. See to it that none be repressed, none discouraged. (*D. J. Hamer.*) *Childlike, not childish*:—Jeremiah learnt to bear testimony without flinching before kings, ay, and, in the name of the Lord, against kings; to be willing to undergo stripes and imprisonment; and to be sawn asunder for his grand defence of the Faith of God. But it was terribly difficult to him, in the beginning of his prophetic ministry, to take even the first steps on that narrow and painful way. The Word of the Lord comes to him, and tells him that from his birth he has been divinely ordained "a prophet unto the nations." "Then said I" (it is an autobiography), "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child," &c. Then the fear of men passed away from the prophet; and he girded up his loins, and arose, and spake unto them all that God commanded him. Now, what strikes us in this is, first, its thorough naturalness; and next, its awakening, encouraging call to each of us. It was so natural in Jeremiah to shrink from the awful ordeal of facing nations and kings. It came to him as such an absolutely new call. Well might he say, I am a mere child: I cannot attempt this. Poor human nature could scarcely have said otherwise. Only the grace of God would empower for such a duty: and that the grace of God was ready for him was proved, alike by the original call and by the rebuke and the encouragement which followed, by the zeal which he was enabled to show, in the face of the greatest possible difficulties, and by the accomplishment, both for good and for evil, of the predictions which God spake by him. And the call and the reproof and the reassuring words, are applicable also, in great measure, to each of us. Each one among us is bound to speak the truth among the brethren, boldly to rebuke vice, and, if necessary, patiently to suffer for the truth's sake. And yet, when we come to real, every-day life, how constantly we fail herein! How often the strong man excuses himself for being weak! how often the soldier, brave to the death in meeting the enemy, has not courage enough to reprove or admonish a friend! how often the minister of Christ, holds his hand, instead of standing up for his Master! Surely, this backwardness in the Lord's work, this miserable fear of men, this distrust of the Divine power committed to us, is found more or less in every class among us. And what is the real name for this? It is our childishness. How different is this from the child-like temper! The greatest and bravest and wisest of men have something of the child in them—the child's simplicity, and truthfulness, and implicit obedience, and regard for authority. Wellington had all this eminently; but he was never childish, he had no false fears, he "never sold the truth to serve the hour." All who are really great share this character, this holy boldness, this valour for the truth upon the earth, this which is described in the picture of the Christian's armour as the preparedness of the Gospel—the readiness to go at once on the blessed messages of God. 1. Realise the needs of men around you. They are very great. They demand all your energies, all your courageous charity, all possible firmness and decision. 2. Think of the danger of delay, the immense value of present opportunities. Have you never noticed, that the occasion for speaking to a soul to which we feel peculiarly impelled is at times

the very last? How bitter must be our regret, if we let such an occasion slip, and allow one for whom Christ died actually to perish! 3. If you hesitate, if the childishness of your nature still wrestles with the mighty angel of God's grace, remember that which should constrain us the most to the fearless deeds of Christian faith—the contemplation of Christ crucified, and of the exceeding great love wherewith He loved us, enduring the contradiction of sinners and the shame and agony of death. Take the first step, the first brave, loving step along that way, and He will hold you by the hand, and go with you into the very midst of the battle, into the heat of the day; and you shall thank Him, ere the sun goes down, for enabling you, though you seemed to yourself but a child, to speak and to fight for Him. (*G. E. Jelſ, M.A.*) **Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee.**—*A portrait of the true servant of God.*—I. HE IS CALLED TO A GREAT WORK. He is a Divine messenger. 1. To go forth on an errand from God. 2. To go only where God sends him. 3. To speak only what God communicates. Not to speak his own speculations, on the theology of others, but the Word of God. II. HE IS CONSCIOUS OF SELF-INSUFFICIENCY. 1. The characteristic of all true servants. Moses, Isaiah, Paul. 2. A qualification of all true servants. "When I am weak, then am I strong." III. HE IS STRENGTHENED BY THE DIVINE (ver. 8). A man who has God within need never be afraid. (*Homilist.*) *Jeremiah a servant.*—I. DIVINE COMMISSION. II. DIVINE AUTHORITY. III. DIVINE PRESENCE. IV. DIVINE DELIVERANCE. V. DIVINE POWER. VI. DIVINE MESSAGE. VII. DIVINE RESULT. (*C. Inglis.*) *The Gospel minister encouraged and instructed.*—1. An objection overruled. 2. Work and duty prescribed. To bear God's message to men. (1) To whom? To all to whom the Lord should send him. He was not to choose for himself. Must obey the call of God, and do his duty, though neglected, hated, and persecuted for his faithfulness. (2) The matter of the message. Not to speak at random whatever came uppermost, or what might be most easy to himself or agreeable to his hearers; but only what the Lord commanded. 3. How, or in what manner, God's word was to be delivered. (1) Faithfully and fully. (2) Plainly and boldly. I. THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY. 1. It is an ordinance of Divine appointment to be continued in all ages to the end of time. Accordingly, they who slight and undervalue it, or despise those who are employed in it, reject their message, and disregard their salutary admonitions, reproofs, and instructions, greatly dishonour God, and pour contempt upon His authority. 2. It hath pleased God to employ weak and sinful men to dispense His word, and bear His message to sinners and saints. 3. None must intrude themselves into the office of the ministry, or presume to exercise it without a lawful call. Those who run unsent, who take upon them the office of the ministry when they are not called to that sacred function, in such a manner as God hath prescribed in His word, have no reason to expect assistance and success in their work. 4. Those whom God calls to the exercise of the ministerial office, He doth in some measure qualify for discharging the several parts of it. 5. The work of the ministry is very important and difficult work. The honour of God, and the salvation of souls, are nearly concerned in it. 6. Those whom God calls to exercise the office of the ministry have ordinarily a humbling sense of their own weakness, and insufficiency for the work they are called to. 7. Ministers of the Gospel, in performing the duties of their function, do not act in their own name, but in the name, and by the authority of their Divine master the Lord Jesus Christ. 8. Whatever opposition, or difficulties, the servants of Christ may meet with in the exercise of their ministry, they have sufficient encouragement to persevere in it. II. SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES AND DISCOURAGEMENTS WHICH THEY WHO ARE CALLED TO EXERCISE THAT SACRED FUNCTION MAY HAVE TO STRUGGLE WITH. 1. Their fears and discouragements are sometimes occasioned by a serious consideration of the nature of the work they are called to engage in. 2. By a sense of their own weakness and insufficiency for discharging the duties of the sacred function. 3. When they consider the opposition they are likely to meet with in the exercise of their office. (1) From the world. (2) From lukewarm professors. 4. The cold reception that is usually given to the messages which the servants of the Lord deliver in His name, is sometimes a cause of discouragement. 5. The low and afflicted state of the Church is apt to discourage those who are about to enter upon public work in her. III. THEIR DUTY, AND THE WORK THEY ARE CALLED TO. 1. They must not choose their own lot. Have they a call in providence to deliver God's message to those who are more likely to persecute them, than to submit to their instructions or pay any

due regard to what they declare in the name of the Lord, they must not dispute, but readily obey the orders given them. Nor have they reason to fear any dangers they may be exposed to, through the power and malice of their enemies; for He in whose service they are employed is able to defend them, and frustrate all the designs of their enemies against them. His promise is their protection. 2. They must deliver nothing in His name but what He commands, or what is agreeable to His revealed will. In order to this, the teaching and renewed illumination of the Holy Spirit is necessary; but they need no additional, objective revelation. 3. The instructions given to the prophet, and every other minister of the Word, in the text imply, that those who are called to preach the Gospel should, as there may be opportunity, teach all truths revealed in the Word of God, and urge the performance of all duties required in it. 4. They should urge the diligent observance of all Divine ordinances, as a necessary duty. They must not think it is enough, if persons have the love of God in their hearts, and some experience of a work of grace in their souls, though they neglect the administration of the word and sacraments, or other outward ordinances, and treat with contempt any endeavours to maintain their purity; because, as some are pleased to speak, they are only outward things, and the observance of them hath not a necessary connection with vital piety, and the exercise of grace in the heart. 5. They must urge obedience to all the precepts of the moral law. 6. They should endeavour to accommodate their doctrine to the various conditions of their hearers. Conclusion: 1. When those who are about to enter upon public work in the Church have a humbling sense of their own insufficiency, it is a presage of future usefulness. 2. The work of the ministry is not to be engaged in rashly. Count the cost. 3. Such as bear the character of office-bearers in the Church, who take upon them to make laws for the members of the Church, contrary to those which the glorious Head of the Church hath enacted, or different from them; or who enjoin the observation of religious rites, devised by men without any warrant from the Word of God, not only transgress the limits of their commission, but are chargeable with great presumption. They teach what God never commanded, and exercise a power which no creature can claim, without invading the prerogative of the supreme Lawgiver. 4. Those who are called to bear God's message to the children of men ought to be well acquainted with His written word contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. 5. Ministers of the word must have no partial respect to the persons of men. 6. In order to a suitable discharge of ministerial duties, much fortitude and resolution is necessary. 7. Those ministers of the Gospel who, sensible of their own weakness, are enabled humbly to depend upon the power and grace of God for protection, and support in their work, are most likely to discharge the duties of their office with acceptance and success. 8. They must take care that they do not run unsent, or thrust themselves into the office of the ministry without a lawful call, the call of God and the call of the Church. 9. They are to deliver their message authoritatively, as not acting in their own name, but in the name of God. If ministers, in preaching the Word, act as the messengers of the Lord of hosts, the people to whom they preach ought to receive their message with reverence and submission. If they reject it, or slight it, they put an affront upon Him who sent them. They despise not man but God. (*D. Wilson.*) **Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.**—*A reason for bravery:*—Whenever fear comes in and makes us falter, we are in danger of falling into sin. Conceit is to be dreaded, but so is cowardice. Our great Captain should be served by brave soldiers. What a reason for bravery is here. God is with those who are with Him. God will never be away when the hour of struggle comes. Do they threaten you? Who are you that you should be afraid of a man that shall die? Can you not trust Him? Do they pour ridicule upon you? Will this break your bones or your heart? Bear it for Christ's sake, and even rejoice because of it. God is with the true, the just, the holy, to deliver them; and He will deliver you. Remember how Daniel came out of the lions' den, and the three holy children out of the furnace. Yours is not so desperate a case as theirs; but if it were, the Lord would bear you through, and make you more than a conqueror. Fear to fear. Be afraid to be afraid. Your worst enemy is within your own bosom. Get to your knees and cry for help, and then rise up saying, "I will trust, and not be afraid." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Valiant manhood:*—Just as much as a man drives out fear, marches boldly on, says his say, does his act, by so much is he a valiant man. In the old Norse ballads it was indispensable to be brave. Odin cast out of his

heaven, the *Valhalla*, all who were tainted with cowardice; and over a battlefield the priests taught, went the Valkyries, or choosers of the slain, heavenly messengers who took care only to admit the valiant. The kings when about to die, lay down in a ship with its sails set, drifted out into the ocean, charged with fire too in the hold, so that the king might blaze in his tomb, and be delivered to the sky. The valiant is the really valuable man.

Courage in ministers.—The truest way not to be afraid of the worst part of a man is to value and try to serve his better part. The patriot who really appreciates the valuable principles of his nation's life is he who most intrepidly rebukes the nation's faults. And Christ was all the more independent of men's whims because of His profound love for them and complete consecration to their needs. There come three stages in this matter: the first, a flippant superiority which despises the people and thinks of them as only made to take what the preacher chooses to give to them, and to minister to his support; the second, a servile sycophancy which watches all their fancies, and tries to blow whichever way their vane points; and the third, a deep respect which cares too earnestly for what the people are capable of being to let them anywhere fall short of it without a strong remonstrance. You have seen all three in the way in which parents treat their children. I could show you each of the three to-day in the relation of different preachers to their parishes. Believe me, the last is the only true independence, the only one that it is worth while to seek, or indeed that a man has any right to seek. An actor may encourage himself by despising or forgetting his audience, but a preacher must go elsewhere for courage. The more you prize the spiritual nature of your people, the more able you will be to oppose their whims. These must be the fountain of your independence. (*Ep. Phillips Brooks.*)

Danger regarded from the high ground of faith.—Fire broke out on a prairie not far from the dwelling of a settler. His son, seeing flames advancing, cried out they would all be burned, but the father took his boy to some high ground, and showed him that all round their dwelling was a wide clearing, too broad for the flames to overleap, and so they were safe. How frequently we worry ourselves because of some threatening danger, whereas, if we took higher ground and looked with the eye of faith, we should see that God has arranged a defence, that it may not hurt us. (*The Signal.*) See, I have this day set thee over the nations.—*Prophet's commission*.—1. He is made a (paqid), a prefect or superintendent of the nations of the world. A Hebrew term corresponding to "bishop" of the Christian Church. 2. He has widest scope for the exercise of his powers: he is invested with authority over the destinies of all peoples. If it be asked in what sense it could be truly said that the ruin and renascence of nations was subject to the supervision of the prophets, the answer is obvious. The Word they were authorised to declare was the Word of God, that fulfils itself with all the necessity of a law of nature (Isa. lv. 10, 11). 3. What strength, what staying power may the Christian preacher find in dwelling upon this fact, that God's Word is fulfilling itself, though that Word may be disowned, and the efforts of the preacher may be thwarted. (*C. J. Ball, M.A.*)

Charge to pastors: their work defined.—I. INQUIRE WHAT ARE THE EVILS AGAINST WHICH YOU MUST CONTEND, AND THE METHODS YOU ARE TO ADOPT IN THIS OPPOSITION. 1. By your public ministry root out errors in doctrine. 2. By leading the Church, in the exercise of faithful discipline, root out evil-doers. 3. By rendering your pastoral visits subservient to the purposes of conviction and correction. II. WHAT IS THAT GOOD YOU ARE TO ENCOURAGE? 1. As a builder—(1) Be sure you lay a right foundation. (2) See that your materials be fitly framed together. Implying that—(a) They be hewed and squared. (b) They be formed by the same rule. (c) Every one be put in the situation for which he is formed. (3) So frame the whole as that it may be a fit habitation for God. 2. As a planter. (1) Sow "wholly a right seed." (2) Give attention to the plants as you see them grow. (3) Cultivate them by every means. (4) Pray that they may be watered by the Holy Spirit. (*Andrew Fuller.*) *The work of Jeremiah, and that of St. Paul*.—I. CONTRAST. Jeremiah, the prophet of disaster and despondency, could look back to a holy and happy past—the son of the faithful priest Hilkiah, the friend of the godly king Josiah; he fell upon evil and apostate times. Saul had to turn his back upon his old life—count all things but loss that had been gain to him—thus he was ever looking forward, reaching onward—the apostle of faith and hope. II. PARALLEL. 1. Each is elected by God, and therefore trained by his circumstances for his work. The call of Jeremiah, the conversion of Saul, was to each a revelation of a God that had formed him from the womb for his work (cp. Gal. i. 15, 16 with Jer. i. 5).

2. The twofold nature of that work—destructive and constructive. To root out, pull down, destroy; yet to plant and to build. We may almost say this is the work of all whom God has called to labour for Him. This was the type of Christ's work. His coming laid an axe to the root of the tree (Matt. iii. 10, see also xv. 13). Yet was He the Sower. It may be the teacher, like Jeremiah, does not live to see his work grow—yet who can doubt the effect of Jeremiah upon those who returned purified and repentant from Babylon? The two must go together. Root up error and plant truth. Pull down the strongholds of sin, and build up the temple of Christian holiness. (*John Ellerton, M.A.*) **To throw down, to build, and to plant.**—*Destruction and construction conjoined*.—"To root up, and to pull down." What a mercy of God to the Church was it that the same day that Pelagius, that arch-heretic, was born in Britain, Augustine the Great, confuter of that heretic, should be born in Africa—providence so disposing that the poison and the antidote should come into the world together. (*John Trapp.*)

Vers. 11-16. **I see a rod of an almond-tree.**—*Tree emblems*.—The Hebrew word for almond signifies the "waker," in allusion to its being the first tree to wake to life in the winter. The word also contains the signification of watching and hastening. The word for almond-tree is *shaked*, and the word for "I will hasten" (ver. 12) is *shoked*, from the same root. The almond was the emblem of the Divine forwardness in bringing God's promises to pass. A similar instance in the name of another rosaceous tree is the apricot, which was named from *præcokia* (early), on account of its blossoms appearing early in the spring, and its fruit ripening earlier than its congener the peach. (*Professor Post, F.L.S.*) **The rod of the almond-tree and the seething pot**.—This vision was parabolic, and contains one thought in different stages of development. In looking at any object through a telescope the first look may give a correct impression of the object, but an adjustment of the lens may reveal details not seen before. So in the case of the double vision here. The almond is the first tree to awake from the sleep of winter, and to put forth blossoms. God, in the vision of the almond branch, indicated that the judgments pronounced upon the Hebrew nation were nearing their fulfilment. "I will hasten My Word to perform it." The second vision gives more information than the first upon the same subject. In the first only the fact of the speedy retribution is made known, the second reveals whence it is to come. "Out of the north." The seething pot also shows the terror and confusion that would fill the city of Jerusalem when surrounded by her enemies. **I. THOSE WHO HAVE TO UTTER THE TRUTH OF GOD TO OTHERS MUST FIRST SEE IT CLEARLY THEMSELVES. II. THOSE WHO CAN SEE THE MIND OF GOD MUST BE PREPARED TO UTTER THE TRUTHS THEY SEE.** Men of genius who see things in secret, and think they see what is worth giving to the world, gird up their loins to put forth what they have seen in word, or on canvas, or in the sculptured marble. Christ instructed His first scholars to do this (Matt. x. 27). So Jeremiah must give out that which he has seen. **III. GOD OFTEN MAKES USE OF THINGS FAR BENEATH US, TO MAKE KNOWN TO US IMPORTANT TRUTHS.** The boiling pot and the almond branch were common everyday objects, yet God uses them as vehicles to convey to Jeremiah solemn truths respecting His people. So in Christ's parables. **IV. THE TIMES AND INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL JUDGMENT ARE IN THE HANDS OF GOD.** **V. GOD'S CHASTISEMENTS INCREASE IN SEVERITY WITH THE INCREASE OF NATIONAL SIN.** God had again and again sent less severe chastisement upon the Jewish nation, but all had failed to stop their moral decay; hence the necessity, if the nation were to continue in existence, of the execution of the judgments foretold in the prophetic vision. **VI. THE MOST CHILDLIKE AND HUMBLE IN SPIRIT SEE BEST INTO DIVINE MYSTERIES.** Just before receiving this revelation Jeremiah had confessed his ignorance and inability (ver. 6). (Matt. xviii. 3-6; Isa. lvii. 15; 1 Cor. ii.) (*Sermons by a London Minister.*) **The almond-tree's message**.—The almond-tree was, as its name indicates, the "watcher," the "hastener"; as if it lay at the gates of spring, waiting, yearning for their opening; as if it would urge forward the days of sunshine and gladness. It was apparently with some sense of the allegory it taught that the shape of its blossom was adopted as the pattern of the "cup" for the candles in the golden candlestick in the temple. So, as the candles burnt from sunset to sunrise in the golden cups of the almond blossoms, the symbol out of which they sprang was telling of the watcher and the hastener, and was saying, "The morning cometh." And the almond branch says through all the

dreary winter, "The spring cometh and also the summer. God watches over His Word to perform it." Yes, as God watches over the almond blossoms to open their beautiful leaves, and to gladden the eyes of men, so will He open the promises and prophecies of His Word to fill men's hearts with joy and peace. Ah, we cannot watch over our word to perform it, save in a very qualified sense indeed. But how calmly the Infinite and Eternal One keeps watch over His from generation to generation till all are fulfilled! Although the symbol of the almond branch was employed to show how certainly God's Word will be performed on the grand scale of its application to national life, we may fairly take our crumb of personal comfort from it. There are multitudes of promises, multitudes of assurances of love, multitudes of revelations which are adopted and applied as personal words from God to His children, who build upon them, hope in them, look for their fulfilment. They have associated God's love and honour with them as closely as our children bind us up with our words. And they are abundantly encouraged to do so. The promises for man are promises to men. God deals with humanity by dealing with individuals. The race is saved through its units. The secret promise of spring in the branch of the almond-tree, which the prophet was taught to apply to the whole nation, has also a meaning for every soul of man. It means that God watches and waits to perform His Word to him. But we turn now to that national and human aspect of the text, which undoubtedly it chiefly had for the prophet, and which it was intended to have for men in all generations. When, then, God performs His Word, does He perform it mediately by the instrumentality of agents, or immediately by an exercise of volition? The almond branch answers our question. Not by the touch of His invisible fingers does He make the flower burst from the stem and open its pale pink leaves to the sun and wind. He does it by the majestic movement of the seasons. The courses of the stars, the rush of the world through space, the heat from the far-off sun, the blowing of the winds, the falling of the rain, the secret chemical action of the soil, the mysterious operation of the laws of life in the tree itself, all combine as God's ministers to bring to pass God's will and word in the making and unfolding of a flower. And this increases the marvel of His work; this enlarges our conception of His superintending care; this touches our souls with a consciousness of His universal presence. If the Almighty will spend a year of unceasing work to make a flower bloom, if He will lavish the wealth of earth and use the powers of the heavens upon it, then we may fairly assume that He will exercise as great or greater vigilance and effort to perform His Word touching the highest welfare of man. He will not fail to establish His kingdom, and He will do it by using the most varied forces operating through centuries of time, if need be, through ages of ages. It is, perhaps, not easy for us to remember that He is now operating through ourselves and through the great masses of mankind, all the while watching over His Word to perform it, but so it is. The Old Testament view of God's use not only of Israel, but also of heathen kings and nations, should aid us to see that He is still using men to fulfil His purposes. Tyrants as well as patriots have served the cause of liberty by compelling nations to safeguard it by constitutional laws and usages. Atheists have furthered a reverent piety by revealing the coldness of their denials and their incompetence to satisfy the deepest, the best, the most irrepressible of our thoughts and desires. Grasping capitalists, as well as Socialists, are now urging forward the cause of a sound and real equality, by causing men everywhere and of all degrees to think, to inquire, to contrive, and to act in combination, each man subordinating the personal to the general good, and so learning a lesson in unity, in self-control, and in care for others. The very faith of the Gospel has been promoted by much that seemed to threaten its extinction. The very principles and precepts of the kingdom of God have been adopted and confirmed because of experience of the evil of their opposites. We dare not, we would not, say that knowledge of evil has been the necessary introduction to knowledge of good, but this we may affirm, that God works by means of evil to perform His Word, to establish it among us as the admitted counsel of perfect wisdom and perfect love; He uses even our faults and our sins to bring to pass the fulfilment of His Word. (*J. P. Gladstone.*) *Spiritual vision*:—This power of spiritual vision is pre-eminently the gift of God. This power of parables, making them or reading them, is a deep mystery of the unseen kingdom. Is it not the gift of sight that distinguishes one man from another? The prophet may truly say, "I hear a voice they cannot hear; I see a hand they

cannot see." How the earth and sky are rich with images which the poet's eye alone can see! What a parable is spring, and what a vision from the Lord is summer, laden with all riches, gentle and hospitable beyond all parallel! With the mountains girdling thee round, as if to shut thee up in prison, and suddenly opening to let thee through into larger liberties—what seest thou? I see beauty, order, strength, majesty, and infinite munificence of grace and loveliness. Look at the moral world, and say what seest thou. Think of its sinfulness, its misery untold, its tumult and darkness and corruption, deep, manifold, and ever-increasing. Is there any cure for disease so cruel, so deadly? What seest thou? I see a Cross, and one upon it like unto the Son of Man, and in His weakness He is mighty, in His poverty He is rich, in His death is the infinite virtue of atonement. I see a Cross, its head rises to heaven, and on it is written, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and from it there comes a voice, saying, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? Believe in Me, and live for ever." And far away in the distance, what seest thou? Across the seething sea of time, standing high above all earthly affairs, yet inseparably connected with them, what is that glistening object? It is fairer than the sun when he shineth in the fulness of his strength, and marvellous is its fascination alike for the evil and the good: the evil look upon it until their knees tremble and their bones melt like wax, and the good look unto it, and praise the Lord in a song of thankfulness and hope. What is it? It is a great white throne whence the living Judge sends out His just and final decrees. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Natural objects setting forth Divine dispensations*.—In his later days it was the habit of Wm. Wilberforce, before retiring to rest, to seek in the natural objects about him, to be afresh assured of his Father's love and presence. "I was walking with him," says a friend, "in a verandah, watching for the opening of a night-blowing *Cereus*. As we stood in eager expectation, it suddenly burst wide open before us. 'It reminds me,' said he, 'of the dispensations of Divine providence first breaking on the glorified eye, when they shall fully unfold, and appear as beautiful as they are complete.'"

Ver. 17. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee.—*God's witness*.—I. Must be quick. II. Busy. III. BOLD. IV. FAITHFUL. For—1. He must speak all that he is charged with. 2. He must speak to all that he is charged against. (1) Because he has reason to fear the wrath of God if he should be false. (2) Because he has no reason to fear the wrath of man if he is faithful. (*M. Henry, D.D.*) *Service requires concentration*.—The girdle is often yards in length, and is a significant part of a man's apparel when in full dress; and the first sign that a man is in earnest about any work would be that he would gather his skirts about him and tuck them into his girdle; so as to be unhampered and free. The idea for us is that Christian service demands concentration. It needs the fixing of a man's power upon one thing, and the gathering together of all the strength of one's nature until its softest and loosest particles are knit together and become strong. You may take a handful of cotton-down and squeeze it tight enough to make it hard and as heavy as a bullet, or you may stretch it out into tissue paper. The reason why some men hit and make no dint is because they are not gathered together, compacted—their loins are not girded. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. I have made thee this day a defenced city, &c.—*A sure stronghold is God*.—Though thou shalt be exposed to persecutions and various indignities, they shall not prevail against thee. To their attacks thou shalt be as an impregnable city; as unshaken as an iron pillar; and as imperishable as a wall of brass. None, therefore, can have less cause to apprehend danger than thou hast. The issue, in Jeremiah's case, proved the truth of this promise; he outlived all their insults; and saw Jerusalem destroyed, and his enemies, and the enemies of the Lord, carried into captivity. (*Adam Clark.*)

Ver. 19. And they shall fight against thee.—*Opposition*.—I. THE VEHEMENCE OF OUR FOES. 1. Formerly this virulence was manifested in revolting cruelties; lit fires of martyrdom; crowded prisons with sufferers for conscience' sake; drove thousands into exile; even disturbed ashes of pious dead to emphasise the execrations of the living. 2. Now opposition resorts to more secret, though not less deadly means. Seeks to prison confidence and joys; impede progress,

disturb peace, destroy spirituality. II. **THE CERTAINTY OF OUR SECURITY.** Saints may be weary, maimed, fearful, but cannot be ultimately defeated. False professors will fall a prey: indeed they tempt the tempter; but true men are sure of victory. III. **THE SOURCE OF OUR CONFIDENCE.** 1. The abiding presence of the Lord. 2. The constant manifestation of the power of the Lord. (*R. A. Griffin.*) *Persistence in spite of opposition*:—As the springs do not cease from giving forth their waters, or the rivers their streams, albeit no man come to take up any, or to sail upon them: so must not the minister cease from preaching, admonition, and reproving, albeit in manner, no man make profit of his doctrine and admonition. (*J. Spencer.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-3. I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth.—*Youthful religion*:—**I. THE RICH AND GLOWING DESCRIPTION OF YOUTHFUL PIETY HERE GIVEN.** 1. Ardent affection. 2. Union of the soul to Christ. 3. A going after God. 4. Not discouraged by difficulties and troubles. 5. A religion of holiness. II. **THE ASPECT WHICH THE DIVINE REMEMBRANCE OF YOUTHFUL PIETY MAY HAVE ON DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE.** 1. A view of approbation. (1) When you are successfully struggling with the temptations of the world. (2) When you act under the influence of youthful impressions in promoting the cause of truth and holiness. (3) When sunk in deep affliction. (4) When young people come to be old people. 2. A remembrance of regret and displeasure. (*R. Winter, D.D.*) “*Thy first love*”:—**I. GOD REMEMBERS WITH GRACE THE BEST THINGS OF HIS PEOPLE'S EARLY DAYS.** 1. I think that it is, first, because all these were His own work. If there was in thee any light, or life, or love, it was the gift of the Spirit of God. 2. God also remembers with pleasure those best things in His people's early days because they gave Him great delight at the time. Those first tears, which we tried to brush away secretly, were so precious to the Lord that He stored them away in His bottle. 3. It is very sweet to reflect that, when God says that He remembers the love of our espousals, and the kindness of our youth, He does not mention the faults connected with our early days. Our gracious God has a very generous memory. 4. The Lord so remembers the best things of our early days that He recounts them. He says, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth.” Let us try whether we can recollect how we showed our kindness to our God in our early days. Then the Lord adds, “I remember thee, . . . the love of thine espousals.” Oh, some of us did love God very fervently in our early days! Observe that the Lord speaks in our text of Israel's going after Him into the wilderness: “I remember thee . . . when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness.” Perhaps some of you, when you became Christians, had to give up a situation, or to quit some evil trade. Perhaps you had to run the gauntlet of a workshop where everybody laughed you to scorn. Some of you had hard times in those days; yet I will not call them hard, for you never had in all your life such joy as you had then. When everybody gave you an ill word, then Christ was most precious to you, and your love to Him burned with a steady flame. II. **GOD REMEMBERS WITH A GRACIOUS PURPOSE THE BEST THINGS OF OUR EARLY DAYS.** 1. He remembers them that He may make use of and honour us in our after days. There is many a man, now honoured in the service of God, who would not have been if he had not been faithful to God as a youth; and I believe that there is many a man who has missed his opportunity of serving God through not beginning well. 2. God remembers these early faithful ones, to instruct them, and to reveal Himself to them. 3. The Lord also remembers what we do in our youthful love and kindness, that He may sustain us in the time of trouble. 4. Especially do I think that this must be true in the time of old age. “I remember how you worked for Me when you could work for Me; and now that you are getting grey and old, and can do but little in your last days, I will uphold you, and bear you safely through.” III. **GOD WOULD HAVE US REMEMBER THE BEST THINGS OF OUR EARLY DAYS FOR OUR REBUKE.** Ah, you are not what you used to be, not so decided, not so joyous, not so faithful! What have you been at? Do you not owe more to God now than you did then? You have come a good way on the road since then;

ought you to love Him less? He has blessed you; He has preserved you; He has forgiven you; He has manifested Himself to you. You have had some grand times when your heart has burned within you; you have sometimes had a taste of heaven upon earth. Should you not, therefore, love Him much more than at the first? Oh, come back with tears of deep regret, and give yourself again to God! Have you ever seen a water-logged ship towed into harbour? She has encountered a storm; all her masts are gone, she has sprung a leak, and is terribly disabled; but a tug has got hold of her, and is drawing her in, a poor miserable wreck, just rescued from the rocks. I do not want to enter heaven that way, "scarcely saved." But now look at the other picture. There is a fair wind, the sails are full, there is a man at the helm, every sailor is in his place, and the ship comes in with a swing, she stops at her proper place in the harbour, and down goes the anchor with cheery shouts of joy from the mariners who have reached their desired haven. That is the way to go to heaven; in full sail, rejoicing in the blessed Spirit of God, who has given us an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's remembrance of our covenant with Him.*—I. A SOLEMN DEDICATION TO GOD, AND ENTERING INTO COVENANT WITH HIM. 1. A contract founded in love. The soul is under the influence of a supreme love to God, a high esteem of His infinite excellences, and a grateful sense of His innumerable benefits. 2. This contract consists of mutual, unalterable engagements. The soul gives itself to the Lord; enters into covenant to be wholly devoted to His service and interest, and to admit no rival with Him. God avouches such a soul for His; and promises to be its God, its father, portion, and happiness. 3. This covenant, like the marriage-covenant, is never to be dissolved. II. THE PLEASING REMEMBRANCE WHICH GOD HAS OF AN EARLY DEDICATION TO HIM. God accepts it as double kindness. 1. Because in youth the affections are most warm and lively. 2. Because it is rare and uncommon. (*Job Orton.*) *Backsliding reproved.*—I. REMARKS. 1. Behold in God a disposition to commend, rather than condemn. While we admire this tenderness, let us learn also to resemble it. Let us approve as far as we can; and, in examining characters, let us observe the good more largely than the evil. Let us beware of indiscriminate reflection; of speaking severely of persons in the gross; of branding a whole course of life with the reproach of a particular action. 2. God remembers the past. Our memories soon fail us. Old impressions soon give place to new ones, and we often find it difficult to recall, without assistance, an occurrence that happened a few months ago. But "a thousand years are in His sight but as yesterday," &c. 3. It is well to be informed of what we once were, and to be led back to our former experience. It is useful for a preacher sometimes to remind us of our natural state; that we may "look to the rock whence we are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged." We need everything that is favourable to self-examination and self-knowledge. II. APPLICATION. 1. To Christians under declensions in religion. How dreadful is it that, when everything requires our advancement, we should be stationary! that, when means and ordinances, mercies and trials, unite to urge us forward; that, when our obligations to God are daily increasing, and the day of account every hour approaching—we should not only stand still—but even draw back! 2. To those who promised fair in their youth, and are now become irreligious. Perhaps you say, "But we are not vicious and profligate." So far it is well. And oh that this was true of all! but, alas! we have swearers now, who in their youth revered the sacred hours; we have Sabbath-breakers now, who in their youth revered the sacred hours; we have sceptics and scoffers now, who from a child knew and admired "the Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation." You say, "We are not like them." But they were not thus drawn aside all at once; they became wicked by degrees. This is always the course of sin. They "proceed from evil to evil": they "wax worse and worse." 3. To those who in their early days are truly devoted to the service and glory of God. To such the words are applicable—not in a way of reproach, but honour—not in a way of rebuke, but encouragement. (*W. Jay.*) *Failures.*—"Many a fine morning has been overspread with clouds, and followed by foul weather. Many a tree in spring has been covered with blossoms, which have never settled into fruit." King George had it in his mind to build a marble palace, and he has left behind him nothing but a marble arch. All failures. (*Ibid.*) *Changed moral conditions.*—"It is difficult to think that the mighty rocks which are as hard as flint were once as soft as the flesh of a little child, and that your finger-dent would have left a mark upon them as upon

dough kneaded for the next batch of bread. Upon some rocks there is the impression of leaves and ferns. In our great museums there are stone slabs with the marks of raindrops that fell in gentle showers hundreds and hundreds of years ago, while on other rocks may be seen the footprints made by wild birds upon the soft beach by the side of some rushing stream in some remote age. Gradually the clayey soil hardened into stone, and from the tracery and marks upon the rocks it is possible to tell what kind of trees and birds grew and flourished in those early times. As with the hard rock, so with the hard heart. It was once soft and gentle. God said to the children of Israel, whose hearts had become like stone, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth" (Jer. ii. 2). (*A. Hampden Lee.*)

Vers. 4-8. What iniquity have your fathers found in Me.—The evil nature of sin committed after conversion:—I. VIOLATION OF SOLEMN VOWS AND COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS. At that time we took Christ's cause for our cause, His people for ours, His will for our law, His glory for our end, and Himself for our portion. Did we love Him too well then? II. WITHOUT ANY PROVOCATION WHATEVER ON GOD'S PART. 1. Was He wanting in forbearance when we were in rebellion? 2. Did He act unfeelingly when we were ruined, in that He gave His own Son to die for us? 3. Has He been a hard master since we entered His service? 4. Has He ever been a churlish father to us? 5. When we have returned to Him with our whole heart, has He not always been ready to receive us, and bury all in forgetfulness? (Dan. ix. 7.) III. PECULIAR AND HORRIBLE INGRATITUDE. 1. He has given, not Egypt or Ethiopia for our ransom, but His own blood. 2. He has redeemed us, not from Egyptian thralldom, but "from the power of darkness," &c. 3. We never were supported by miracles in lonesome deserts of Arabia, but "having obtained help of God, we continue." 4. We did not possess Canaan, but "God hath provided some better thing for us."

IV. EXTREME AND SINGULAR FOLLY. 1. It is a foolish exchange—of liberty for drudgery, peace for remorse, joyfulness for anguish, abundance for penury and misery. 2. It is singular folly. The people of the only true God alone prove untrue! (*Andrew Fuller.*) *Heaven's appeal to the sinner:—*I. THE SINNER IS DIVINELY DESCRIBED. 1. Sin is departure from God. Alienation of sympathy and soul. 2. Sin is a progress of vanity. A going from the real to the unreal. (1) The pleasures he seeks are unsatisfactory; all empty, and outside him. (2) The honours he aspires to are unreal; neither enrich nor ennoble the soul. II. THE SINNER IS DIVINELY CHALLENGED. 1. If iniquity were found in God, there would be some justification for apostasy. 2. The discovery of such iniquity is an absolute impossibility. (*Homilist.*) *God's mercies should evoke gratitude:—*Selim, a poor Turk, had been brought up from his youth with care and kindness by his master, Mustapha. When the latter lay at the point of death Selim was tempted by his fellow-servants to join them in stealing a part of Mustapha's treasures. "No," said he, "Selim is no robber! I fear not to offend my master for the evil he can do me now, but for the good he has done me all my life long." May not many Christians learn a lesson from Selim? **Neither said they, Where is the Lord, that brought us up?—Three shameful possibilities in human life:—**

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF DISHONOURING THE GREAT MEMORIES OF LIFE. "Neither said they, Where is the Lord?" &c. The dark night was forgotten, and Israel did not know who had lifted upon it the brightness and hope of morning. 1. The great memories of life are dishonoured—(1) When the vividness of their recollection fades. (2) When their moral purpose is overlooked or misunderstood. (3) When their strengthening and stimulating function is suspended. 2. What would human life be without its hallowed memories? Man must have facts as well as hopes,—something to which he can go back with confidence; back to some place where he met God. There is, however, a possibility of forgetting sacred scenes, and of cheating the soul of reminiscences which ought to be a perpetual inspiration. Let each man find the proofs in his own history: Sickness, poverty, danger, &c. II. THE POSSIBILITY OF UNDERESTIMATING THE INTERPOSITIONS OF GOD. 1. Look at the case in the text,—through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt. Viewed prospectively, men shrink from such difficulties; viewed retrospectively, a good many of the terrors are forgotten. Granted that we have not the same outward difficulties, will any man deny that his moral pilgrimage is beset by many perils, and that the grave is constantly open at his feet? Not only was the dark

side of history forgotten, but the bright side was overlooked. "I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof." What was the result? Did they erect the altar, and bow in long-continued prayer, and unite in the loud, sweet psalm of thankfulness? "Ye defiled My land, and made Mine heritage an abomination." 2. If we try our own lives by these historical disclosures, shall we shame Israel by our purity and love? Remember the Deliverer! Remember the Giver! III. THE POSSIBILITY OF THE LEADING MINDS OF THE CHURCH BEING DARKENED AND PERVERTED (ver. 8). The priests, the pastors, and the prophets, all out of the way! 1. In all ages there have, of necessity, been foremost men; men whose capacity, culture, and Divine election have entitled them to leadership; men whom God Himself has acknowledged as the guides of the people. How easy it is for such men to succumb in periods of general corruption is too evident from universal history. What then? (1) Such men should watch themselves with constant jealousy. (2) Such men should never be forgotten by those who pray. 2. The most affecting of all subjects to contemplate is,—God grieved, God complaining! Would He complain without reason? Would He startle the universe for some trifling cause? It is as the cry of one whose heart is breaking; His great deliverances have been forgotten; His heritage has been defiled; His power has been despised, and His mercy been treated as an empty sentiment; what if the throb of His great sorrow should send a shudder of distress through the heavens and the earth! Look at Calvary for the full expression of all this Divine emotion. Seeing that such pain was inflicted by sin, let us avoid it as the abominable thing which God hates. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **The priests said not, Where is the Lord? . . . the rulers also transgressed . . . and the prophets, &c.**—*The three ruling classes accused*:—1. The priests, part of whose duty was to "handle the law," i.e., explain the Torah, to instruct the people in the requirements of Jehovah, by oral tradition and out of the sacred law-books, gave no sign of spiritual aspiration; like the reprobate sons of Eli, "they knew not Jehovah," that is to say, paid no heed to Him and His will as revealed in the book of the law. 2. The secular authorities, the king and his counsellors, not only sinned thus negatively, but positively revolted against the King of kings, and resisted His will. 3. The prophets went further yet in the path of guilt, apostatising altogether from the God of Israel, and seeking inspiration from the Phœnician Baal, and following worthless idols that could give no help. (*C. J. Ball, M.A.*) *The corruption and ignorance of the priests and prophets*:—Two centuries ago the religious state of the English-speaking world was bad, and was rapidly becoming worse. Infidelity was fast spreading among the people, and, consequently, there was an open and professed disregard of religion and morals. The secret of this sad state was simple. The clergy, though their lives in general might not be scandalous, were, as a rule, ignorant of all spiritual truth, and in too many cases even devoid of a sound intellectual apprehension of scriptural teaching. As Cowper, referring to those clergy, tersely put it—

"Except a few with Eli's spirit blest,
Hophni and Phinehas may describe the rest."

VERS. 9-13. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods?—*Christian controversy*:—The text may be put into other words, thus: "Go over to the islands of the Chittim, the isles and coast lands of the far west; then go to Kedar, away in the eastern desert,—go from east to west,—and ask if any heathen land has given up its idols, and you will find that no such thing has ever taken place; but whilst the heathen have kept to their gods as if they had strong love for them, My people, for whom I have done so much, whose names are on the palms of My hands, have turned away from Me, and have given up their living and loving God for that which can do them no good." There must be some way of accounting for conduct so clearly unreasonable and ungrateful. We may perhaps find our way to the secret step by step, if we notice one or two things that we ourselves are in the habit of doing. We all know how much easier it is to keep up the form of religion than to be true to its spirit. Say that religion is a number of things to be done, some at this hour and some at that, and you bring it, so to speak, within range of the hand, and make it manageable; but instead of doing this, show that religion means spiritual worship, a sanctified conscience, and a daily sacrifice of the will, and you at once invoke the severest resistance to its supremacy.

Or say that religion simply means a passive acceptance of certain dogmas that can be fully expressed in words, which make no demand upon inquiry or sympathy, and you will awaken the least possible opposition; but make it a spiritual authority, a rigorous and incessant discipline imposed upon the whole life, and you will send a sword upon the earth, and enkindle a great fire. Earnest religious controversy seems to be but the higher aspect of another controversy which has vexed man through all time. The study of God is the higher side of the study of man. It is a singular thing that man has never been able to make himself quite out, though he has been zealously mindful of the doctrine that "the proper study of mankind is man." He wants to know exactly whence he came and what he is; but the voice which answers him is sometimes mocking, and nearly always doubtful. Is it wonderful that man, who has had so much difficulty with himself, should have had proportionately greater difficulty with such a God as is revealed in the Bible? On the contrary, it will be found that the two studies—the study of man and the study of God—always go together, and that the ardour of the one determines the intensity of the other. In this view the text might read thus: Pass over the isles of the Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see whether the inhabitants thereof have studied the physiology and chemistry of their own bodies; but the philosophers of Christendom have built themselves upon protoplasm. Kedar cared nothing about humanity, and therefore it cared nothing about divinity. When man is not deeply interested in himself it is not likely that he will be deeply interested in God. In the doctrine that the very greatness of God is itself the occasion of religious controversy, and even of religious doubt and defective constancy, we find the best answer to a difficulty created by the words of the text. That difficulty may be put thus: If the people of Chittim and of Kedar are faithful to their gods, does it not prove that those gods have power to inspire and retain confidence? and if the people of Israel are always turning away from their God, does it not show that their God is unable to keep His hold upon their occasional love? Such a putting of the case would be valid if inquiry be limited to the letter. But if we go below the surface we must instantly strip it of all worth as a plea on behalf of idolatry. Clearly so; for, not to go further, if it proves anything it proves too much; thus—the marble statue which you prize so highly has never given you a moment's pain; your child has occasioned you days and nights of anxiety; therefore a marble statue has more moral power (power to retain your admiration) than has a child. Your clock you understand thoroughly; you can unmake and make it again, and explain its entire mechanism down to the finest point of its action; but that child of yours is a mystery which seems to increase day by day: therefore you have more satisfaction in the clock than in the child. So the argument in favour of Kedar proves nothing, because it not only proves too much, but lands the reasoner in a practical absurdity. The foundation of this argument is, that of all subjects that engage the human mind, religion (whether true or false) is the most exciting; that in proportion as it enlarges its claims, will it be likely to occasion controversy; and that, as the religion of the Bible enlarges its claims beyond all other religions, assailing the intellect, the conscience, the will, and bringing every thought and every imagination of the heart into subjection, and demanding the corroboration of spiritual faith by works that rise to the point of self-crucifixion, the probability is that there will not only be a controversy between man and man as to its authority and beneficence, but also a controversy between man and God as to its acceptance; and that out of this latter controversy will come the very defection complained of in the text, and will come also the vexatious human controversies which may really be but so many excuses for resisting the moral discipline of the Gospel. This is the whole argument. Specially is to be noted that the principal controversy is not between man and man, but between man and God; our hearts are not loyal to our Maker; His commandments are grievous to souls that love their ease. The God of grace, rich in all comfort and promise, we do not cast off. We want such a God. But the God of law, of purity, of judgment, terrible in wrath and not to be deceived by lies, our hearts can only receive with broken loyalty, loving Him to-day, and grieving Him to-morrow. It is in this sad fact that we find the only satisfactory explanation of the slowness of the spread of the Christian kingdom. Evil hates goodness, hates light, hates God; and as truth cannot fight with carnal weapons, or force itself upon the world by physical means, it can only "stand at the door and knock," and mourn the slowness which it cannot accelerate. It is God's will that the rock

grow slowly, and that the forest hasten not its maturity; but it is surely not the will of the Lord that His children should grieve Him long, and provoke Him to wrath through many generations. We have been speaking of the controversy respecting the Unseen and Invisible God. There is a distinct effort made in our day to turn the controversy out of historical channels, and to fasten it upon abstract speculation. We must resist this effort, for we, at all events, believe that the discussion concerning essential Deity was started from a new centre when Jesus Christ came into the world. No name given under heaven amongst men has occasioned, and is now occasioning, so much controversy as the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Men do not know what to make of Christ. You cannot get rid of Christ: you exclude Him from your schools by Act of Parliament, but He, passing through the midst of you, says, "Suffer Me and the children to meet; let the flowers see the sun"; you find Him in statute-books, in philanthropic institutions, in literature; you find Him now just as His disciples found Him, in out-of-the-way places, doing out-of-the-way things;—"they marvelled that He spake with the woman,"—the eternal marvel, the eternal hope! This leads us to remark that how strong soever Christianity may be in force and dignity of pure argument—and in that direction it has proved itself victorious on all fields—its mightiest force for good is in its vital and inexhaustible sympathy. Christianity as a sympathetic religion, tender, hopeful, patient, with morning light for ever falling on its uplifted eyes, leaning with all its trust upon the Cross of the atoning Son of God, calling men from sin, ignorance, and death, is a figure the world will not willingly spare in its day of anguish and sore distress. It will be interesting to observe how God Himself meets the controversy which He deplures, for in doing so, we may learn a method of reply. When God answers, His reply must be the best. Look at the Divine challenge: "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me?" This sublime challenge you cannot find in all the sayings of heathen gods. And this is the invincible defence of the Christian religion in all ages and in all lands,—you have purity at the centre, you have holiness on the throne! Those who have read Augustine's immortal work, *The City of God*, will remember with what fierce eloquence he scourges the gods of pagan Rome. How biting his tone, how keen his retorts, how broad his sarcasm! "Why," he sternly demands, "did the gods publish no laws which might have guided their devotees to a virtuous life?" And again, "Did ever the walls of any of their temples echo to any such warning voice? I myself," he continues, "when I was a young man, used sometimes to go to sacrilegious entertainments and spectacles; I saw the priests raving in religious excitement, and before the couch of the mother of the gods there were sung productions so obscene and filthy for the ear that not even the mother of the foul-mouthed players themselves could have formed one of the audience." History, as you know, is full of such instances. Remembering these things, you may see the force of the inquiry, "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me?" This is the invincible defence of the Christian religion to-day. Observe how Jesus Christ repeats the very challenge we find in the text,—"*Which of you convinceth Me of sin?*" And, later on, "*If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil.*" They had accused Him often, but had convicted Him never! We apply this doctrine with timidity, for who would wilfully slay himself, or bring judgment upon a thousand men? Yet the application is this: When the Church is holy, the Christian controversy is ended in universal and immortal triumph! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Changing gods*.—The records of all ages exhibit the strange obstinacy with which the heathen usually cling to their superstitions. If we except the triumphs obtained over paganism by the Gospel of Christ from the apostolic age up to the present, some of which even in our own day have been most signal, the idolatrous nations of the world still perpetuate the absurd and unholy practices transmitted to them by their fathers. Most urgent then is it upon all Christians to feel pity for their fellow-creatures sunk in the darkness and guilt of heathenism, and by Christian teachers to rescue them from their fearful condition. But there is also another practical consideration connected with a survey of the obstinate blindness and superstition of the heathen, and their devotion to their idolatrous worship, namely, the contrast which it affords to the conduct of too many who consider themselves worshippers of the one true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. May it not too truly be said, "Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." I. WE HAVE SET BEFORE US THE

EVIL CONDUCT OF THE PEOPLE. 1. The first step in the career of evil is "forsaking God." This is the fountain and root of all other sins. While the prodigal son remained contented under his parent's roof he knew nothing of the want, the hunger, which he afterwards experienced. His first sin, and that which led to all the evils which overtook him, was his neglect towards his parent, his indifference to his approbation, his wish to cast off the duties he owed to him. If then we would guard against evil, we must watch over our hearts, and beware of forsaking God. The more gross violations of His law are readily discovered, while perhaps we think little or nothing of that great sin which is the foundation of all others.

2. But this sin leads to another; for we are not content when we forsake God, that our hearts should continue a mere blank; we seek to fill up the void which His absence has made, and to find our satisfaction in other objects, which can never afford us true repose. Having forsaken God, we choose to ourselves idols. In the words of the Almighty in the chapter before us, "they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and become vain"; they even refuse His offers of peace and reconciliation.

II. Such is the universal offence of mankind against God: we proceed now to show THE SINFULNESS, THE INGRATITUDE, AND THE FOLLY, WHICH ARE INVOLVED IN IT.

1. Its extreme sinfulness. Persons are apt to speak and to think of these subjects with the most careless indifference. They do not consider themselves as virtually addressed in such words as those in the chapter which precedes our text, where Jehovah says by His prophet, "I will utter My judgments against them, touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods." They do not open their eyes to the aggravation of their crime, as pointed out even by our natural sense of obligation to our Creator, of which the very heathen are examples; for, says the Almighty, "hath any nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods?" The light of natural reason taught them that they ought to obey their Creator, their preserver, and their benefactor. But the proof of our sinfulness in forsaking God, and in placing our trust and happiness in the things of this present life, does not depend upon the mere light of natural conscience; for we have in our possession a revelation from Himself, in which He plainly declares to us His own unerring decision upon the subject. "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice; and ye shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him." 2. But the sinfulness of forsaking God, and preferring other things to His service, is greatly aggravated by the ingratitude involved in the offence. The Almighty reminds His rebellious people of the miracles of mercy which He had performed on their behalf; how He had brought them out of the land of Egypt, &c. He gave them His law to guide them, and pastors to teach them; and He challenges them, as it were, to point out any instance in which He had acted unjustly or unkindly towards them: "what iniquity have your fathers found in Me?" 3. But there is still another consideration dwelt upon by the prophet in reference to this sinful and ungrateful course of conduct, namely, its unparalleled folly. The very heathen would not give up their vain hope of benefit from the supposed protection of their images of wood and stone; yet the professed worshippers of the one living and true God are too often willing to sacrifice the inestimable blessings of His favour for the most trifling gratifications of a frail and sinful life. "My people have changed their glory, for that which doth not profit." No! it is the height of folly thus to choose the worldly mammon before the true riches; to forsake God for the creature; and to prefer earth to heaven, and time to eternity. Are we not conscious that we have been guilty of the sin of forsaking God? (*Christian Observer.*) "Hath a nation changed their gods?" Xenophon said it was an oracle of Apollo, that these gods are rightly worshipped which were delivered them by their ancestors; and this he greatly applaudeth. Cicero also saith, that no reason shall ever prevail with him to relinquish the religion of his forefathers. The monarch of Morocco told an English ambassador that he had lately read St. Paul, and that he disliked nothing in him but this, that he had changed his religion. (*John Trapp.*)

Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this. — Seven wonders: — Parents of olden time were wont to tell their eager children of seven wonders: (1) The Pyramids. (2) The Temple of the great Diana of the Ephesians. (3) The Statue of Jupiter at Olympia. (4) The Tomb of Mausolus. What a satire on immortality! Who was Mausolus? We know not, but the mausoleum is with us. He gave his name and glory to his tomb. (5) The Colossus at Rhodes. (6) The Pharos at Alexandria. (7) The Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

We have to do, however, at this moment with marvels in the province of the spiritual life. There are some things here touching our relations with the spiritual world whereat heaven must wonder. A thoughtful man will find it impossible to explain them. I. AN UNCLAIMED CROWN. God made man in His likeness, with a splendid birthright and glorious possibilities before him. He was of the line royal, the blood of the King of kings flowing in his veins. Where is the man to whom God extends this crown? See him yonder chasing butterflies, pursuing thistle-down. He calls this pleasure. See him toiling with a muck-rake, his eyes downcast, plucking coins out of the garbage and loading himself with them. He calls this wealth. See him climbing laboriously the rocky side of yonder cliff that he may carve his initials upon its face—and fall. And this is fame! All the while the windows of heaven are open above him and the glory of the celestial realms is unveiled before him. He gives no heed. II. A SECRET SIN. Here we touch the lowest part of our nature. A dog with a bone sneaks off to a corner of the garden and buries it, watching meanwhile out of the corners of his eyes that none may know his secret. So we bury our darling sins; so we flatter ourselves that none shall ever find us out. An Egyptian princess died four thousand years ago, and her body was committed to a company of priests for embalming. They said, "Let us save ourselves the trouble; it will never be known." So they dipped the body of a common Egyptian into bitumen and placed it in the princess' casket. It was a clever trick; but a few years ago, before a company of scientists at Tremont Temple, gathered together to witness the unswathing of the royal mummy, the bands of byssus were unwound, and the fraud perpetrated by those priests, now forty centuries dead and turned to dust, was detected. There is, indeed, nothing hidden that shall not be brought to light, and that which is done in a corner shall be proclaimed on the housetop. III. A REPROBATE'S LAUGH. Not long ago I heard the merry laughter of a girl and looked that way. A carriage was passing by. Through the open window I saw two women, the one old, haggard, bedizened—it was easy to discern her vocation—the other a sweet-faced girl late from some country home, going garlanded to death. God help her! How dare they laugh who are hurrying on unprepared to the judgment bar? Yet they are making merry everywhere. O men and women, let us be safe and then be merry. IV. A CHRISTIAN'S GROAN. We profess to believe that the past is forgiven, all gone like a nightmare, and that heaven is open before us and that Christ walks with us, an ever-present and helpful friend. If a man believes these things, how can he ever hang his head like a bulrush? Surely something is wrong. One night in Newgate prison a man sang cheerily and swung like a boy on the post of his bed. "Fine shining shall we have to-morrow!" Who is this, and what "shining" shall there be? This is John Bradford, and to-morrow he is to die at the stake. But what matter, if the day after to-morrow he shall be in the midst of the merry-making of heaven? Why, shall he not with gladsome heart be praising God? V. A TATTERED LIVERY. Our Lord tells of a marriage feast whereat a certain one was found who had not on the wedding gown. His host remonstrated with him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither in this garb?" And the man was silent. We are going to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Our heavenly Host has provided for us fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints. To appear in that heavenly presence clad in our own righteousness is to be found arrayed in rags and tatters, for all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. VI. AN AVERTED FACE. A few days ago, at a hanging in a neighbouring State, it is said that twenty thousand people left town and tramped four miles along a country road to see a poor wretch swung from the gallows-tree. There is, indeed, something brutal in our human nature. When our Lord was dying on the accursed tree it is written, "The people stood beholding." Is it strange that men should look on anguish with a calm delight? Was it strange that men could look at Jesus dying and feel no responsive thrill of sympathy? Ah! a thousand times stranger is it that some of us should refuse to look upon Him! We hide, as it were, our faces from Him; He is despised and we esteem Him not. VII. A WAITING GOD. "Behold, I stand at the door," &c. Wonderful patience! Love that passeth knowledge! His arms are loaded with the dainties of the kingdom, apples and pomegranates from the King's gardens, and bread of life. Oh, let us draw the bolts that He may come in and sup with us! (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Sin unnatural*:—There is something unaccountable and unnatural about sin, which, if we were not the victims of its power every day, would startle and make us horribly afraid. If we merely heard of it as existing in some other of God's

worlds, we should doubt whether the report could be true. We should demand more than the usual amount of testimony before believing so unnatural a story, and when it was proved, should not cease to wonder, and to ask what cause beyond our experience had brought to pass a thing so marvellous. I. IT PREVENTS MEN FROM PURSUING WHAT THEY OWN TO BE THE HIGHEST GOOD. There is a passage of Ovid where a person in a conflict between reason and desire is made to say, "*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*"; and in a like strain we hear Paul, or rather the man made aware of the bondage of sin saying through him, "That which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that I do." So true to human nature such words are, that no one ever thought of them as being misrepresentations of the real state of man. Everywhere we see examples of this sacrifice of a higher good to a lower, of acknowledged greater happiness to less, of the improvement of the mind to the enjoyments of the body, of future hopes to present pleasure, of an object of desire felt to be praiseworthy and exalted to one which is base and low and sure to be followed by remorse. We find this cleaving to the best of men and to the wisest: the influences of the Gospel may weaken but never remove this tendency. It belongs to mankind. Is there not, now, something very strange in this fatal proclivity toward the low, in this constant, wide-spread, unalterable folly of choosing wrong within the moral sphere of action? Suppose we found the same obliquity of judgment and choice elsewhere—that, for instance, a scholar, aware that what was the right meaning of a passage according to the laws of thought and language, deliberately chose a wrong meaning; or a merchant, acquainted with the laws of trade, undertook an adventure with his eyes open, from which only ruin was to be expected; or a general, patriotic and discerning, adopted a plan of battle which all his experience had condemned as sure to end in his defeat: should we not regard such a person as a kind of moral prodigy, as fit to be put away in a museum of morbid psychology among the deranged men who have believed themselves to be two persons, or that their souls had gone from their bodies? II. IT IS NOT DEPENDENT ON A WEAK CAPACITY, BUT THE VERY HIGHEST INTELLECTS ARE OFTEN EMPLOYED IN ITS SERVICE. It is indeed true, that sagacity and folly will differ in their ways of sinning and of escaping detection. An absurd, or ill-contrived, crime will be committed by a boy or a half-witted person, and not by a man of shrewdness. Whence it may happen that the criminals in a penitentiary may be, in the average, below the ordinary range of intellect. In other words, the vigour of mind will show itself, either by abstaining from certain crimes, or by committing them in such a way that they will not be brought to light. But we do not find that the highest abilities keep men from sinning, from a life of pleasure, from deadly selfishness, from feelings which carry with them their own sting. Great minds lie like wrecks all along the course of life; either they disbelieve against evidence, or give themselves up to monstrous pleasures, or destroy the welfare of society by their self-will, or gnaw upon themselves with a deadly hatred of others. III. ITS EXISTENCE INVOLVES THE CONTRADICTION OF THE FREEDOM AND THE SLAVERY OF THE WILL. This is but another aspect of the truth which we have already considered—that the soul steadily chooses in some strange way an inferior good before a superior; but it is too important a view of our nature not to be noticed by itself. Mankind, in choosing the evil, have been an enigma to themselves and to the philosophers who have studied human nature. We see our nature exercise its freedom in various ways,—choosing now a higher good in preference to a lower, and now a lower before a higher,—doing this over and over within the sphere of earthly things, yet when it looks the supreme good full in the face unable to choose Him, unable to love Him, until, in some great crisis which we call conversion, and which is as marvellous as sin is, we find the soul acting with recovered power, acting out itself, and soaring in love to the fountain and life of its being. It is as if a balance should tell every small weight with minutest accuracy, and when a large weight was put on, should refuse to move at all. It is as if the planets should feel each other's attraction but be insensible to the force of the central sun. Is not sin then as unaccountable as it is deep-seated and spreading in our nature? IV. IT HAS A POWER OF RESISTING ALL KNOWN MOTIVES TO A BETTER LIFE. This, again, is only another form of the remark, that we are kept by sin from pursuing our highest good; but under this last head we view man as opposing God's plan for his salvation, while the other is more general. Here we see how causeless and unreasonable are the movements of sin, even when its bitterness has been experienced, and the way of recovery been made known. The way in which the Gospel comes to

us is the most inviting possible—through a person who lived a life like ours on earth, and came into tender sympathy with us; through a concrete exhibition of everything true and good, not through doctrine and abstract statement. It has been the religion of our fathers, and of the holy in all time. It is venerable in our eyes. It is God's voice to us. Where else can so many motives, such power of persuasion be found; and yet where else, in what other sphere where motives operate, is there so little success? Even Christians who have given themselves to the Gospel confess that all these weighty considerations often fail to move them; that they stand still or turn backwards a great part of their lives rather than make progress. So marvellous is the power of sin to deaden the force of motives to virtue, even in the minds of the best persons the world contains. V. IT CAN BLIND THE MIND TO TRUTH AND EVIDENCE. Of this we see numberless examples in daily life. We see men who have been accustomed to judge of evidence within the same sphere in which religion moves, that of moral and historical proof, rejecting the Gospel, and afterwards acknowledging that they were wilfully prejudiced, that their objections ought to have had no weight with a candid mind. We see prejudice against the Gospel lurking under some plausible but false plea, which the man has never taken the pains to examine, although immense personal interests are involved. We see men rejecting the Gospel unthinkingly, repeating some stale argument scarcely worth refutation, as if a great matter like the welfare of the soul might be trifled with, and made light of. It is strange, too, how quick the change is, when for some reason the moral or religious sensibilities are awakened after long slumber, how quick, I say, the change is from scepticism, or denial of the Gospel, or even hostility, to a state of belief. Multitudes of intelligent men have passed through such a conversion, and have felt ever afterwards that truth and evidence were sufficient, but that their souls were in a dishonest state. Now, how is this? Is this a new prejudice which has seized upon them, at their conversion, and has their candid scepticism given way to dishonest faith; or did sin,—that which in a thousand ways, through hope and fear, through indolence, through malignity, through love of pleasure, blinds and stupefies, did sin destroy their power of being candid before? VI. THE INCONSISTENCY OF SIN IS MARVELLOUS IN THIS RESPECT: THAT WE ALLOW AND EXCUSE IN OURSELVES WHAT WE CONDEMN IN OTHERS. Men seem sometimes to have no moral sense, so open are their violations of morality, and so false their justifications of their conduct. And yet, when they come to pass censure upon others, they show such a quickness to discern little faults, such an acquaintance with the rule of duty, such an unwillingness to make allowances, that you would think a new faculty had been imparted to their minds. These severe critics of others are all the while laying up decisions and precedents against themselves, yet when their cases come on, the judges reverse their own judgments. They condemn men unsparingly for sins to which they are not tempted, although the radical principle in their own and in others' sins is confessedly the same. Marvellous inconsistency! Strange that the same mind balances between two standards of conduct so long. Why does not the man, whose own rules condemn himself, begin to sentence himself, or to excuse and pardon others? Is not this an unnatural state of mind; impossible, save on the supposition that it is effected by some strange perversion of its judgments? (T. D. Woolsey.)

Ver. 13. **My people have committed two evils.**—*Two astounding evils:*—**I. THE FORCE OF HUMAN FREEDOM.** Mightiest rivers cannot break from their source, nor greatest planets from their centre, but man can from centre and fountain of his being. 1. This freedom is a matter of personal consciousness. 2. It invests human existence with transcendent importance. **II. THE ENORMITY OF HUMAN WICKEDNESS.** 1. Ingratitude. 2. Injustice. 3. Impiety. **III. THE EGREGIOUSNESS OF HUMAN FOLLY.** 1. In withdrawing from the satisfying to toil for the unsatisfying. 2. In withdrawing from the abundant to toil for the scanty. (*Homilist.*) *The twofold sin of mankind*—**I. THE NATURE OF SIN.** This will be seen by observing—1. What men leave, God—a “fountain of living waters” to them. The sum of all excellency, the source of all happiness. 2. What they follow. “Broken cisterns.” (1) Worldly business. (2) Worldly pleasure. (3) Earthly distinction. (4) Worldly ease. **II. HOW WE SHOULD REGARD SIN.** As God regards it—with loathing and abhorrence. **Learn**—1. The emptiness of mere outward profession. 2. God's remedy for man's sin. (*C. Clayton, M.A.*) **They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters.**—*The fountain of living waters:*—In a land like this, perpetually green with Atlantic showers,

which at once refresh the thirsty soil and replenish the subterranean reservoirs, it is not easy to understand the gratitude, reverence, almost affection, with which men who live under a fiercer sky, and upon a parched earth, look upon a "fountain of living waters." Some remnant of the feeling, descending to us from an earlier and simpler time, may be noticed in connection with such a strong outgush of pure waters as, at Wells or at Holywell, springs into the upper air, at once a river: men have thought that there must be some healing efficacy in so bountiful a manifestation of one of nature's most beneficent forces; and soon they have imagined a legend, and built a shrine, and to the natural holiness have added a superstitious sanctity. But it is almost the same in the thirstier lands of the East with any rill of water, so it be perennial. A spring becomes a natural landmark of a kind to which expectation points, round which memories are wont to gather. When all the long day the caravan has toiled patiently through the pitiless brightness, and the path has lain for many a weary mile over the sand-smitten rocks shimmering in the heated air, or by the mountain pass where the sun-smitten rocks reflect the intolerable rays,—how grateful, as the shadows are lengthening, to descry afar off the fringe of palm-trees on the horizon, and to quicken the march, till at last there is a bubbling in the cool grass, and shade overhead, water for the thirsty lips, rest for the tired feet! And how terrible the disappointment, if, when the journey has tended to some less fortunate spot, where the care of man has provided—poor substitute for the bounty of God!—a cistern to catch a precarious and failing supply, the travellers have found at nightfall only a broken reservoir, and the trace of help and refreshment passed away! What resource, but a night as comfortless as the day had been toilsome, and on the morrow, a renewed effort, with diminished strength and a courage sustained by despair, to reach some happier island in the desert, where the waters of God never fail to flow! There is a depth of spiritual meaning in this passage, which, ignorant as we may be of the precise occasion to which it applies, forbids us to interpret it in any but a religious sense. It was, so to say, the nature, the destiny, of the Jewish people to be always committing the two evils of which it speaks. Theirs was indeed a mixed character, in which elements as opposite almost as light and darkness perpetually struggled for the mastery. Their distinguishing mark as a nation was insight into God: they had discerned Him as one; they had learned that He was holy; they had fixed, for all coming time, the true point of contact between God and man in the god-likeness of humanity; and yet in their history, as told by their own lips, they show themselves false, fickle, sensual, cruel, as hardly any other people. In Judah of old, a distracted State, the sport of fierce political passions within and beyond her own borders, falling back now upon a hard Levitical religiousness, now madly rushing upon alien idolatries, now again wakened to better life by the thunder of prophetic rebuke;—in Judah of old it was possible for a man to climb, like Isaiah, to such heights of rapt communion with the all-holy God as human feet have since but rarely trodden, or to find a downward way to abysses of foul sensuality, masking itself in a pretence of religion, such as it is not good even to speak of. It is enough surely to forsake God; to pass through the dry and thirsty land of life as if no fountain of living waters sprang up to cheer and to fertilise it; to choose the sun-smitten sand, to toil up the parched torrent-bed, when it is possible to rest beneath the palm-trees' shade, and to drink of the brook that murmurs through the grass. And yet this can hardly be: the thirst for the Divine cannot wholly die out of the human heart: there must be some reaching forth to the unseen, some attempt to find a stay in the Eternal. So the first evil has its natural issue in the second. Those who have turned away from the living fountain bend their wandering steps towards a cistern of their own making, a broken cistern which will hold no water; a cistern which, as the traveller draws nigh, offers to his thirsty lips only the slime, where water was long ago, baking in the sun. This it is to forsake the solemn worship of Jehovah for the wild dance of the devotees of Baal. It may not be easy to expound this passage; but, as it stands, it is impossible not to feel how deep and how vivid it is. It contains all the secret of religion; the secret which it is the object of preaching of every kind to reveal and to enforce; the one truth which prophets present in every form of living and burning words,—that all life worthy of the name is life in, and with, and for God; that life without God is a dream likest death, except that by God's mercy it is always possible to awake from it. So I take this particular metaphorical representation of the central truth to indicate that an essential element of human nature is a

longing for the Divine, as heat and weariness thirst for cool water : a sense of a higher law, a holier will, to which it would be peace and happiness to conform : a desire to find, amid the perplexity of things, a hand of guidance, and in their mutability and sorrowfulness a heart on which to rest : a yearning after something fixed and changeless, to set against the daily experience of loss and decay and death. The thirst is in us all : when sorrow strikes us down upon the sand ; when disappointment bars our way in the mountain pass ; when the mirage of earthly affections first allures and then deceives us, we feel it, and all the more keenly that we hardly know where to seek the spring that will refresh us. Would that always we had the courage to listen to the promptings of our nobler nature, and to enter upon the impossible task of quenching the soul's thirst for God ! Would that always we could recognise the demand of our true need, and bring our parched lips through every desert and over every obstacle to the living spring "whereof who drinks shall never thirst again" ! (*C. Beard, B.A.*) *The fountain and the cistern* :—Jeremiah was the medium rather than the source of these words ; and it is noteworthy that he does not lay claim to them. We find lying between the two verses a clause which invests them with Divine authority, namely, "saith the Lord." I. THE CHARACTER WHICH GOD GIVES HIMSELF. It is a fact, that all that God has made and sustains speaks to us of God ; and it is essential to morality and religion, as well as to our happiness, that God should reveal Himself. Before we can know that He is worthy of our supreme love, reverence, and trust, and that we should obey His will, He must make Himself known. We cannot conceive of God giving Himself a false character. God sets Himself forth as "the fountain of living waters." His estimate of Himself is high, but not too high. He does not speak of Himself as a stream or reservoir of water. He is a "fountain," and not merely a fountain among other fountains, but "the" fountain. If there be other fountains, they spring from Him ; and He casts them completely into the shade. He is not content with representing Himself as the fountain of waters. He applies the epithet "living" to the waters that issue forth from Him. He is a fountain that is ever gushing. There is no exhausting of Him. There is an immense difference between the water that is taken from a reservoir and that which is drawn from a fountain. The water which is taken from a fountain is peculiarly fresh, pure, sweet, and wholesome. For ages the angels have been enjoying God. Has He become distasteful to them ? The waters that flow from Him never grow stale and flat. They are living and life-giving. They undergo no change for the worse. This language—"the fountain of living waters"—is, of course, figurative, and on that account all the more beautiful and expressive. The grand idea which they suggest is—that God alone can satisfy individuals and communities. Creatures are good and useful. As things are, we cannot do without them. Earth is not a superfluous gift. We require light and air ; we require bread and human society, and a multitude of other things ; but creatures are not absolutely needed. If God chose, He could dispense with them. Assuredly, it is not in creatures to satisfy us. They yield us more or less pleasure ; and it would ill become us to despise them ; but we have a mind above them. Deal with them as we may, they leave us unsatisfied. We were made for God, and, till we find Him, there is a void within. He is "the fountain of living waters," and besides Him there is no fountain. Thirst has an injurious effect upon the body's life, beauty, health, and strength, and is a most painful sensation. Well, what do the thirsty need ? Lead them to a bubbling fountain, and they are satisfied. II. THE TWO EVILS WITH WHICH JUDAH IS CHARGED. 1. The first evil is desertion of God. "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters." To forsake God in any physical sense, in the sense in which birds sometimes forsake their nests, and children home, is impossible. We can put local distance between us and our fellow-creatures, but not between us and God. The forsaking referred to is departure of a moral kind, or departure in thought and affection. This species of departure from God was possible to the inhabitants of Judah. Like ourselves, they were morally free. They might either think about God or not, either love Him or not, either trust in Him or not, either do His will or not, either seek their happiness in God or not ; and how did they act ? It seems that the departure from God which we have characterised as possible, became actual. God did not turn His back on them ; but they deserted Him, and in deserting Him they "forsook the fountain of living waters." They forsook Him as a people, and in forsaking Him they committed an "evil." They neither

did God nor themselves justice. Morally, they backslided from Him—dismissed Him from their minds and hearts, and lapsed into a state of sin and idolatry. Instead of seeking their happiness in God, they began to seek it in other objects. What God pronounces an evil must be an evil. It is criminal to forsake God; and, as we would expect, it is as injurious as it is criminal. 2. The second evil is attempting to find a substitute for God. "And hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns," &c. These two evils go together. The one naturally leads to the other. The religious is perhaps man's strongest instinct. There is something which men of the world ever supremely fear and love, to which they look and pray in times of danger and distress, and on which they lean for happiness. Accordingly, when we cease to worship God—the right object of worship—there is not with us an end of all worship. There is merely a change of worship. Wrong objects are put in the place of God. Man is not competent to the supply of his own wants, and he knows it. He cannot rid himself of the consciousness of limitation and dependence. Hence, when he departs from God, he precipitates himself on a variety of objects, and devotes himself to a variety of pursuits, with the view of indemnifying himself. Nothing will do for those who renounce God, but trying their hand at cistern-making. They are driven to exert themselves in order to the discovery of a substitute for God; and are they successful? No. One cistern may be larger than another, or differ from another in shape, or other respects; but the best cisterns are leaky. Water may be poured into them, but, alas! they let it through. Whatever may be thought of them by the maker, they fall infinitely short of God, "the fountain of living waters." III. THE SUMMONS TO ASTONISHMENT ADDRESSED TO THE HEAVENS. "Be astonished," &c. Were a fountain of living waters and a leaky cistern put before a person suffering from thirst, it would excite wonder were he to prefer the cistern to the fountain. We would be strongly tempted to call in question his sanity. Were a youth to leave a happy home—to forsake a father well able to provide for, protect, school, guide him, advance his temporal and spiritual interests, how would we feel on being introduced to him as a deserter from home? We would look on him with no small measure of pity and surprise; and how can we help being affected with the profoundest astonishment when with the mind's eye we contemplate an intelligent and free creature turning his back upon God? (*G. Cron.*) *The misery of forsaking God*.—I. WHAT HAS MAN SUBSTITUTED IN THE PLACE OF THE HAPPINESS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN FOUND IN GOD? 1. Philosophy. They have sought enjoyment in calm contemplation on the relation of things, and on the abstract questions of philosophic inquiry. They have sought to raise themselves above suffering by rendering the mind insensible to the common ills of life, and they attempt to separate themselves from the common herd of mortals by their insensibility to the woes which affect the mass of men. 2. A part, men of leisure and of taste, fly to the academic grove, and look for happiness there. They go up the sides of Parnassus, and drink from the Castalian fount, and court the society of the Muses. Their enjoyment and their solace is in the pursuit of elegant literature. Their time is spent in belles-lettres—in the records of historic truth, or in the world of poetry and of fiction. 3. Another portion have substituted the pursuit of wealth in place of religion, and their happiness is there. This has become almost the universal passion of civilised man. Yet is not happiness so much sought in the pursuit of wealth itself as in that which wealth will procure. He looks on to the old age of elegant retirement and leisure which is before him; he sees in vision the comforts which he will be able to draw round him in the splendid mansion and grounds, and in the abundance which his old age will enjoy. II. HAS THE PLAN SUCCEEDED? 1. What is happiness? (1) It must be adapted to the nature of man or fitted to his true rank or dignity. There must be some permanency, some solid basis on which the superstructure is to be reared. (3) There must be a recognition of immortality. This must be, because man is so made that he cannot wholly forget it. (4) True happiness must be of such a nature that it will not be materially disturbed by the prospect of sickness, the grave, and eternity. "My Athenian guest," says Cræsus to Solon, "the voice of fame speaks loudly of your wisdom. I have heard much of your travels; you have been led by a philosophic spirit to visit a considerable portion of the globe. I am here induced to inquire of you what man, of all you have beheld, has seemed to you most truly happy." After one or two unsatisfactory answers, and being pressed still for a reply, Solon said, "I shall not be able to give a satisfactory answer to the question you propose till I know that your scene of life shall have

closed with tranquillity. The man of affluence is not in fact more happy than the possessor of a bare competency, unless in addition to his wealth his end be more fortunate. Call no man happy till you know the nature of his death. It is the part of wisdom to look to the event of things; for the Deity often overwhelms with misery those who have formerly been placed at the summit of felicity" (Herod. i. 24, 32). Our happiness must not be of such a nature as to be disturbed by the recognition of death, and the anticipation of a future world. 2. Can happiness be found away from God? My appeal is mainly to experience; and here the argument need not be long. The experience of the world on this point may be divided into two great parts—the recorded and the unrecorded. Of the recorded testimony of the world, I appeal to the records made on sick beds, and in graves; to the disappointments, and cares, and anxieties, evinced all over the world as the result of the revolt in Eden, and of wandering away from God. Recall for one moment what the forsaking of God has done. Whence is sorrow, disappointment, pain, death? The misery of our world all began at that sad hour when man ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. What might not this world have been if man had never forsaken the fountain of living waters! Alexander wept on the throne of the world. Charles V. and Diocletian descended from the throne to seek that happiness in the vale of private life, which could never be found in the robes of royalty. Goethe, the celebrated German author, said of himself, in advanced age, "They have called me a child of fortune, nor have I any wish to complain of the course of my life. Yet it has been nothing but labour and sorrow, and I may truly say that in seventy-five years I have not had four weeks of true comfort. It was the constant rolling of a stone that was always to be lifted anew." Who shall record the disappointment of those who seek wealth as their portion? The most instructive part of the history of our world is unwritten—at least is not written among mortals. It is recorded in the book that preserves the memory of human deeds with reference to the judgment, and will be developed only on the final trial. It is the record of numberless individual failures and disappointments; the total history of that which makes up the vast experiment in our world to find enjoyment without the friendship of the Most High. (*A. Barnes, D.D.*)

Broken cisterns that can hold no water.—*Broken cisterns*:—I. A SINNER'S LIFE IS LABORIOUS. Have your dreams of ease in sin been fulfilled? Have you not found the life of sin to be a toilsome, thankless drudgery? Be honest to your own heart if you cannot confess it to man. Has not sin been an universal deceiver, a cruel, remorseless taskmaster? Have not all the fairy visions of our fancy been converted into bushes of thorns and barren rocks of desolation? God has made the broad road thus to prevent His children walking therein. II. A SINNER'S WORK IS WORTHLESS. Our grandfathers could tell us what a great noise sounded through Europe in the days of their early youth at the strokes of a great cistern hewer. By a series of marvellous steps the mightiest military genius of modern days reached the cold and tottering summit of imperial power. He had devoted almost superhuman energies of body and mind to the task of hewing out a cistern, he had compelled millions of slaves to assist in this gigantic construction. Strong and glorious as the fabric was, God could not be outwitted; His decree went forth against the cistern, by His iron rod it was broken into a thousand shivers, and the exile of St. Helena sat himself down for weary months and years in the chill shadow of his own "broken cistern which could hold no water," till his own heart broke, and he passed away, to render his account unto God. Power, glory, fame, are but a broken cistern to the soul of man. You may get it by becoming a vestryman, an alderman, a popular novelist, a member of Parliament, a Cabinet minister, or a hundred other ways, but the end will be the same dissatisfaction and unrest which overwhelmed the great Napoleon. Ah, when will saints give as much diligence to their high and holy calling as the servants of pleasure give to theirs? III. A SINNER'S STATE IS APPALLING. Shall we witness the blindness, madness of our own friends and neighbours, of our fellow-citizens, and have no bowels of compassion for them? Let us fervently, kindly, personally appeal to them; let us watch for their souls, invent wise contrivances, and lovingly use them till the scales fall from their eyes, and we bring them to the Fountain of living waters. IV. A SINNER'S CONDITION IS NOT HOPELESS. God is still the Fountain of living waters. In Him abides the fulness which alone can supply all the lawful and infinite longings which rise up within the mysterious nature of man. Do we want knowledge, wisdom, love, life, peace, rest, immortality? They are all in God. From Him

is ever issuing a stream bearing upon its bosom the richest spiritual blessings His mercy can provide. The grace of God is wider, deeper, richer, than in the era when the prophet of lamentation poured forth his sorrowful strains over the folly of sinners. (*W. A. Escary.*) *Broken cisterns*:—Think over these cisterns which have been built, and have been offered to us in our time, and ask whether, after all, they are not broken, obviously broken before our eyes. 1. I thought of the immense part that, a few years ago, secularism seemed to play in the thought of London. A cistern offered to us of this kind, that man should confine his attention to the world in which he lives; that we should seek to make the most of our material and intellectual opportunities here; that we should use our time honestly and well, we should instruct one another in the affairs of the world and of life, but we should remit the consideration of religion and thoughts of God to another world if it ever comes, and not trouble ourselves with them here. That cistern of secularism, at which the men of England have been requested to drink, must always be an unsatisfying cistern—a broken cistern indeed. For what reason? Because you never can silence the deep craving of the human soul; you never can bring man within the limits of time and space, and get him quietly to remain there. If secularism could give us, as we wish, a more equal distribution of opportunities, and if every man had all that the world could offer, every man would still remain unsatisfied. Count Leo Tolstoi has told us himself how in his youth he was a nobleman with every advantage of wealth and education and social position, and, moreover, he was a man in perfect health, and there seemed to be not a cloud to cross his sky. And yet he has told how at that time his deep dissatisfaction and misery were such that he was constantly contemplating suicide. 2. And then I thought of that cistern which has been offered to us under the name of socialism. That cistern is so well constructed, and is so attractive, that I would be the last to deny that waters of a satisfying kind might for a time be stored within it. It proposes to make a framework of society in some future day complete and satisfying, but meanwhile it has no message to the millions of human souls that are passing, as it were, in a dull, dead flood, week by week, day by day, into the silent grave. 3. Then it occurred to me how much we had heard in our time of natural science and physical science as cisterns at which human beings were to quench their thirst. And I remembered how, in my earlier ministry, we were constantly told that the discoveries of science would take the place of religion, and that man would learn to live his life in the world, subject to its many limitations, in the clear light that science sheds upon the development of human life and its possible goal. Then I took up the utterance of a great scientific man to-day, Sir Henry Thompson, who has published his little pamphlet called “The Unknown God,” in order to show us what the creed of science really is. I turn over the pages of Sir Henry Thompson’s book and see what a great and candid and earnest scientific man makes of this universe, and of this life in the light of science. When I read his broken and halting conclusions, and see what he offers me as the cup of cold water to quench the ardent thirst of my soul, I cannot hesitate to say, with all reverence to so good, so honest, and sincere a thinker: “My friend, you have brought me to a broken cistern, which can give no water for the thirsty soul of man.” 4. And then I thought of that which is much commoner than secularism, socialism, and science, as the solution of human life—I mean the widespread and absolute indifference to all higher things into which so many of our unhappy people fall. The men who seem agreed to live as if they were merely animals upon the earth, like the beasts with lower pleasures, like the beasts with lower pains. The men who put aside altogether ideals and dreams. The men who do not ask for either God or life or eternity. The men who do not concern themselves about moral improvement or the benefit of their fellow-creatures, but drift along the path of life an aimless crowd, careless of the world, careless of themselves, indifferent to all that makes life truly worth living and significant. And it seemed to me that this was not so much a cistern which is offered, or even a broken cistern, but a dull flat pool, a mere stagnant pond where men can never quench their thirst, but where they can be and must be poisoned by the malaria that rises from the stagnant waters. What is to happen to these men if the soul thirst should ever awaken within them? And when I thought of all these broken cisterns that can hold no water, I remembered from my text that meanwhile there is a fountain; it rises there in the far-off Galilean hills, and the stream flows through the thirsty centuries, and where it flows the margin of the stream is green and

fertile. And to-day it seems as if it were in a sense easier to get to the spring than in any other day that has ever been. "If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink." (R. F. Horton, D.D.) *True happiness to be found not in the world, but in God* :—I. THE SOUL OF MAN NATURALLY THIRSTS AFTER HAPPINESS. 1. This affords a strong argument for the dignity of the soul, and the certainty of a future state. 2. These inward and insatiable cravings, amidst the high enjoyments of sense and the world, should lead us to God, who alone can felicitate the soul He hath made; should deaden our desires towards the delights of life, and quicken them after those of religion. II. NOTWITHSTANDING THIS NATIVE THIRST IN THE SOULS OF MEN AFTER HAPPINESS, YET THEY ARE GENERALLY MISTAKEN IN THEIR CHOICE OF IT. 1. There are many who quite mistake the object of their happiness, and place it in those things which are not only foreign from but opposite to it. Wealth, ambition, pleasure. 2. Some are right in their notions of happiness, but seek it the wrong way. Instead of seeking God's favour in the way of righteousness, through the mediation of Christ, by the assistance of His Spirit, they build their hopes of it either on a zeal for speculative opinions, party notions, formal services, modes of worship, voluntary mortifications, impulses of fancy, deep knowledge, rigid faith, or unscriptural austerities. 3. How many are they who have not only right notions of happiness but of the way to it, who yet fall short of it through neglect and indolence; and the fatal influence which the world and the things of it have upon their hearts! whereby they are rendered quite cold, lukewarm, and indifferent, in the things which concern their eternal salvation. III. MANKIND ARE NATURALLY DISPOSED TO SEEK THEIR HAPPINESS FROM THIS WORLD, WHERE IT IS NOT TO BE FOUND. 1. The pleasures of this life are very scanty and confined. They are but cisterns of water—which can hold no very large quantity—not sufficient to answer all the occasions we may have for it, at least not for any considerable time. 2. They are also insipid and unsatisfying; like water in a cistern, stagnated and exposed to the sun; whereby it not only loses its quick taste and freshness, but contracts scum and dirt and foulness. 3. They are at the same time uncertain, and continually wasting away. The vessel that holds them is leaky. 4. They are not to be had without much pains. Even these broken cisterns we are obliged to hew out to ourselves, and be at great labour to procure. IV. MEN ARE NATURALLY BACKWARD AND AVERSE TO SEEK THEIR HAPPINESS FROM GOD WHERE ALONE IT IS TO BE FOUND. The folly of this will appear by considering that the pleasures of piety have properties just the reverse of those belonging to worldly pleasures. 1. They are most full and capacious. Not contracted and limited, not diminished by successive draughts, as water in a cistern is—but free, and full, and ever flowing, as water at the fountain head. 2. They are the most exquisite and satisfying delights. 3. They are most durable and imperishable. 4. They are easy to be had. Freely offered. (J. Mason, M.A.) *The sin of people's forsaking God and betaking themselves to the creature in His stead* :—I. FORSAKING OF GOD IN CHRIST, AND DETAKING ONESELF TO THE CREATURE IN HIS STEAD, ARE TWO SIGNALLY ILL THINGS. 1. The forsaking of God in Christ. (1) The object forsaken by the hearers of the Gospel must be considered as—God in our nature, for communion with guilty men (Matt. i. 23). God in our nature, ready to communicate His fulness to us, for making us happy in time and eternity (John iv. 10). A God we have professed to betake ourselves to for our happiness (Jer. xvi. 19). (2) How sinners forsake God in Christ. Lowering their esteem of Him, the value and honour they had for Him sinking low (Ps. l. 21). The heart's falling off its rest in Him, and turning restless, so that the fulness of God cannot quiet it (Isa. xxx. 15). Ceasing to cleave to Him by faith, and letting go believing grips of the promise (Heb. iii. 12). Looking out some other way, for something to rest their hearts in (Ps. iv. 6). Growing remiss in duties, and slighting opportunities of communion with God; a form of duties may be kept up, but the heart is away, what avail they? Having no regard to please Him in their ordinary walk (Ezek. xxiii. 35). Laying aside the Word for a rule, and regulating themselves by another standard (Ps. cxix. 53). Forsaking His people for their companions (Prov. xiii. 20). Forsaking ordinances and the communion of saints therein (Heb. x. 25, 26). Throwing away the form of religion, casting off the mask, and giving the swing to their lusts. (3) Why they forsake Him. There is a natural bent to apostasy in all (Hos. xi. 7). Many were never truly joined to the Lord, though they seemed to be so: so having never knit with Him, no wonder they fall away from Him (1 John ii. 19). They often have some idol of jealousy secretly preserved when they are at their best;

and that upon a proper occasion does the business; like the young man in the Gospel, that went away from Christ grieved, because "he had great possessions." Their not pressing it to the sweet of religion, in an experimental feeling of the power of it (Ps. xxxiv. 8). The want of a living principle of grace in the heart, that may bear out in all changes of one's condition (Ps. lxxviii. 37). They cool like a stone taken from the fire, and wither like a branch that takes not with the stock. Unwatchfulness. Thereby men are stolen off their feet (Prov. iv. 23). A conceit of being able to live without Him (Jer. ii. 31). Ill company carries many away from God (1 Cor. xv. 33). (4) The ill of sin that is in forsaking God in Christ. It is a downright perversion and deserting of the end of our creation. There is in it a setting up another in the room of God. Fearful ingratitude for the greatest mercy and kindness (Jer. ii. 2, 12). Notorious unfaithfulness to our kindest Head and Husband (Jer. ii. 20). Notorious unfaithfulness to our own interest and folly with a witness. An affronting of God before the world, casting dishonour on Him, bearing false witness against Him (Jer. ii. 31). A practical commendation of the way of the world, condemning God, and seeking their happiness in things that are seen (Prov. xxviii. 4). A sinning against the remedy of sin, making one's case very hopeless (Heb. x. 26). An opened sluice for all other sins. The man that forsakes God, exposes himself a prey to all temptations, to be picked up by the first finder (Prov. xxvii. 8).

2. The betaking of oneself to the creature in God's stead. (1) The object taken up with in God's stead. (a) It is not God (Deut. xxxii. 21). (i.) It cannot satisfy. (ii.) It cannot profit. (b) It is the world (1 John ii. 15); the great bulky vanity (Eccles. i. 2); the passing world (1 John ii. 17); the present evil world (Gal. i. 4). (2) How sinners take up with the creature in God's stead. Raising their esteem of and value for the creature, till it come to overtop their esteem of God in Christ, like Eve with respect to the forbidden fruit. Bending their chief desire towards the creature (Psa. iv. 6) to obtain it, and the satisfaction they apprehend is to be found in it. Embracing and knitting with it in love (2 Tim. iv. 10). Seeking a rest for their hearts in it. Trusting in it, and having their chief dependence on it, notwithstanding the curse pronounced against such trust (Jer. xvii. 5, 6). Using their chief and most earnest endeavours for it. Rejoicing most in their enjoyment of it, and delighting most in it. Sorrowing most of all for the want of it, under the frowns of it. Still cleaving to it, under never so many disappointments from it; nor forsaking it, but trying another means, when one misgives (Isa. lvii. 10). Following the creature, whithersoever it goes, even quite over the hedge of the law of God. (3) Why sinners take up with the creature in God's stead. Because the heart of man is naturally wedded to the creature; and that bond not being truly broken, it is apt to return upon occasion to its natural bias. Because man's corrupt nature finds a suitableness and agreeableness in the creature to itself (Isa. lvii. 10). Because the creature takes by the eye and other senses; God and His favour is the object of faith, which is rare in the world. Because the creature promises a present good, whereas the greatest things of God are reserved to another world. Because, by the power of a strong delusion, conveyed into the nature of man by the serpent in paradise, they expect a satisfaction and happiness in the creature (Gen. iii. 5, 6). Because they must needs betake themselves to something within themselves, not being self-sufficient; so, having lost God, they fall of course to the creature in His stead. (4) The ill of this practice, taking up with the creature in God's stead. It is an egregious wrong done to God, and His infinite excellency (Jer. ii. 11). It is a wrong done to the creature, as being a putting it out of its proper place (Rom. viii. 21, 22). It is a wrong done to the whole generation of the saints (Psa. lxxiii. 12-15). It is an egregious wrong to the sinner's own soul, putting the arrantest cheat upon it that one is capable of (Prov. viii. 36).

II. TO FORSAKE GOD IN CHRIST, AND TAKE THE CREATURE IN HIS STEAD, IS A WRETCHED EXCHANGE. 1. It is an exchanging of a fountain for a cistern. (1) The water in the cistern is borrowed water; that in the fountain is from itself. (2) The water must needs be sweeter and fresher in the fountain than in the cistern. (3) The water in the cistern is no more but a certain measure; in the fountain it is unmeasurable. (4) The water in the cistern is mostly very scanty; the fountain is ever full. (5) The water of the cistern is always dreggy; the fountain clear and pure. (6) The water of the cistern is soon dried up; the fountain, never. 2. It is an exchanging of a fountain made ready to our hand, for a cistern that remains to be hewed out by ourselves. (1) The fountain is always ready for us; the cisterns often are unread. There is access at any

time to be had unto God, through Christ, by faith (Psa. xli. 1). But the creature is an unready help, so that the man's case is often past cure, ere help can be had. (2) The fountain is made ready for us by another hand, the cistern must be prepared by our own (Zech. xiii. 1; John vii. 37). (3) At the fountain one has nothing to do but drink; but it is no little pains that is necessary to fit out the cistern for us. Hard and sore work (Hab. ii. 13). Longsome work, that one comes but little speed in. Weary work. 3. It is an exchanging of a fountain for many cisterns. (1) None of them are sufficient, but all defective. (2) There is something disagreeable and vexing in them all (Eccles. i. 14). (3) They enlarge the appetite, but do not satisfy it (Hab. ii. 5). As one draught of salt water makes the necessity of another, so the gratifying of a lust doth but open its mouth wider; as is evident from the case of those, who having once given themselves loose reins, nothing can prevail to bind them up, till the grace of God change them. They go from ill to worse. Now, this is a wretched exchange; for the access to one fountain is far more ready than to many cisterns. He that has but one door to go to for sufficient supply is certainly in better case than he that must go to many; so he that has the fulness of a God to satisfy himself in, is in circumstances a thousand times better than he who must go from creature to creature for that end. The water is better that is altogether in one fountain, than that which is parted into many cisterns. United force is strongest; and that which is scattered, the farther it is scattered abroad, it is the weaker. It is with greater ease of mind that one may apply to the one fountain, than to the many cisterns. O what ease has the man that goes to God's door for all, in comparison of him who begs at the doors of the creatures, ranging up and down among them! Use—Repent then of this folly, and take the one fountain instead of your many cisterns; go to one God instead of the multitude of created things. Motive 1.—This will contract your cares now so diffusive, lessen your labour, and spare you many a weary foot. Motive 2.—Ye shall find enough in God, that ye shall see no necessity of seeking any happiness without Him (John iv. 14); more than shall supply the want of the corn and wine (Psa. iv. 7); that shall be commensurable to your whole desire (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Forsaking the fountain for the broken cistern*.—I. THE OBJECT FORSAKEN. 1. Sin is an ungrateful rejection of God. The parental bond is broken, the conjugal tie is dissolved, the oath of suretyship is annulled. 2. We cannot forsake God without forsaking our own mercies. Sin is always the act of a suicide; we cannot reject the counsel of God against ourselves without rejecting His blessings also. 3. What is the fountain which Israel hath thus forsaken? Oh! it is deep as the unfathomed sea; free as the unbought air; more healing than Bethesda's pool; fresh as the stream which comes forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. II. THE OBJECT PREFERRED. 1. The deadening character of all worldly enjoyments. For all the ends of consolation and encouragement and hope the resources of the world are worse than unavailing. The cisterns are not so empty as they are poisonous. 2. Poor as the world's enjoyments are, they are to be obtained only at great cost and labour. In drinking of "the fountain" you will have to stoop much, to kneel long, and to lie low. In drinking from the "cistern," you will have to labour hard, to drag heavily, and to climb high. 3. Another characteristic of worldly enjoyments is their instability, their transitoriness, their incapacity for yielding any continued happiness, or for "giving a man peace at the last." They are not "cisterns" only, but "broken cisterns"; vessels which let out their contents as fast as they put them in; cisterns "which can hold no water." The world not only palls upon its votaries while drinking of its waters, but its tide is always ebbing away. Not only may we write upon it "Marah" for the bitterness of its taste, but also "Ichabod" for the evanescence of its glory. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) *Broken cisterns*.—I. The first cistern which attracts our attention is one of SENSUALISM. The youth who is working at it with mallet and chisel, and with hot and fevered face, dreams that the highest enjoyment of life is that which comes through the senses. He will inform you that he regards man as an animal more than anything else, and that it behoves him to listen to the cry of his passions and to satisfy it. He will demand of you why his passions were lodged in his heart, if they were not to govern him. But the sensualist reasons as if he forgets two most important points. He forgets that the passions are no longer what once they were. He reasons as if the soul were still as it was when it came bright and sinless from its Creator's hands; as if its original harmony and balance were undisturbed; as if there had been no obscuration of

the moral sense and no inflammation of the passions. And he forgets, too, that while the soul has passions they have their due place assigned them in the economy of our constitution, and that that place is not the throne but the footstool. They can never sit in the throne but by revolt, rebellion, and usurpation. Their position is one of service, a service, too, assigned them, by a pure conscience and an enlightened judgment. I said the sensualist forgets these two important points—but does he not forget another? He strives to hew out a cistern of satisfaction by gratifying his passions; but has he not yet learned from observation, if his own experience has not taught him, that from their very nature the passions can never yield a constant happiness? The more they are indulged, the less they can be gratified. The pampered appetite becomes the jaded appetite, and at length becomes the diseased and ruined appetite. And the man who is hewing out for himself a cistern of sensual pleasure is like the dram-drinker, who derives less stimulus and delight from the same quantity every day, who has accordingly to increase the dose to supply the same excitement; who at length gets beyond the range of gratification, but finds that the passion holds him fast in its serpent coils even when all its joys are for ever fled. II. We find another earnest worker who is hewing out a cistern of *WEALTH*. No sooner do we reach him than he begins to pour out his contempt of the man we have just left. He wonders how it is possible for any one with an atom of sense to spend his life and strength at such a cistern as that—a cistern which, even if it could be made to hold water, proclaims the mean and degraded character of the man who could drink it. Then turning to his own cistern he points with evident pride at this monument of his superior wisdom; expatiates on the various powers of wealth; tells us how “money answereth all things,” how it has ministered to the growth of nations, to the development of civilisation, to the creation and sustentation of commerce, to the advancement of the arts and sciences, to the physical and moral improvement of mankind, and even to the extension of the Gospel itself. Now what shall we say to this man? It will not serve any good purpose to call him hard names. You cannot scold a man out of any sin, still less out of the sin of covetousness. Nor must we bluntly deny all that he has said in praise of wealth. It is when we find men mistaking its functions and properties, and labouring to hew out of it a cistern of satisfaction, that we are constrained to remind them that such a cistern will hold no water. Christ speaks of the deceitfulness of riches. I wonder where the man is who can raise an intelligent and experienced protest against the epithet. Wealth is the feeder of avarice, not its satisfaction. It inflames the thirst, it does not quench it. But would you learn the weakness of wealth as well as its power, look at the narrow limits within which after all its efficacy is bounded. If there are times when one feels that money answereth all things, there are times when one feels still more keenly that it answereth nothing. When the brain becomes bewildered, or its substance begins to yield and soften, what can a man's wealth do for him then? If you travel on the sea, and a destructive storm falls upon your vessel, will the waves that engulf the poor retire in bashful respect for a wealthy man? The digger of this well has said something about the power of wealth: is it not well that he should learn, too, its powerlessness in regard to many of the great needs and sorrows of life? It cannot give you health; it cannot give you talent; it cannot give you the real and abiding respect of your fellow-men; it cannot give you peace of mind; it cannot save your wife or children; it cannot avert death and its preliminary horrors and pains from yourself. III. But we must leave this worker, and make our way to another who is hewing out the cistern of *INTELLECTUALISM*. He is clearly a higher type of man. There is a refinement about his appearance which shows that his communion has been with the thoughts of poets and philosophers. He expatiates on the intrinsic greatness of man; on his immortality; on his reason, that “vision and faculty divine”; on the unapproachable supereminence of man over all the universe around him. Knowledge, he says, is the thing for man. For this we were made. It is the element in which we are to live, and without this there is no life worthy of man. And yet, somehow, there seems a shade of sadness upon that face now that his glowing excitement has passed away. Aye, it is even so. He tells us that he is not yet satisfied; that he is hoping to be; that with all his knowledge he feels more ignorant than wise; that if he gets fresh light he seems only to realise more fully the fact that he is standing on the border of a vaster territory of darkness; that if he solves one mystery it serves but to show a thousand more; and that he has been striving,

too, for many years at some difficulties which have hitherto beaten him back in hopeless confusion. We assure him that this need not distress him, for with his limited capacities he cannot expect to understand all things at once, and that while it is true that death will for a moment interrupt his speculations and researches, there is eternity before him with its illimitable scope and opportunities. He is paler now than ever, and seizes convulsively his mallet and chisel, and works away with averted face at his cistern, muttering between every stroke, Death, death; ah! it is death which troubles one. What is death?—what will it be to me? Why should I die? and if I must die, why should I fear to die?

IV. While thus he muses and mutters, let us visit the cistern of MORALITY. Its owner accosts us at once as follows: "And so you have been visiting my learned neighbour yonder. He is incurable, and I would fain believe, insane. He has the fancy, that man is nothing but intellect, and that our whole mission in this world is to acquire knowledge. I have told him once and again, that if this were the chief end of man he need not to have had either affections or conscience, and that we are moral creatures as well as intellectual ones. Now, the cistern which I have been working at for years is the cistern of morality and good living, for it is clear that we ought to love God with all our hearts, and minds, and strength, and our neighbours as ourselves; and that, in fact, our happiness lies in this, and in nothing else. And it is delightful to have something which one's own hands have made, to have a righteousness we ourselves have wrought out, and for which we are indebted to no one." Thus speaks the man, and while he speaks we have been looking at the cistern, which is not without its beauty, and which shows traces and proofs of long and careful working; and we have seen, or think we have seen, chinks great and small which do not promise well for the serviceableness of the cistern, if it be meant, as it is meant, to hold water. Has it been made exactly according to the pattern which you have specified, namely, that you love God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself? Will it hold any water? And the man, chagrined to have the perfectness of his work called in question, replies: "I know that as yet it will hold no water, but it is not finished. I am striving to fill up the defects and openings with mortar—with the mortar of sorrow for the past, and endeavours to do better for the future." But what, we ask, if the mortar be as porous as the stone? What if it will not hold water any more than the cistern? What if future obedience cannot repair the mischief of the past? What if repentance without Christ itself needs to be repented of? What if even an awakened conscience itself refuses to accept the part for the whole? And what if God say, "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified"? And what if there be a special condemnation for those who, "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God"? V. As we retrace our steps and visit the other cisterns, lo! we find that THE WORKERS WORK NO MORE. The end has come to all. And on the cistern of the scholar we find the inscription, as if traced by a mystic hand, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." And on the cistern of the worldling we find, "So is every man that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." And on the cistern of the sensualist we find, "To be carnally minded is death." And as we look within we find that all is parched and dry as summer dust, and that the description is awfully exact and literal: "Cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (*E. Mellor, D.D.*)

Broken cisterns.—Whilst two evils are specified, we are not to suppose they are ever committed separately: no man forsakes the living fountain who does not also hew out the broken cistern—for there is a search after happiness in which all men naturally engage; and if they do not seek happiness in God, where alone it may be found, they will inevitably seek it in the creature, though only to be disappointed. Yet notwithstanding that these truths are attested by universal experience, there is continually going on the same forsaking of the fountain, the same hewing out of the cistern, so pathetically and indignantly denounced in the text. There is something very striking in the expression "hewed them out cisterns." What labour does it indicate, what effort, what endurance! Had the cisterns been ready made to their hands, there had not been so much with which to upbraid them. But God has caused that it shall be actually a toilsome thing for men to seek happiness in the creature. Witness the diggings, so to speak, of avarice: the painful climbings of ambition: the disgusts and disappointments of sensuality. God makes it an aggravation of the sin of his

being forsaken that He is forsaken for that which must demand toil, and then yield disappointment. He sets the "fountain of living waters" in contrast with "broken cisterns"—as though He would point out the vast indignity offered Him, in that what was preferred was so unworthy and insufficient. It is the language not only of jealousy, but of jealousy stung to the very quick by the baseness of the object to which the plighted affection has been unblushingly transferred. "Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth." God speaks of His people as offering Him this indignity; but He does not speak to His people. He tells His grievance to the material creation, as though even that were more likely to feel and resent it than the beings who were actually guilty of the sin. And ye who are setting up idols for yourselves, ye who, in spite of every demonstration of the uselessness of the endeavour, are striving to be happy without God, we will not reason with you: it were like passing too slight censure on your sin, it were representing it as less blinding, less besotting, than it actually is, to suppose that you would attend to, or feel the force of, an ordinary remonstrance. It may move you more, ye worshippers of visible things, to find yourselves treated as past being reasoned with, than flattered with addresses which suppose in you the full play of the understanding and the judgment. Ye will not hearken: but there are those who witness and wonder at your madness: the visible universe, as if amazed at finding itself searched for that which its own sublime and ceaseless proclamations declare to be nowhere but in God, assumes a listening posture; and whilst the Almighty publishes your infatuation, He hath secured Himself an audience, "whether ye will hear, or whether ye will forbear"; for the accusation is not uttered till there have been this astounding call: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this," &c. But let us proceed to the case which is perhaps still more distinctly contemplated by the passage before us—that of the abandonment of the true religion for a false. If ever God discovered Himself as a "fountain of living waters," it was when, in the person of His own Divine Son, He opened on this earth a "fountain for sin and for uncleanness." The justifying virtue of the work of the Redeemer, the sanctifying of that of the Spirit—these include everything of which, as sinful but immortal beings, we can have need: by the former we may have title to the kingdom of heaven, and by the latter be made meet for the glorious inheritance. Nevertheless, can it be said that men in general are ready to close with the Gospel, to partake of it as the parched traveller of the spring found amid the sands? Even where religion is not neglected, what pains are bestowed on the making some system less distasteful to pride, or more complacent to passion, than practical, unadulterated Christianity! What costly effort is given to the compounding the human with the Divine, our own merit with that of Christ; or to the preparing ourselves for the reception of grace, as though it were not grace by which, as well as for which, we are prepared, grace which must fashion the vessel, as well as grace which must fill it. Truly, the cistern is "hewn out," when the fountain is forsaken. Let Christ be unto you "all in all," "made unto you of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," and the fountain gives a river which, like the rock struck in Horeb, never ceaseth to make glad the believer. But turn away, though by a single step, from Christ, and, oh, the toil, the dissatisfaction, of endeavouring to make—what? "a broken cistern," "a cistern that can hold no water"—if creature comforts are such cisterns to those who seek happiness, creature systems must be to those who seek immortality. For what shall endure the severity of God's scrutiny, but that which is itself of God's appointing and providing? (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *A broken cistern*:—The mother of Hume, the philosopher, was once a professor of Christianity. Dazzled by the genius of her son, she followed him into the mazes of scepticism. Years passed and she drew near to the gates of death, and from her dying bed she wrote him the following: "My dear son,—My health has failed me. I am in deep decline. I cannot live long. I am left without hope or consolation, and my mind is sinking into a state of despair. I pray you hasten home to console me, or, at least, write to me the consolations that philosophy affords at the dying hour." Hume was deeply distressed at his mother's letter. His philosophy was "a broken cistern" in which was no water of comfort.

Ver. 14. *Is Israel a servant? is he a home-born slave? why is he spoiled?*—*Israel a home-born slave*:—Is this a contemptuous inquiry?—Israel a servant, Israel a home-born slave. Is there not scorn underlying the interrogation,

as who should say, Thou art a worm, a thing to be crushed by the foot, or a servile thing to be made no account of by the auditor of the universe? Nothing of the kind. There is a tone of tenderness in this inquiry. In Bible times to be a home-born slave was to be next the son of the family; there was a domestic interest in such a slave, full of pathos, and the condition brought with it its own advantages and rights; a slave born in the house took rank almost with the son, certainly immediately after the son; and the Lord seems to say, Is not Israel a servant, a home-born slave,—has he not rights at home; has he not domestic interests and family claims, a status which he can assert and maintain, and the fruit of which he is at liberty to enjoy? Why then is he spoiled; why has he thrown his inheritance away; why does he not seize the possessions to which he is entitled, and live within the light and the security of the privilege which belongs to him in his domestic relations? So there is no scorn in the words “home-born slave.” The Divine voice infused the pathos of emphasis into the word “homeborn.” Who can say “home” in a tone that is worthy of its music? Surely only He who has made the universe a home for His creatures, and offered them the hospitality of His infinite love. God comes after us, and says, Are ye not Mine; do you not belong to My house; are you not in the covenant of My love; is not your name upon the record of My memory; and goes not out after you all the solicitude of My heart? Why then have you spoiled your destiny, perverted your way, gone in a forbidden course, and exposed yourselves to the paw and the teeth of the lion? (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 15. *The young lions roared upon him, and yelled.*—*Dangers outside the Divine bounds:*—That comes of going from home, leaving sacred discipline, taking life into one's own hand, assuming the mastership of one's own fortune and destiny. Woe betide the man who goes beyond the bounds which God has fixed! Immediately outside those bounds the lion waits, or the plague, or the pestilence, or the pit hardly hidden but deep immeasurable. Luther said: Who would paint a picture of the present condition of the Church, let him paint a young woman in a wilderness or in some desert place; and round about her let him figure hungry lions whose eyes are glaring upon her and whose mouths are open to devour her substance and her beauty. Is the Church in a much better condition to-day? That is the natural condition of the Church. The Church always challenges the lion, tempts the devourer, excites the passions of evil men. When an evil generation tolerates the Church, applauds its dogmas, and flatters its ministry, it is because that Church has surrendered her prerogatives and trampled her functions in the dust. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Know that the Church of the living God is alive, and is fulfilling her destiny, when all round about her are men more cruel than ravenous beasts. Israel, the home-born slave, who ought to have walked arm-in-arm with the son of the house, left the precincts of the family and plunged into the way of lions. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 18. *What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt.*—*Words of expostulation:*—I. Addressing myself to the CHRISTIAN, I shall use the text in three senses, while I expostulate with you in regard to sin, to worldly pleasure, and to carnal trust. 1. O true believer, called by grace and washed in the precious blood of Christ, “What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of the muddy river?” What hast thou to do with the sins which once delighted thee, and which now find happy pastime for the world? A vision flits before my eye. The Lord God hath made a great feast; armies have met together; terrible slaughter has been the consequence. Men's arms have been red up to the very elbow in blood; they have fought with each other, and there they lie strewn upon the plain—thousands of carcasses bleeding. The vultures aniff the prey from far-off desert wilds; they fly, keen of scent. God hath made a great feast to the fowls of heaven, and to the ravenous beasts of the earth. But what is that I see? I see a dove flying with the same speed as the vulture towards the carrion. O dove, what hath brought thee there in dangerous connection with thy fierce enemies? Whither art thou going? Is there anything in that bloody feast that can content thee? Shall thy meek eyes glare with the fires of anger? Shall thy fair white plumage be stained with gore, and wilt thou go back to thy dove-cot with thy pinions bloody red? The question then cannot be answered, because when a Christian goes into sin he commits an incon-

sistent act—inconsistent with the freedom which Christ has bought for him, and inconsistent with the nature which the Holy Spirit has implanted in him. Christian, what hast thou to do with sin? Hath it not cost thee enough already? What, man! hast thou forgotten the times of thy conviction? There is yet another light in which to put the sin of the believer. Let me repeat the question once again—"What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of the muddy river?" There is a crowd yonder. They have evidently assembled for some riotous purpose. They are attacking one man. There are very many of them. They give Him no space to take His breath, no time to rest. Let me press through the throng and look at the man. I know Him at once. He hath a visage more marred than that of any other man. 'Tis He; it is the Crucified One, it is none other than Jesus, the Son of man, the Saviour of the world. Hark to the blasphemies which are poured into His ears! See how they spit in His face, and put Him to an open shame. Onward they bring Him, and you hear them cry, "Crucify Him! crucify Him! crucify Him!" They are doing it: they have nailed Him to the tree: yonder is a man with the hammer in his hand who has just now driven in the nail. Look round upon the mob. I can well comprehend why yonder drunkard, why yonder swearer, why the whoremonger, and the like of infamous notoriety, should have joined in this treacherous murder; but there is one man there—methinks I know his face. Ay, I have seen him at the sacramental table, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ: I have seen him in the pulpit saying, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ": I have seen him on his knees in prayer, pleading what he called "The precious blood." What hast thou to do in this counsel of the ungodly, this scene of sin without a parallel? 2. The pleasures of this world do sometimes entice the people of God, and they find some degree of mirth therein. To those Christians who can find pleasure in the common amusements of men, this question may be very pertinently put—"What hast thou to do to drink the water of that muddy river?" I can never understand that Christianity which alternately goes out to find joy in worldly amusements, and returns home to have fellowship with Christ. In the life of Madame Guyon I have read an anecdote something to this effect. She had been invited by some friends to spend a few days at the palace of St. Cloud. She knew it was a place full of pomp, and fashion, and, I must add, of vice also; but being over-persuaded by her friend, and being especially tempted with the idea that perhaps her example might do good, she accepted the invitation. Her experience afterwards should be a warning to all Christians. For some years that holy woman had walked in constant fellowship with Christ; perhaps none ever saw the Saviour's face, and kissed His wounds more truly than she had done. But when she came home from St. Cloud she found her usual joy was departed; she had lost her power in prayer. She felt in going to the lover of her soul as if she had played the harlot against Him. She was afraid to hope that she could be received again to His pure and perfect love, and it took some months ere the equilibrium of her peace could be restored, and her heart could yet again be wholly set upon her Lord. He that wears a white garment must mind where he walks when the world's streets are so filthy as they are. 3. We are all tried with the temptation to put our trust in things which are seen, instead of things which are not seen. The Lord hath said it—"Cursed is he that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm," but "blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord." Yet Christians often do trust in man, and then our text comes home—"What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the water of that muddy river?" "Some trust in horses and some in chariots, but we will stay ourselves upon the Lord God of Israel." II. CONVINCED SINNER, you feel your lost estate; God's Holy Spirit has kindly looked upon you, and begun a good work in your soul. And yet during the past week you have fallen into your old sin. Ah! smarting and yet sinning! wounded and yet rebelling! pricked with the ox-goad, and yet kicking against the pricks! It is hard for thee! And what was the cause of your sin after all? Was it worth sinning for—to grieve your conscience and vex the Holy Spirit? I have heard of a man who had just begun the Christian life, and he had some months of sorrow owing to a hasty temper. His neighbour had let some of his cattle stray into the field; he asked him to fetch them out again and mend the fence; his neighbour would not, and he flew into such a passion with him that afterwards he sat down and cried. Said he, "Why, if all the cows in the field were sold, and I had lost

the money, they were not worth the bother I made about them, nor worth one moment of the grief which I have to suffer." Oh! what fools we all are! Let us, however, write ourselves fools in capital letters, if when conscience is tender we yet go and do the very thing which we hate, and choose the very cup which was so bitter to our taste, so nauseous to us just now. You are under conviction of sin, and you have been lately—as it is a festive season—you have been frequenting the dancing-room, or the theatre. Now these are amusements for worldlings; let them have them; I would not prevent them for a moment; let every man have his own amusement and his own joy. But what is this to you? What hast thou to do with it? III. Lastly, to any who are CARELESS. I have a hard task to bring a reasonable question to unreasonable men. Ye tell me that ye love the vanities of this world, and that they content you. I look you in the face and remind you that there have been many madmen in this world besides yourselves. Yet as there is some spark of reason left, let me see if I can kindle a flame of thought therewith. Sinner, God is angry with the wicked every day. What have you to do with joy? you are condemned already, because you believe not on the Son of God. What have you to do with peace—a condemned man dancing in his cell at Newgate with chains about his wrists? What have you to do with merriment? You! If you were sure you should live a week you might spend six days, if you would, in sin; but you are not sure you will live an hour. What have you to do with sin and its pleasures? God is furbishing His sword to-day; it is sharp and strong as the arm which shall wield it. That sword is meant for you except you repent. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The believer's portion superior to the world's*:—Thou hast tasted of better drink than the muddy river of this world's pleasure can give thee. If thy profession be not a lie thou hast had fellowship with Christ, thou hast had that joy which only the blessed Spirits above and the chosen ones on earth can know. Hast thou eaten the bread of angels, and canst thou live on husks? Good Rutherford once said, "I have tasted of Christ's own manna and it hath put my mouth out of taste with the brown bread of this world's joy." "What hast thou to do," &c.

Ver. 19. *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee.—Sin its own punishment*:—I. IN THE DEALINGS OF GOD WITH GOOD MEN. 1. Neglect secret devotion, and God will refuse His blessing on other means of grace. 2. Indulge secret sin, and God will bring that sin into open light and condemnation. 3. Idolise created good, and God will take from us an idol, or make it a plague to us. 4. Act with faithlessness to others, and God will permit us to suffer from the treachery of others. 5. Undutifulness to parents punished by the defiance of our own children. 6. Indifference as to home piety returned upon us in the irreligion of those in the home. II. IN THE DEALINGS OF GOD WITH WICKED MEN. 1. Those who resent religious persuasions, and strive to stifle conviction, are deprived of godly parents and friends, and left to a fatal peace. 2. Those who repel the Gospel because of its humiliating truths, are allowed to "believe a lie," &c. 3. In death and judgment, the punishment of the sinner will reflect his sin. (Andrew Fuller.) *The uses made by God of sin*:—I. PRECAUTIONARY OBSERVATIONS. 1. Sin, in its own nature, is inexpressibly bad. Not only the negation of all that is good, but the absolute plenitude of all that is evil. It is wrong raising itself against the order, purity, and happiness of the universe. The originating, exclusive, and prolific source of all human woe. 2. If in any circumstances sin appear in a beginning, and good and happiness in the end, the latter will not be, in any sense, the proper conduct of the former. Good comes of evil through causes exterior to evil, independent of evil, hostile to evil, and which turn evil to good account against evil. Imagine a man sleeping in a wood. A serpent strikes its fangs into one of his limbs. The man is stung into consciousness, and starts up from his slumber just in time to escape the pounce of a hungry tiger, whose eyes are glaring in the thicket. The serpent had no intention of saving him. It attacked him for itself; but the sudden anguish of the bleeding wound was the occasion of rescue from the twofold destruction. So, often, a man "dead in trespasses and sins" is maddened into activity by the remorse of wickedness, and ultimately rushes away from the adjacent coils of Satan and the gaping jaws of hell. 3. To turn evil to good account is one of the sovereign prerogatives of God. It is only through Divine interference and interworking that sin fails, at any time, to effect "evil, only evil, and that continually." This is one of the express laws of the Divine conduct in the Bible. Joseph and his

brethren. David and Shimei. Preaching Christ out of envy, &c. II. WHAT ATTITUDE GOD ACTUALLY ASSUMES AND MAINTAINS TOWARDS SIN. 1. God has surrounded sin by limits and restrictions. The moral sentiments of men—the moral restraints of society—the moral utterances of revealed religion—the moral corrections of the invincible laws of the material economy—have conspired to bind sin hand and foot, in its most monstrous and demoniacal forms. 2. Sin is permitted, but anticipated; defiled, but used; unscathed, but bridled and harnessed, till the reluctant monster shall be firmly yoked to the car of the mighty victor and swell the final triumph. (1) God uses sin to punish sin. When God employed the passion and ambition of hostile monarchs to chastise the apostate Israelites, or when God directed warring kings, raging with the lust of empire, to relieve His afflicted and repentant people—in either case the Jews recognised the operation of an inter-working and over-ruling providence, and recorded the principles which we are explaining. (2) God uses sin to defeat sin. Very often when two persons, two coteries, two nations, it may be, are struggling to obtain a false object, and both the parties or communities are equally prodigate in the means which they employ to secure success, the plans of the unprincipled tricksters clash; all are overwhelmed with defeat and disgrace together, and the field is left free for right quietly to triumph. In the history of every kingdom and hierarchy, political and priestly despotism may be seen committing suicide by out-doing its ordinary amount of enormity. (3) God uses sin to reprove sin. God does not turn sins into whips exclusively, by the pains and disappointments of iniquity, merely to scourge the sinner. The element of moral reproof is uniformly associated with the anguish of punishment. We ask not here how sin can at all become the means of moral instruction; we only state the fact. Without seeking the remote or proximate cause of such a phenomenon, it is sufficient for our present purpose to say that one act, or a few acts of sin, and the immediate consequences are often, to a man apparently established in irreligion, the occasion of godly sorrow for the sins of his whole life. (4) God uses sin to promote goodness. The odiousness of sin, when visible in the conduct of the ungodly, is ever felt by Christians to be promotive of piety. It undoubtedly increases their gratitude when they are reminded, by contrast, of the obvious and revolting abominations from which they have been rescued. The daily sinfulness, too, of which the best are conscious, which they frankly acknowledge, however unaffectedly deplore, becomes a source of sincere and growing humiliation. The transgressions, also, of the past are never remembered without grief; and the spirit is chastened into meekness at the recollection of even bygone and forgiven iniquities. And, beyond this, what salutary spiritual consequences are derived from a conscious proneness to sin in the future! To what self-renunciation does it conduct! what acts of self-consignment to God does it prompt! and how much possible sin does it annihilate! (5) God uses sin to display the matchless glory of His Divine perfections. (*H. Batchelor.*) **It is an evil thing and bitter.—The evil of sin:—**I. INQUIRE WHEREIN SIN CONSISTS, ACCORDING TO THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPHET. 1. Every sinner has forsaken God. (1) He does not desire Him as his portion, but other things in preference. (2) He is not mindful of His favour, but esteems the friendship of a fellow-creature more than His. 2. As God is not loved, so neither is He feared, at least, not in such a way as to depart from evil. 3. From these two sources proceed all the evils that are in the world. (1) Forsaking God has been the cause of every abomination: hence all the wars, oppression, and injustice, between nations and individuals. (2) From the same source also arises a rejection of Christ and the Gospel; a contempt of religion and of religious people. (3) Hence, also, that hardness and indifference to the Gospel in many who attend upon it. (4) Hence the most solemn warnings and tender expostulations are without effect, and all the mercy of the Saviour is neglected. II. CONSIDER THE EVIL AND BITTER NATURE OF SIN. 1. We may “know and see how evil and bitter a thing sin is,” by the precepts of God’s holy law, which forbid it; and we must measure it by this rule to see what evil there is in it. 2. We may “know and see” by the awful threatenings of God’s Word, by which it stands condemned (Deut. xxviii. 15). 3. We may know and see by the bitter sorrows of true penitents (Psa. xxxviii. 1-6, li. 1-4; Zech. xii. 10). 4. Know by the bitter fruits it has already produced. 5. By the still more bitter fruits it would have produced if God had not restrained it. 6. By the bitter pains of eternal death. 7. Know it also by the bitter sufferings of the Son of God. III. ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION: “Know therefore and see that it is an evil

and bitter thing." 1. Unless we know and see this, we can neither know nor see the salvation of God. 2. Without a knowledge of the evil of sin, we shall neither repent of it nor depart from it to any good purpose. 3. If we know and see it not truly in this world, we shall be made to know and see it to our cost in the world to come. 4. If we are brought to know and see it aright, we shall come to Christ; and herein will be the proof of our knowledge being in some measure what it ought to be (John vi. 45). (*Theological Sketch-book.*) *The evil and bitterness of sin.*—I. INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS. 1. Men in general think lightly of sin. They consider it rather as a failure or infirmity of nature, than as positive transgression, guilt, or vileness. Nay, "fools make a mock of sin." 2. The great reason why men think so lightly of sin is, that they think lightly of God. Our judgment of anything is always in proportion to our esteem or disesteem of its opposite. God and sin are two contraries; and we will unavoidably form our estimate of sin, according to that which we form of essential holiness. 3. There is an infinite evil in sin. This may appear impossible, because man, its subject, is a finite being. But although viewed in man, or in any creature, as its subject, it can be only finite; with respect to God, the object against whom it is directed, it is infinitely evil: for it is an affront to His infinite perfections. 4. All sin has an infinite evil in it. The guilt of one sin exposes to eternal wrath. The least sin implies in it ingratitude, unbelief, rebellion, and atheism. II. THE EVIL OF SIN.

1. Because contrary to the nature of God, who is the supreme standard of truth and righteousness. Men may talk as they will of moral rectitude and the fitness of things. But these are terms without meaning, unless we understand them as relating to the perfections of the Divine nature; for there can be no notion of rectitude, fitness, or propriety, abstracted from the nature of God. 2. Because contrary to His holy law. This notion of sin is usually illustrated by the situation of a person under a bodily disease, who not only labours under the want of a proper temperament of humours, but hath a positive disorder among them. So sin, which is a moral disease, not only implies a want of proper conformity to the law, but a real opposition to it. 3. It is an attempt against the moral government of God in the world. This is the necessary result of its being a transgression of the law. 4. It is abominable to God. Nothing else in the universe is the object of Divine hatred, or nothing else but on account of sin. 5. That sin is an evil thing is evident from that malignity which is in its nature. Does the justice of God proclaim the guilt of sin? Do we learn its filth from its contrariety to Divine holiness? Its malignity also appears by its opposition to the alluring perfection of love. 6. Because it makes man the slave of Satan. By the law of his creation, he is the subject of God. To Him he owes his service, and to Him only. Inferences—1. That those who have never seen sin to be evil and bitter have no fear of God. 2. The danger of entertaining trivial thoughts of sin. 3. The dreadful ingratitude that is in sin. 4. The impossibility of delivering ourselves from sin. 5. The necessity of washing in the blood of Christ. III. THE BITTERNESS OF SIN. 1. Sin is so bitter in its consequences that it has deprived us of all good. It has robbed us of the Divine image and favour. 2. Sin has subjected us to all penal evil. The curse of the law; afflictions; death. 3. Sin has introduced disorder into the whole creation of God. IV. BY WHAT PROOFS SINNERS MAY KNOW AND SEE THAT SIN IS EVIL AND BITTER. 1. By the commands and threatenings of the law. It threatens death in all its extent: temporal, spiritual, and eternal. 2. By terrors of conscience. 3. From the complaints of God's people, on account of sin. They everywhere, when rightly exercised, represent it as their heaviest burden; and however great their afflictions, they consider sin as greater than any other. 4. By the punishments inflicted on sinners in this life. Flood: Sodom and Gomorrah. 5. Many see and know the evil and bitterness of sin by their own eternal misery. Hell. 6. In the sufferings of the Son of God. (*J. Jamieson, M.A.*) *Sin evil and bitter.*—Many and great are the benefits arising from a proper view of the evil of sin. It teaches us our true relation to God, and the value of Christ's salvation. It shows us the necessity of repentance, and serves to form in us that spirit of humility which so well suits a fallen creature. To promote this necessary branch of Christian knowledge, therefore, I propose to set before you some of the evils contained in sin. 1. Sin is an act of rebellion against God, our supreme governor. We all feel it to be right that a master should govern his servant, a parent his child, a king his subjects: and, in these cases, if obedience be refused, we immediately censure it as wrong. Now, all the relations of father, master, and king, do not confer a thousandth part of

the right to rule, and to be obeyed, which centres in God. If authority is attached to property, the world is His, and the fulness of it;—if to high station, He is King of kings, and Lord of lords;—if to natural right, whose claim can be so little liable to dispute as that of the Creator of all things, by whom all things subsist? The language of sin is, “Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?” Now, when we consider the infinite glory, power, and goodness of God, whose authority is thus trampled upon; the meanness of man—dust of the earth quickened into life by God; the slightness of the motive by which in many cases he is induced to disobey God; and the desperate boldness or unthinking carelessness with which he dares to transgress, often showing neither reluctance, nor apprehension, nor sorrow, surely we shall see in this one view of the subject how “evil and bitter a thing it is that we have forsaken the Lord God, and that His fear is not in us.” But to all this it may be objected, that guilt lies chiefly in the intention; and that it is not the intention of the sinner to offend God, much less to rebel against Him: his end is only to please himself. This may be true; but is it not rebellion against God not to intend to obey Him? No criminal directly proposes to insult the laws of his country. He intends only to please himself; to serve some selfish end of his own. But when the act which he commits is forbidden by the law, we consider him as justly liable to suffer the penalty of disobedience. But it is pleaded, “We have no distinct idea, when we sin, of acting against the will of God, but are drawn, by thoughtlessness, to do that which in our more serious moments we condemn.” Is thoughtlessness itself, in respect to God and our duty, no crime? This is to excuse the guilt of the single act, by acknowledging a general principle of evil. Men, for the most part, know that what they are about to do is forbidden by God. Their conscience reproves them; their guilt is placed full in their view, and yet they proceed in their course. 2. The evil of sin will further appear from this consideration, that by every act of sin we do in effect arraign the wisdom and goodness of God. Every one who sins decides against the wisdom and goodness of God. He declares by actions, which always speak more strongly than words, that God would have more promoted the happiness of man had He allowed him to indulge his lusts; that His yoke, therefore, is hard. Now, is it not an unpardonable presumption in us thus to set up our judgment against that of God? 3. The evil of sin appears also from its tendency to defeat the designs of God. It introduces disorder into His dominions. It spreads desolation through His works. It destroys the happiness, harmony, and glory of the world, and fills it with misery and discord. All sin has this tendency. For, be it remembered, we are not to measure the evil of sin by its effects, but by its tendency. If God, by His power, prevents the effects which it would otherwise produce, this does not take away from its proper malignity. 4. The evil of sin will further appear when we consider the ingratitude contained in it. Is there, then, no guilt in sin which injures and insults our best Friend; no evil in that disposition which allows us to be even negligent in our conduct towards Him to whom we owe such obligations? 5. Sin manifests also an abject and grovelling spirit. It proposes to gratify the corrupt appetites of the flesh, and considers only the present moment: for this, reason is dethroned, while the flesh is allowed to rule: for this, honour, conscience, and the fear of God, are trampled under foot: for this, eternity is sacrificed to time. It belongs only to fallen beings; it is the badge of their shame, and the rod of their punishment. 6. Lastly, the evil of sin appears in the injury it does to others. It is the excellence of holiness that it spreads happiness around; but it is the effect of sin, like a pestilence, to spread ruin and desolation. All I have said of sin in general applies, of course, to every act of sin; and yet how very different an appearance does sin usually bear to us from what has been described! Is God, then, an angry tyrant, who marks in secret the weaknesses and follies of His creatures, in order, at length, to pour out His vengeance on them? Far from us be such an idea of our gracious and merciful God. He is slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. (*Christian Observer*.) Sin:—1. The nature of sin. Forsaking the Lord as our God. 2. The cause of sin. Because His fear is not in us. 3. The malignity of sin. An evil and bitter thing. 4. The fatal consequences of sin. Without God. 5. Use and application. Repent of thy sin. (*Matthew Henry, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. How then art thou turned into the degenerate plant.—*Spiritual deterioration*:—A mysterious action is this of spiritual deterioration. It does not set in with obvious energy all at once, so that in one short week a

man ceases to be a healthy and fruit-bearing vine ; but little by little he goes down, his tone changes, his prayers are depleted of elements that once made them rich with spiritual significance ; a carelessness comes upon all his personal discipline ; we say, he is no longer the man he once was ; then he falls again, and still further he goes down, until at last we begin to be ashamed of his society, or to say that we never come near him without being chilled : once he was so warm, so cordial, so affectionate, so spiritually-minded, that to touch him was to receive virtue ; but now all is changed,—his talk has fallen to a lower level, and there comes now and then a look into his face which means that the better self is being displaced by another identity. “What I say unto one,” said Christ, “I say unto all, Watch.” Let us be careful lest whilst we slumber the enemy take an advantage over us. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 22. *Though thou wash thee with nitre.*—*No self-expiation*:—One of the shortest, but most pregnant, words in our language is sin. And yet it is one of those words least understood. The whole system of the Gospel rests on the fact of sin, and on the dreadful evil of sin, and on the inexpiable character of sin by any human means whatsoever. Our text puts the truth with a very startling clearness. The nitre here mentioned was a mineral substance, and the soap was a vegetable substance, both employed for the purpose of removing spots ; and the meaning is, adopt what means you may and all the means within your power, and still your sin will remain, it will strike through again, and be as fresh as the day on which it was committed. This is true of sin in both its aspects of guilt and stain : as guilt or wrong you cannot remove it ; and as a blot you cannot remove it. Let us look at it as guilt or wrong. Who can expiate it as a matter of right ? If the question be asked, but may not God waive His right ? We answer that, if He did this, it would be an act of grace ; it would be a voluntary surrender on His part of what He had a right to claim and to inflict. But it does not require much thought to teach us that God could never give to any of His creatures the power of expiation consistent with the stability of His own throne and government. To grant that a man has power to expiate a sin, would be to grant that he has a right to insult God and to sin whenever he desires. Such an engagement would place God in the position of a being who was trafficking in selling the right to do iniquity. You can conceive of a foolish father or mother possessing an imperious nature, and anxious to display supreme authority, incessantly commanding and forbidding their children to do certain trifling things—things which, whether done or left undone, would be of no injury to the children. This is not government. It is irritation. This is not encouraging obedience ; it is promoting rebellion. It frets the will by the assertion of needless and unreasonable claims. But surely, the commands of God are not of this character. The commands of God are God Himself in expression, and not merely the power of God or the will of God, but the sense of right and justice and holiness, without which He could have no claim on the obedience and reverence of any creature. But this is not all. Not only do God's commands express His own eternal nature, and not only do they appeal to our moral nature, so that we cannot treat them as if they were simply suggestions, or pieces of advice, or matters of taste ; but they are commands which contemplate and secure, in so far as they are obeyed, our happiness. In other words, they not only enjoin the right way, but the happy way. To sin, therefore, is not only to disobey, but to derange ; it is not only to set at nought a Divine injunction, but to outrage your own nature. If therefore the line of obedience to the Divine will is also, as it most assuredly is, the line of blessedness to yourself, do you not see that there can be no expiation for disobedience ? Will punishment for a certain time be an expiation ? In no country is it held that imprisonment for theft is as good as honesty ; in no country is a fine for drunkenness as good as sobriety. But if punishment is not an expiation for sin in human government, in the sense of being regarded as an equivalent for the offence which has been committed, if it does not restore to a man either the character or the standing which he occupied before, so neither is it an expiation for sin in our relations to God. It is true that He too says, If you sin you will also suffer ; but He does not say, Your suffering will stand good instead of your obedience. When God punishes, He says first, I cannot be trifled with, and I cannot have My laws set at nought. The punishment means that in the first instance ; it must mean that, whether it means anything else or not. If

it be asked whether punishment is not meant to be corrective, and whether it is not meant also to be preventive, by way of example to others who see the suffering which follows sin, I admit that these are among the purposes of punishment; but they are secondary purposes. God says to us, If you sin punishment will follow whether you are corrected by it or you are not, and whether others take warning by it or not. It may be said that suffering is not the only nitre and soap by means of which men seek to wash off the guilt of sin; that there is repentance, and future amendment; and that these are sufficient as a set-off against any amount of transgression. Now, it is impossible for us to determine what repentance can do or what future amendment can do, in reference to past sin, without the light which Scripture gives us. Repentance is a change of mind and heart and life; and in the dispensation under which we live, repentance is connected with faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And it must not be torn from this connection. The parable of the prodigal son teaches us, that as a son must return to his father, and will be received if he returns, so if a man return to God he will be received. But it was not meant to expound the whole Gospel. The great truth is set forth that a returning child is received; but the way of return Christ explains again and again in His other teachings, as for example when He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father, but by Me." The question which we have all to consider is, how is the guilt of our sins to be dealt with that it will not be laid at last to our charge? The answer of the Gospel is not that repentance will stand between it and us. It is that Christ will stand between it and us. Repentance does not bear our sins; Christ bears our sins. (*E. Mellor, D.D.*)

Vers. 23-30. **How canst thou say, I am not polluted.**—*Self-vindicating sinners reproved*:—I. THE SELF-VINDICATING WAYS OF SINNERS. 1. Direct denial (Gen. iv. 9). 2. Vain excuse (1 Sam. xv. 13-15). 3. Hypocritical palliation (Gen. iii. 11-13). II. GOD SUBSTANTIATES HIS CHARGE AGAINST HIS OFFENDING PEOPLE. 1. By an appeal to fact. 2. By a most apt comparison. Dromedary and wild ass, when seeking their mate, are so bent upon attainment of desire, that efforts to catch them are vain; no one will weary himself with so fruitless a labour. But when their time of pregnancy has advanced, they fall comparatively an easy prey to the pursuer. So, to little purpose that you are followed with invitations and entreaties: you "will not hear the voice of the charmer," &c. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) **Know what thou hast done.**—*What hast thou done?*—Look at thy life in the light of—1. God's Divine purpose. 2. Your social position, and the circumstances by which you have been surrounded. 3. The responsibilities of the domestic relationship. 4. Your relationship to the best and tenderest of fathers. 5. The tender dealings of the Holy Spirit. 6. Your relationship with Him who, because He loved you, was content to hang upon the Cross. (*W. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.*)

Vers. 31-37. **Have I been a wilderness unto Israel?**—*Divine questions*:—The people were required to answer two questions: "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? have I been a land of darkness unto Israel?" Speak out. If you have an impeachment to bring even against God, do not fear to bring it. He asks for it. A wondrous tenderness inspires the inquiry. It seems, indeed, to bring its own answer with it. So the father might plead with his child, "Have I been a wilderness unto thee, or a land of darkness? have I been deaf to entreaty? have I been without sympathy in the time of affliction? have I but half-opened the door when you have sought to return to my love and my confidence?" The very inquiry is a defence; the very method of the inquiry means, It is impossible to answer this but in one way. Having answered a question respecting God, they have next to answer a question respecting themselves: "Wherefore say My people, We are lords; we will come no more unto Thee?" Literally, Why do My people say, We will rove at will? That is licence, not liberty. They have lost the centre, and are plunging evermore in chaos, without being able to give an account of themselves or to use what benefit might lie within their power. Why this new cry, namely, We will do as we like? Why this so-called freethought? why this progress which means running round and round and never advancing by one measurable inch? How very early men begin to be free-thinkers! How soon sin says to a man, Rove at will; do what you like: you are a man! Then the poor fool thinks

he is a man, and begins to "play fantastic tricks before high heaven." He forgets that we have only liberty to obey. Then the Lord seems to adopt a kind of taunting tone: "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" When did either of them forget a pin, a jewel, a toy, a feather? What a memory for little things, for dressing, for adornment, for outgoing, for public excitement! What a recollection for dates, when the date is filled up with an amusement, a new sensation! But no memory for sacrifice, for prayer, for holy sacrament, for consecrated day, for revelations from heaven,—a memory that will hold all the fiction that ever was written, but a memory like a sieve in respect of everything that is written in the Bible! What a voice is the Lord's! How strident, how mocking! how tender, beseeching, importunate, full of lamentation! "My people have forgotten Me days without number." Could the complaint have been stated more pensively? The very voice in which it is uttered adds to the poignancy of the distress. Who likes to be forgotten? Who likes to be the one member of the family for whom no flower is brought, for whose birthday no provision is made, for whose little wants, or great, no one cares? Now the voice changes, and the element of accusation enters into it very sharply (ver. 33): "Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?"—why this continual invention in incidental reforms? why not go to the root of the matter? A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. It is useless to paint the branches, or hang bird-cages upon them, or tie to them fruit gathered from other orchards. Down with the tree, up with the roots, burn them, and in its place let there be a tree of the Lord's right-hand planting. But all this trimming and adaptation and partial reform indicates a species of ingenuity and cleverness—"therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways." The substantive is feminine—"therefore hast thou also taught wicked women thy ways": you have been inventive, you have issued new programmes of evil; you have said in effect: See how clever we are: here is a new method of profanity, here a novelty in blasphemy, here a cloak that baffles scrutiny, here an impervious garment—waterproof and fireproof, deluge and lightning cannot get through this covering. No doubt there is a great deal of ingenuity in wickedness. Bad men have wonderful sagacity in some cases, great mental penetration, and quite a striking method of doing their own work in their own way; they are inventive, mentally fertile; as to their fecundity in the way of devising evil methods and evil practices, it is immeasurable. But God knows it, and founds a charge upon it. Mark the hardening process of sin in the thirty-fourth verse: "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these." The blood of the prophets was found in the skirts of those who had slain the good men. But "in thy skirts,"—is not that a term which indicates concealment? God says, I have not found out this blood, or the sin with which it is connected, by secret search—by digging down and finding a hole in the wall, as the prophet Ezekiel found a hole in the wall and entered into the chamber of imagery; this is not a cellarful of blood; this sin is not confined to the basement of the life-house: you have advanced beyond that. Cain, who introduced social sin into the world, performed his murder in secret, wiped his lips, and stood before God as an innocent man. We have made advances upon that infantile crime. Now our crime is public. The sin which you are half afraid of to-day, you will make a boon companion of before very long. The words you now use with blushing and trembling of voice, you will use familiarly by continued practice. We cannot rest at a certain point, saying, I will go no farther than this. Such may be our intention at the time being, but we subtly and imperceptibly advance until we become adept in evil. "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria" (ver. 36). Literally, Why all these shifting policies? why all these new alliances? why be performing a kind of moral conjuring? Are there not many people who are all things by turns and nothing long—men who are wanting in conviction and thorough persuasion of soul, incapable of enthusiasm, driven about by every wind of doctrine; men who have called at all the hovels of heresy, and have never settled in the sanctuary of truth? We need not alter the terms; they are simple as our best-known mother tongue, and they will stand for the purposes of scrutiny all the while, not needing change or modification. Be something. Belong to somebody. Do not mistake roving at will for a safe dwelling at home. What was the result of this trimming and gadding about, this changing

between Assyria and Egypt? "Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head," &c. (ver. 37). Observe the expression, "Thine hands upon thine head." It was the Oriental sign of dejection and despair. Seeing a man in that attitude, the meaning was: He has no more hope; his spirit is full of chagrin; he has been utterly disappointed, and his soul is dead within him; and his confidences are all battered down; the day of prosperity, even nominal and superficial, is gone for ever. There are many confidences, and they look well. What can look better from the outside than golden wealth: the foundations silver, the gates made of precious stones, the front of the house gleaming white marble, the roof of the house one sheet of gold; and behind horses and chariots, and man-servants and maid-servants, and a retinue endless? What can look better as a confidence than health—rude health, rosy-cheeked health, bright-eyed health: the voice as sound as a bell, the arm as strong as iron, a strength that never knew what it was to be weary—real genuine health of blood and bone and sinew and skin; a man whom death dare not touch? Or the confidence of invention—that fertility of mind which always has a new shift, which can always see a back door out of every difficulty? Or pleasure—sunny, merry, dancing pleasure, with a tune for every hour of the day, and as happy in the night season as in the daytime; bells ringing the whole four-and-twenty hours round; and as for laughter and joke and all kinds of mirthfulness, why here they are? "The Lord hath rejected thy confidences." One bolt of lightning, and the whole gold-house has gone down. One chill some damp night, and the health-house is ruined from attic to basement. One touch by the invisible hand, and the brain that had in it a thousand inventions trembles, and cannot remember. One keen disappointment, and pleasure is struck dead; its face is an annoyance, its rattle is an insult, its invitations are blasphemies, in face of a woe so terrible. There is but one abiding confidence—"Rock of Ages, cleft for me." There is but one refuge from the storm—"Jesus, refuge of my soul." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *An unjust imputation repelled by Jehovah:*—To an ingenuous mind God never appears so irresistible, so overpowering, as when He addresses His creatures in the language of tender expostulation. Did all men possess such a disposition, He would seldom address them in any other language, and even now, destitute of it as they naturally are, He condescends occasionally to employ it. One instance of its use we have in our text. I. SHOW WHEN PROFESSED CHRISTIANS TREAT THEIR GOD AND REDEEMER AS IF HE WERE TO THEM A WILDERNESS, A LAND OF DARKNESS. The mention of a wilderness, especially of a wilderness as it appears at night, when darkness prevails, suggests to us ideas of dreariness, solitude, and gloom; of a place where there is nothing to cheer, to nourish, or shelter us, where numberless obstacles impede the wanderer's progress, and through which is no discoverable path. Every declining professor of religion, every one who serves God with reluctance, who does not find pleasure in His service, regards Him precisely in this light, and treats Him as if He were a wilderness, a land of darkness. When a professor becomes slack and remiss in waiting upon God, careless in walking with Him, and negligent in seeking communion with Him, does he not practically say, God is, to me, a wilderness? In the same manner does every one regard it, who in any place of worship, whether private, social, or public, feels as if he were detained there, and as if he would prefer some other situation or employment. Still more loudly does the professing Christian declare that he regards God as a wilderness, when he repairs, in search of happiness, to the scenes of worldly pleasure, or to the society of worldly-minded men. He then says to them in effect, the ways of wisdom are not ways of pleasantness; a religious life is a life of constraint and melancholy; I should die with hunger and thirst, did I not occasionally forsake the wilderness in which I am doomed to live, and refresh myself with the fruits on which you are feasting. II. APPLY TO ALL, WHO HAVE TREATED HIM IN THIS MANNER, THE PATHETIC, MELTING EXPOSTULATION IN OUR TEXT. 1. The temporal blessings which you enjoy. Look at your comforts, your possessions, your children, your friends, your liberty, your security. Did you find all these blessings in a wilderness, or did they come to you out of a land of darkness? 2. The religious privileges with which you have been favoured. Did you find the Bible, the sanctuary of God, and the Gospel of salvation, in a wilderness? Surely, a wilderness, where such blessings are to be found, must be preferable to the most fertile spot on earth! 3. Those who are professors of religion, we may remind of the spiritual blessings which they have, or profess

to have enjoyed. (1) You have found the table of Christ spread for your refreshment. You have enjoyed precious seasons of communion with Him. You have tasted the first-fruits of the heavenly inheritance, celestial fruits, the food of angels, such as earth does not produce. Was it a wilderness which produced the celestial fruits, on which you have feasted? (2) Has God been a wilderness, a land of darkness to this Church, considered as a body? Look back and see what it was twenty years since. Consider how it has been preserved, blessed, increased, during the intervening period. 4. Yet, notwithstanding all that has been said, there are probably some who feel as if, in one respect at least, God has been to them no better than a dark and dreary wilderness. We allude to those who, though they have professedly paid some attention to religious subjects, and have perhaps enrolled themselves among the visible followers of Christ, have found no happiness in religion. Such persons often say in their hearts, We have spent much time in religious pursuits, and have made many endeavours to find that rest and peace and consolation which Christ promises to His disciples, and of which many Christians talk so much. But all our endeavours have been in vain; and we must say, if we speak the truth, that our way has been like that of a man travelling through a wilderness, where he finds no path, no refreshment, but meets with thorns and briars and obstacles at every step. In reply to such complaints, we remark, that the persons who make them compose several different classes, and that the complaints of each of these classes are wholly unreasonable and without foundation. (1) The first class we shall mention, is composed of those who, to use the apostle's language, go about to establish their own righteousness, and do not submit to the righteousness of God. That such persons find no happiness in God, in religion, is not wonderful; for to God, and to religion, they are entire strangers. It is only by believing in Jesus Christ, that men are filled with joy and peace. (2) The second class we shall mention, is composed of the slothful. That they should find no happiness in religion, is not surprising; for inspiration declares, that the way of the slothful man is a hedge of thorns. (3) A third class of complainers is composed of such as an apostle calls double-minded men, who are unstable in all their ways. They are engaged in a vain attempt to reconcile the service of God and that of mammon. In making this attempt they wander from God, and lose themselves in a wilderness; and then inconsistently complain, that wisdom's ways are not paths of peace, that God is to them a land of darkness. But their complaints are as unreasonable as those of a man, who should bury himself in a dungeon, and then complain that the sun gave no light. Permit me now to improve the subject—1. By applying it to the members of this Church, and to all the professed disciples of Christ before me. Let me say to each of them, Have you never treated your God and Redeemer as if He were a wilderness, a land of darkness? 2. In the second place, let me apply this subject to impenitent sinners. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *God no barren wilderness*.—I. A DEMAND. 1. It has the force of a remonstrance or protestation. Men are wrongly opinionated respecting God. (1) Because God is pleased sometimes to suspend and delay the expressions of His goodness to them. (2) Because God does not always reward them as they desire and expect. 2. It has the force of a remembrance or seasonable intimation; i.e., I have been the contrary, I have in reality been a paradise. 3. It has the force of a reproach; i.e., Israel hath rather been a wilderness to Me! And so it represents to us the unfruitfulness of God's people. Three things aggravate this. (1) The mercies they enjoy. (2) The means (of improvement, advantages) they partake of. (3) The expectations which are upon them. 4. It has the force of an appeal or provocation to them; i.e., let Israel speak what they know of Me. II. AN EXPOSTULATION. 1. The charge is twofold. (1) Their assertion: "We are lords," whereby they hold forth their own greatness, self-sufficiency, and independence. (2) Their resolution: "We will come no more," &c. 2. The censure, "wherefore?" signifies that—(1) It was without reason. (2) Against reason. Consider—(a) Their relation. "My people." (b) Their indebtedness. III. AN INVITATION. By "generation" He meant the people of the time. There is a reflection in the phrase upon the sinfulness and wretchedness of the age, as if to say, Into what a time and age are we fallen! 1. Unto what this generation is invited. To "see the Word of the Lord," i.e., mind it and attend to it. 2. The weightiness and seriousness of it. (1) As it respects God's own justification. (2) As it respects Israel's condemnation. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *A just challenge*.—You cannot

hear such a text as this without feeling greatly solemnised. I do not suppose they said this literally, but practically they said, "We are lords; we will come no more unto Thee." Also, how the words impress us with the necessity of a better dispensation,—in other words, of a better covenant, of a better religion, that should take a saving hold of the people, and make them all that which the Lord Himself would approve. I. THE JUST CHALLENGE. 1. What the Lord was to them. Salvation. Those among them who were spiritually minded, and were taught of God, saw in the Paschal lamb, Christ Jesus; saw in the salvation from Egypt, Christ Jesus; saw in the victory that was wrought for them, Christ Jesus. 2. How it was they failed. They defiled the land. II. THE SELF-EXALTATION. "We are lords." What does it mean? It means that they set their authority above the truth of God. Now it becomes us to see that all the parts of our religion are of Divine authority. So far from the Christian as he goes on finding that he is lord over his own self, and lord over this, and that, and the other, he finds out, as he goes along, more and more of his poverty; he decreases more and more. Ah! he says, If I were black in my own eyes a few years ago, I am blacker now: if vile in my own estimation a few years ago, I am viler now. And thus as we sink the Saviour rises, grace reigns, and we glory in being poor sinners at the feet of Jesus, indebted to God from first to last for our eternal salvation. III. THE BLIND DECISION. "We will come no more unto Thee." I do not apprehend that this means that they would give up the supreme God, but that they would come no more unto Him in that representation of Him which His truth gave, in that representation of Him which His prophets gave. We will thus come no more unto Thee—not in that way. In Isaiah xxix. you have these instructive words, "This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me." They are not conscious of that. You say to the Pharisee in the Saviour's day, Do you love God? Of course I do. But is not your heart removed from Him? No;—they were not conscious of it. Every erroneous seeker says he loves God; what, then, is the sense in which their hearts were removed from God? what is the sense in which they would come no more to Him? "Their fear," saith Isaiah (xxix.), "toward Me is taught by the precept of men." The Saviour comes to the same point when He says, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." And when He had opened up the beauties of the everlasting Gospel in John vi., it was not the supreme God abstractedly, but it was God in His own way of saving a sinner that they hated, and they went back and walked no more with Him. (J. Wells.)

Ver. 32. Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet My people have forgotten Me.—*The bride and her ornaments: the sin of forgetting God.*—It is a clear proof of the great love of God to His people that He will not lose their love without earnest expostulation. He loves us too well to suffer us to go on in our iniquity. He will scourge rather than abandon; chide rather than lose. I. A VERY GRIEVOUS SIN. "My people have forgotten Me days without number." 1. Observe whom they had forgotten: it will help us to see the sin of it. It would not have mattered half as much if they had forgotten their dearest friends—the husband his wife, or the mother her child; but here are favoured men and women who have forgotten their God, their Father, their life, their all. God, the good, the best, who has a chief right to be remembered. There is great evil in our hearts, or it would be so hard to forget God as to be impossible. A friend has gone away from us, and we do not see him; but he has left so many tokens of his goodness that we are reminded of him every day. Is it not so with God? Has He not left us innumerable tokens of His affection for us? Ought we to forget when so many forget-me-nots are round about us? But, supposing that friend has not gone away at all, but is living with us in the house, and enters even into our chamber, what shall we say if we forgot one who is constantly with us? No man is so present with his friend as God is with His people. 2. Who were they that forgot God? Not strangers, not heathen; but "My people." That is to say, a people not only chosen and redeemed, but brought to know Him, brought into fellowship with Him, brought into relationship with Him, brought absolutely into union with Him,—they have forgotten Me. 3. Observe sadly the space in which they had forgotten: in the case of Israel, it is added, "days without number." How long is it since you were in the habit of walking with God? How long is it since you have seen the face of the Well-Beloved? I

ventured to put that question once to a professor, and, shaking his head, he replied, "Don't ask me that: if you will ask me whether I have been a drunkard, whether I have been dishonest in business, whether I have done any positive action by which I have degraded the Christian name, I can answer you without fear; but if you ask, How long since I have had fellowship with Christ, I cannot—I dare not—answer you." 4. How is God forgotten? What are the manifestations of this offence? (1) Some professors evidently forget God by their worldliness. They have been fattened with the treasures of the world, but their souls have been starved to very skeletons, for they have not fed upon the things of God. (2) Some have forgotten God by self-seeking. They live unto themselves. (3) Some, too, show that they forget God by the failure of their trust. They are in trouble, and they are very anxious. Why? Because they have forgotten God, though He has promised to help them. (4) Alas, there are some who add to this a forgetfulness of God through neglect of private devotion. Prayers are slurred over; drawing near to God becomes a form and a pretence. (5) And you and I can do it in a very high sense by a breach of communion, by getting out of fellowship with God, by walking contrary to Him, so that He walks contrary to us. It is very bad walking and very bad living when God and ourselves are at cross purposes. 5. If ever we do forget God, it leads to all sorts of mischief. We lose our joy and our comfort; and then we lose our strength and our watchfulness; and then we backslide by little and little; and then, probably, we fall into one sin, and then into another sin, if not into a third more grievous still. II. THE CHIDING QUESTION which is the very marrow of the text. "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" 1. I suppose that question is put, first, because there are many trivial things which occupy minds so that they cannot forget them. How sad it is that the grandest things, the best things, should not equally engross our thoughts! 2. If a bride did forget her attire, or a maid did forget her ornaments, it would be very unreasonable behaviour. But how infinitely more unreasonable it is that you and I should forget God. He is our diadem of glory: He is our beauty of holiness. In Christ we are arrayed in raiment of needlework, and our garments are of wrought gold. Can we, shall we forget Him? 3. It would have been a most unreasonable thing for a maid to forget her attire at her wedding. A bride who forgets her attire would be something like the foolish virgins who forgot to take oil in their vessels with their lamps. And, certainly, it is a most unreasonable thing for me and you to forget our God while we are here. Let the soldier, when the arrow is flying from every bush, forget his armour, but let us not forget our God. Let the hungry man, when famine rages through the land, forget his store of bread, but let us not forget the food of our souls, which is our Lord Jesus. 4. Notice the conduct of the maid or the conduct of the bride, with regard to her ornaments. (1) She labours hard to obtain her ornaments and to gain her attire. Many women in the East save up every coin that they have, and turn all into silver. It is their life's work to provide themselves with ornaments against the marriage day. While they do this, let us do better: let us store up the thoughts of Christ, and the words of Christ, and the things of Christ, and let us labour to get more and more of Christ, that we may be adorned with Him and made comely in His comeliness. (2) When the Eastern woman has with great difficulty obtained her ornaments and her attire, then she thinks a great deal of them: she preserves them with much care; she will, if possible, prevent a thief from taking away a ring or gem; she locks them up carefully. Oh, that we did store up every bit we get of our Lord's love, and put it by to keep it, never losing any pearl that we find, or any ring that we fashion by experience. (3) How joyfully the Eastern woman puts on her jewels, puts on her attire. She has these things to wear them. I am ashamed of those Christians who are ashamed of Christ. They have jewels: I hope they have; but they are very chary of ever showing them. III. A few words of CALL TO REPENTANCE, if we have in any measure forgotten God. I am sure, first, that our God does not deserve to be treated so. "You use no other friend so ill." Have you forgotten? Will not the time past suffice for that? A half a minute's forgetfulness of God is half a minute too long. Let it not come to be "days without number." But, if the number be ever so small, let us weep to think we should have forgotten Him at all. Think, if He had forgotten you—forgotten you in your merriest moment, ay, in your holiest moment, what would have been your portion? (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Forgetfulness.—The Almighty entered this grave charge against His ancient favoured nation, "My people have

forgotten Me days without number." I. THE SAME CHARGE LIES WITH TOO GREAT FORCE AGAINST ALL CHRISTENDOM. The true secret of this lurks in the obstinate ungodliness of the carnal mind. This hinders the recollection of God in the following modes—1. In habitual inattention to Divine truth, when presented to the mind. Some try to excuse their ignorance of God and His inspired Word, pleading, "I have such a bad memory," when the memory is quite good enough, if Divine truths were once well lodged in it by due attention. No memory, however excellent, can retain that which was never allowed to make an impression (Heb. ii. 1). 2. In neglect of reflection on Divine truth read or heard. Where there is little meditation on God and His Word, it is vain to expect a rich experience, or a solid religious character. 3. In the occupation of the mind with comparative trifles. Filling our measures with chaff, we leave no room for good and solid grain. The maid thinks of her ornaments, and the bride of her attire. The young—and not they only, but many to whom increasing years have brought no wisdom—fill their thoughts and conversation with the fashions, the amusements, and entertainments of the season; and so can have, in their foolishly occupied minds, no grave recollection of that God with whom they have to do. It was a judicious answer of Themistocles to Simonides, who had offered to teach him the art of memory, "Rather teach me the art of forgetfulness; for the things which I would not I remember, and cannot forget the things I would." 4. In excess of worldly cares. There are grave anxieties regarding success in business, or the attainment of a coveted position, that so press upon the soul as to preclude the earnest recollection of religious truth. Hence it happens that shrewd men, who easily remember whatever affects the markets, cannot remember how to "buy the truth"; and readily quoting the stock and share lists of commercial enterprise, cannot accurately quote the verses of the blessed Word of God. II. TO SHOW THE EVIL OF FORGETFULNESS, let it be considered how much a religiously stored memory tells on the development of the Christian mind and formation of the Christian character. It constitutes knowledge, it deepens repentance, it fortifies faith, it supplies comfort, and moves continual thankfulness. (*D. Fraser, M.A.*)

Vers. 35-37. Thou sayest, I have not sinned.—*Obstinate impenitence*:—1. Blind to its own guilt. 2. Blasphemes God by accusing Him of unjust anger. 3. Will not escape just punishment. (*Naegelsbach.*) *Denial of guilt*:—At one of our seaside resorts, a cab proprietor was fined £10 and costs for not having licences for twenty-seven carriages. His excuse was that they were relics of antiquity, kept to lend out while others underwent repair. Some make a like plea when their sins are discovered: they do not sin as a regular business, though it is true they keep some of the old relics of antiquity. If we keep the devil's carriages, even under such a pretence, we will find them turn into funeral cars ere long. Do not keep wine in the cellar, and you will not drink it. He who has a pistol may shoot. "Make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. xiii. 14). "Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. iv. 27). Do not keep even an old stool for him. Away with all his furniture. "Old things are passed away."

Ver. 38. Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?—*Living to purpose*:—I. THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING AN OBJECT IN LIFE. There is a vast difference between the state of a man when running a race, and when sauntering about to kill time. There is an equal difference between the men who pass through this city on business, and those who come to the metropolis merely to see sights. Plant yourself upon London Bridge, the city side, about nine o'clock in the morning, and look into the faces of the men who are crossing that bridge. Go into the National Gallery, or into the British Museum, any day when these places are thronged, and look into the faces of the persons who are there. A very different state of thought and feeling you will find revealed by those faces. Now in this difference we see the importance of a well-defined and all-commanding object. An object in life sufficient for a man, brings him out, educates him. The prize calls out the school-boy who contends for it; the honours of the university elicit the mind, and the scholarship of the man who wrangles for them—and any object has a similar effect, the pursuit of which fully calls out a man's powers. This is education. Instruction is not education. Education, as the very word implies, is the calling forth of what is within a man; and the objects and subjects of pursuit do more in our education than the mere reading and study of books.

Desiring a particular end, and determining to obtain it, the man asks, What have I that I can use in order to reach this end? An object calls out a man. And an object keeps the man out. It calls him out, and maintains the manifestation and the development. He is not like the snail, but is like the bee, or as the ant. His powers are never withdrawn—in all working time they are outstretched. Neither is there incessant and useless change in his operations. He who gads about to change his way, having no fixed and definite object, but changing his object almost with the change from month to month, and from season to season, never lays hold of anything that is worth securing. But a man with a good object, with a commanding object, and a sufficient object, cannot afford to be unstable. Now, if a man's powers be called out, and kept out amid obstacles and conflicting circumstances, the education of the man is yet further advanced. He is opposed, say, in the pursuit of his object. Well, this opposition keeps the earnestness and the seriousness alive within him. It is a great advantage to be opposed in the pursuit of our object. If men will only take opposition with good temper, and be quiet, and of a meek and patient spirit, they will always be the better for it. Annoyances arise—he feels that if he yields to them he shall be unfitted for his pursuit. What does he? He keeps down his susceptibilities to fretfulness, and he learns quietness of heart. How soon the man learns this, who is in constant intercourse with the Saviour about all the objects of his pursuit, and who tells Him everything that dwells on his mind about everybody, and about every circumstance! He can see the invisible; he can assure his heart of what his hand does not now grasp—and thus he is educated by his object.

II. WHILE IT IS IMPORTANT THAT EVERY MAN SHOULD HAVE SOME OBJECT, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAT THE OBJECT OF PURSUIT TO EVERY MAN SHOULD BE GOOD. Say that a man sets out with fame as his end. He means to be known; he means to get into every newspaper. Such a one does everything to be seen and to be spoken of. That which will not tell upon his reputation he will not do. He wishes the trumpet to call attention to everything which he executes; he wishes to be called the best scholar, or the noblest patriot, or the richest merchant, or the most devoted philanthropist of his day. He wishes to be called first; and he pursues that end. Now, such an end will make a man proud and vain. In all matters of morality and religion such a man will be most unsteady. Consider wealth a man's object. He plans and labours to get money—to get it for spending or for hoarding; and money is the man's goal. This will make him narrow-minded, and selfish in heart. Men will rise and fall in his estimation according to their possessions, and objects will be pursued as they secure to him money. Perhaps this was the goal of Judas; and see what effect it produced upon him. He lost his soul in running to it. Consider power a man's end. He lives and toils to subdue others to himself. This makes a man ungenerous, cruel, unjust, and often impious. Admit pleasure to be a man's object. This destroys the proportions of the human constitution, and throws out of their right and proper place the several parts of our human nature. Now, put in contrast with fame, money, power, as the chief end of man, the good of others. Say that men are living to effect some object in connection with the well-being of their fellows; then you have such a character as that of John Howard, Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry, Buxton. Howard's object, as you know, was the release and the relief of the prisoner; and while John Howard's disposition led to the choice of this pursuit, that disposition to do good grew marvellously under the training influence of his object. Wilberforce was naturally sympathetic, but his efforts for the slave marvellously enlarged his heart. Buxton would have been a noble man anywhere, but his pursuit of the extinction of slavery made him grow like the palm-tree, and flourish like the cedar in Lebanon. Many a female culprit would confess their obligations to Mrs. Fry; but Newgate was a school of grace to the prisoners' friend and teacher: and if she could hear us talking of her now, she would say to us, "Speak not of anything I did, but rather tell what all this did for me. It was far more blessed for me to communicate, and to give, and to strive in that prison to do good, than it ever was simply to receive." (*S. Martin, M.A.*)

As to gadabouts:—The illustration by which this prophet of tears deplores the vacillation of the nation to whom he wrote, is a homely one. Now they wanted alliance with Egypt, and now with Assyria, and now with Babylon, and now they did not know what they wanted, and the behaviour of the nation reminded the prophet of a man or woman who, not satisfied with home life, goes from place to place gadding about, as we say, never settled anywhere or in anything, and

he cries out to them: "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?" Well, the world has now as many gadabouts as it had in Bible times. Gadabouts among occupations, among religious theories, among churches, among neighbourhoods, and one of the greatest wants of the Church and the world is more steadfastness and more fixedness of purpose. It was no small question that Pharaoh put to Jacob and his sons when he asked, "What is your occupation?" Getting into the right occupation not only decides your temporal welfare, but may decide your eternal destiny. Last summer a man of great genius died. He had the talents of twenty men in surgical directions, but he did not like surgery, and he wanted to be a preacher. He could not preach. I told him so. He tried it on both sides of the sea, but he failed, because he turned his back on that magnificent profession of surgery, which has in our time made such wonderful achievement that it now heals a broken neck, and by the X ray explores the temple of the human body, as if it were a lighted room. For forty years he was gadding about among the professions. Do not imitate him. Ask God what you ought to be, and He will tell you. It may not be as elegant a style of work as you would prefer. It may be callous and begrime your hands, and put you in suffocating atmosphere, and stand you shoulder to shoulder with the unrefined, but remember that if God calls you to do one thing you will never be happy in doing something else. All the great successes have been gained through opposition and struggle. "Hard pounding," said Wellington at Waterloo,— "hard pounding, gentlemen; but we will see who can pound the longest." Yes, my friends, that is the secret, not flight from obstacles in the way, but "who can pound the longest." The gadabouts are failures for this life, to say nothing of the next. There are many who exhibit this frailty in matters of religion. They are not sure about anything that pertains to their soul or their eternal destiny. Now they are Unitarians, and now they are Universalists, and now they are Methodists, and now they are Presbyterians, and now they are nothing at all. They are not quite sure that the Bible was inspired, or, if inspired, whether the words or the ideas were inspired, or whether only part of the book was inspired. Gadding about among religious theories, and never satisfied. All the evidence is put before them, and why do they not render a verdict? If they cannot make up their mind with all the data put before them they never will. If it is a good book, your eternal happiness depends upon the adoption of its teachings. Once and for ever make up your mind whether it is the book of God or the book of villainous pretenders. So, also, many are unfixed in regard to their spiritual condition, and day after day, and year after year go gadding about among hopes and fears and anxieties. Why do you not find out whether you are His or not? There are all the broad invitations of the Gospel. Accept them. There are all the assurances. Apply them. This moment you have all the information pointing to the road that terminates at the gate of the Golden City, and the voyage that anchors in the haven of eternal rest. Why go on guessing when you have all the facts before you? My text also addresses those who in search of happiness are going hither and yonder looking for that which they find not. Let all the gadabouts for happiness know that in kindness and usefulness and self-abnegation are to be found a satisfaction which all the gaieties of the world aggregated cannot afford. Among the race of gadabouts are those who neglect their homes in order that they may attend to institutions that are really excellent, and do not so much ask for help as demand it. One bad habit these gadabouts, masculine or feminine, are sure to get, and that is of scandal-distribution. Such gadabouts have little prospect of heaven. If they got there they would try to create jealousy among the different ranks of celestials. Therefore let us resolve that we will concentrate upon what is right thought and right behaviour, and waste no time in vacillations and indecisions and uncertainties, running about in places where we have no business to be. Life is so short, we have no time to play with it the spendthrift. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 37. **The Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them.**—*The danger of false confidences:*—In the state and conduct of Judah we have a picture of the state and conduct of the world, in religious matters, at the present day; and as that nation, by their distrust of God and want of reliance on His power and goodness, wrought for themselves the degradation and the miseries of a long captivity, so those who are seeking for themselves present and eternal peace by any other means than those which God has appointed, and are lulling

their souls into security by false confidences, are "heaping up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." I. THE GENERAL MERCY OF GOD IS THE GROUND OF CONFIDENCE WITH MANY, BUT THIS IS A CONFIDENCE WHICH THE LORD HATH REJECTED. The Scriptures are full of declarations which show the utter fallacy of this trust. We may assure ourselves that those who hold to it have ideas of sin very different from those given us in "that sure Word of Prophecy unto which we do well that we take heed." Let us ponder the fact, that if man, as the Scriptures tell us, was formed in the image of God, by every act of transgression we must be effacing that image, and spoiling God's most glorious workmanship; and if God can look upon such a thing with indifference, and allow it to pass with impunity, He must be reckoned as altogether heedless of the grossest interference with His wise purposes which we can possibly suppose. Now, is such a thing at all countenanced in the Scriptures? No. "God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Evil cannot dwell with Him, nor fools stand in His sight." And so jealous is He of His glory, that in His dealing with the first of our race He annexed the penalty of death to transgression. Adam transgressed, and he died, spiritually and temporally. And where in this is the evidence of a God all mercy? Why did not paradise smile on our first parents as before? Why did the sword of the cherubim keep them out from their first and most beautiful habitation? It was because God is a God of justice, and His veracity stood pledged for the fulfilment of His righteous threatening. And He stands as pledged still with regard to all but those who, being in Christ Jesus, have escaped condemnation. "Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup." And hath He said it, and will He not do it; hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? II. MANY TRUST TO THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD, BUT THIS ALSO IS A CONFIDENCE WHICH THE LORD HATH REJECTED. Do and live is the motto of the religion of such persons. They purpose to get to life, and their way to it is by keeping the commandments. God, say they, has annexed the promise of future felicity to obedience, and we obey that that felicity may be ours for a reward. Now, this would do very well, did we retain our original standing with God; but whether man be now that holy being he was when God pronounced him to be very good, let the state of the world, let your own hearts witness. The conscience of every man who knows aught of the law of God, and is at all accustomed to compare his conduct and his feelings with its requirements, will testify, that it is as true now as on the day when it was written that all "have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But many, who "trust to themselves that they are righteous," will endeavour to get rid of these considerations, by saying, that though they have sinned, they have repented: that is, they have felt sorry for their sin, and that God will receive penitence as an atonement. This is trifling with the character of God, and with that righteous government which it is His immutable purpose to maintain throughout the whole of His dominions. Even human legislators have not failed to see how subversive such a principle would be of the good of civil society if put in practice in the world. Would it be right—would it be consistent with good government, that crime should go unpunished, if the criminal, when brought to the bar of justice, should express sorrow for his offence? All know that it would not. And will God fail to vindicate His law, His justice, His veracity because of a few sorrowing tears and sighs? But it is said that Jesus, by His obedience and suffering, has obtained an abatement of the law; that He has softened it down in order to fit it to human infirmity; that it is not a perfect, but a sincere obedience that is required; and that if we fall short in any thing, the merit of Christ comes in to supply the deficiency. 1. We observe that Christ came for no such purpose as to temper the law to our infirm circumstances; for if the law was originally right, if that wisdom which enacted it, and which cannot err, saw it to be fit and necessary, it must be immutably so. What! did Christ die that we should not be obliged to love God and our neighbour, so much as we were originally bound to do? Did He give Himself to procure for us a liberty to sin with impunity? No one in soberness of spirit will say so. 2. But, with regard to the merit of Christ supplying only for the little that we may have fallen short, we observe, that it is altogether at variance with every dictate of Scripture on the subject of the sinner's salvation. Was not the sacrifice of Christ a full satisfaction to Divine justice? Did He not magnify the law, and make it honourable? And can it be necessary that to His infinite satisfaction and merit we should

add our obedience, soiled and imperfect as it must be at best, in order to obtain pardon and acceptance with God? What an unhallowed mixing of the clean and unclean; what a confounding of Christ and Belial would be here! Besides, why will men be so perverse as to seek justification by the law, whether it be abated, as it is not, or whether it stands in its original force, as it does to those who are under it, and as a rule of life to all? Why will men be so perverse, when it is said so pointedly, that "by the deeds of the law no living flesh shall be justified"? We apprehend that, to every candid person, the foregoing considerations are sufficient to show how unsafe a foundation, on which to build for eternity, are our own righteousness, and those things connected with it which we have noticed. What, then, is the confidence, by depending on which we may look forward securely to eternity? It is the righteousness of Jesus, made ours by imputation, and received by that faith which is of the operation of God. III. TOO MANY CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH A BARE SPECULATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUE WAY OF SALVATION, AND THIS IS A CONFIDENCE WHICH THE LORD HATH REJECTED. There is a form of godliness without the power. In order to a real saving knowledge of the subject of redemption, we must have a deep impression of the truths which the subject involves: the deep depravity of our nature; our alienation from God; the hatefulness and repugnancy of sin to the Divine nature; our inability to rescue ourselves from perdition; the love, the wisdom, the condescension, all infinitely displayed in the plan and the execution of our redemption, and the readiness and ability of Christ to save. (*P. M'Guffie.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-5. *Return again to Me, saith the Lord.*—*The backslider invited to return.*—We have here a wonderful display of God's character: forbearance, pity, and love. I. WHAT IS INFERRED. A departure from God. 1. The life of an ungodly man is one long departure from God. Every step he takes leads him farther away. 2. What departures we find even in the holiest and best! Secret neglects. Seductions in daily avocations and companions. Tampering with sin. II. WHAT IS DECLARED. A returning to God as a promising God, as a forgiving God, as our God and Father in Christ Jesus, in real humiliation of spirit before Him; for "whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy." Observe, the return is not a mere turning away from sin; it is finding the way back again to God. The very fruit and work of the blessed Spirit. III. WHAT IS DISPLAYED. Touching tenderness. 1. God Himself speaks. 2. He points to the Cross. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Return to God.*—1. Let Christian believers behold in these words with whom it is that they have to do. There have been times when the Lord made you rejoice before Him—when your fellowship with Him was delight. And so He would have had you to continue. But your joy changed into sorrow, your light was quenched in darkness; not because you were forsaken, but because you forsook. You did evil in the sight of the Lord, and He delivered you into the hands of the Philistines. But He did not forsake you utterly, nor cast you off for ever. He brought you back, and restored to you "the joy of His salvation." Soon you forgot it all. You did evil again in His sight. He departed from you, and you were carried captive by your enemies. In the land of Babylon you wept, and hung your tuneless harps upon the willows, for you could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land! You remembered Zion, and eagerly longed that your captivity might come to an end. And the Lord ended your captivity and brought you back. Yet, notwithstanding all your sad experiences, you have again and again forgotten and forsaken Him. What should be your feelings when you think of these things? Should there be any sorrow like unto your sorrow? Yet be not afraid; conclude not that your sins must of necessity have separated for ever between you and God; say not that for you there is no hope in Israel, and no place left for repentance. Had you to do with man it might be so. Were you to be dealt with as you have sinned, it could not but be so. But the Lord God is merciful and gracious. His love continues as strong as ever. He cannot bear to give you up. He compassionates your weakness. He laments your folly. 2. Let those who are still in the gall

of bitterness—alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, be assured that this language is addressed even to them. You are His, although you are now strangers and foreigners; for His hand did form you, and you were not designed to be His enemies. You have chosen to be so; but all the enmity is on your side. Your enemy He has never been; nor is He now your enemy! He is emphatically the friend of sinners. (*R. J. Johnstone, M.A.*)

Backsliding process.—A church is sometimes astounded by the fall of some professor in it: this is the fruit, not the seed or the beginning of backsliding. So a man is laid on a sick-bed, but the disorder has only now arrived at its crisis; it has for some time been working in his system, and has at length burst out and laid him low. So the sin of departing from God and secretly declining has been going on while the profession has still been maintained; the process of backsliding has been working silently yet surely until a temptation has at last opened the way for its bursting forth, to the scandal of God's people and true religion. In the sight of God the man was fallen before, we only now have first discovered it. (*H. G. Salter.*)

Therefore the showers have been withholden.—God inflicting punishment on those who turn away from Him.—If God is immanent in the universe, not a Deity immeasurable distances away from His creation; if without Him it could not hold together for a moment, there is nothing unreasonable in the thought that He should sometimes show resentment at the spirit of evil, indicate some emotion at least in the presence of ingratitude. We do the same ourselves. Parents sometimes give children to feel that the penalty of ill-behaviour is the withdrawal of a privilege, the abbreviation of a holiday, the suspension of a pleasure. Sometimes by deprivation God inflicts punishment upon those who turn away from Him. In this case the penalty was one of deprivation—the showers had been withholden. Sometimes the penalty is positive, and there are too many showers. God drowns the world that denies Him. He does not withhold the showers for want of water; the deluge is always ready: the river of God is full of water. It may be unscientific and ignorant to think that God interferes with nature, but it stands to our highest reason as a probable truth. If He made it, He may interfere with it; if He constructed it, He may sometimes wind it up, visit it, operate upon it, assert His eternal proprietorship. If the great landlord allows us to walk through his fields freely and joyously, he may sometimes, say, once in twenty-one years, put up a fence or a boundary, which being interpreted means, This path is mine, not yours; the boundary will be taken down again to-morrow, but it is here to-day to signify that you have acquired no rights by constant use. It is not an unnatural intervention, nor do we see that it is an unreasonable intervention on the part of God if we deny Him, neglect Him, scorn Him, operate wholly against the spirit of His holiness, that He should now and again withhold the shower, or send such deluges upon the earth as shall wash away our seed and make a desert of our garden. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The chief cause of calamities.—Great honour has always been paid by all nations to their supposed gods, and it has always been reckoned a crime to rob them of the glory of which they were supposed to be so jealous. One of the Greek comedians in a stage play asks this question, "Who was the wicked author of the vines being blasted by the frost?" And he gives the answer, "He who gave the honours of the gods to men." This heathen writer teaches us a lesson when we fail to trace our trials to the first cause. Who shall say that some dishonour of the name of God may not be the cause of our afflictions? Sorrow does not come out of the dust. The seeds of disease are not driven about recklessly. The lightning does not strike by chance. There are reasons for what seems evil which we cannot trace, and perhaps one of the chief causes of the calamities which befall men may be found in their want of regard for the honour and glory of the Divine Name. (*Quiver.*)

Ver. 4. *Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?*—*The Divine Guide*.—We are all travellers, but are not all travelling in the same direction. We need a guide. There is only One to be relied upon. I. *WHY WE NEED A GUIDE*. 1. Because of our ignorance of the way. 2. Because of our liability to take the wrong path. 3. Because of our liability to leave the right path after we have chosen it. II. *WE SHOULD TAKE GOD AS OUR GUIDE*. 1. Because He knows the way. 2. Because He knows the trials that will befall us. 3. Because He knows the perils that we shall encounter. 4. Because He is our Father, and therefore kind and considerate. III. *WE SHOULD*

ASK GOD TO GUIDE US NOW. 1. Because the present time is the best. 2. Because the present time is the safest. 3. Because the present may be the only time. (*Homilist.*) *Taking God as our Guide in youth*.—I. IT IS DUE TO GOD. 1. He is your Maker, who gives you all things; therefore He has a supreme and sole right to you. 2. He has bought you at a vast expense, that you might be delivered from the curse of sin and the wrath to come. If an artist pays a large sum of money to get back his own painting from some one into whose hands it has fallen, and then labours to improve it, would you not say that he has a good title to such painting? Thus with the ransomed children of God. II. IT WILL BE GOOD FOR YOURSELVES. 1. You need a guide. (1) Consider your character. Ignorance of the future, and without experience, should you not tremble to go alone? (2) Consider your situation. The road is beset with dangers, infested with robbers, filled with bypaths! (3) Consider the importance of your steps. Begin to wander, and who shall tell the issue? Worn out with fatigue, benighted in that trackless wilderness, you fall a prey to the forest-beast, or are dashed in pieces over a hidden precipice. One evil habit may lead you to ruin, must cause you pain and trouble. One false step in youth may mar you for ever. 2. God is infinitely the best Guide. That He is a sure and safe Guide, none can doubt. He is wise, knows all things, and can proportion trials to your strength. He never fails. You live in a world of changes; but He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. But He is also a pleasant Guide. He is powerful to bring you out of trouble; He is gracious in it. In the day of the east wind He stays His rough wind, and "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." (*J. C. Herdman, M.A.*) *God's tender expostulation with the young*.—I. THE PARTICULARS OF THE PROPOSAL. 1. That you should make God your Father; to love, honour, and obey. 2. To choose God for the Guide of your youth; to regard His authority, follow His will, and comply with His directions. (1) By His Word. (2) By His Spirit. 3. To do these things instantly, without delay. II. MOTIVES FOR COMPLIANCE. 1. The grace and condescension of the proposal. 2. The reasonableness of such a proceeding. Refuse the offer of His heavenly guidance, and you will be like a vessel in a boisterous sea without a pilot to direct your course. 3. The seasonableness of the proposal. "From this time." The time past cannot be recalled. You may deeply regret that you have hitherto neglected to make God your Father, and to choose Him for the Guide of your youth. But regret will not recover the time which is past. Opportunities lost are gone for ever. Your business is to improve those which remain. The present time is still your own. (*E. Cooper, M.A.*) *God the Guide of youth*.—I. THE PROPOSAL. 1. It requires penitence. You must feel your depravity and lament your guilt. 2. It includes prayer. A life of communion with God. 3. It implies yielding yourself up to God, to walk in His ways, be guided by His counsel, and glorify His name. II. YOUR OBLIGATIONS. To whom will you give your affections if you withhold them from Him? III. ADVANTAGES TO BE GAINED BY COMPLIANCE. 1. Safety. While leaning on your own wisdom, and walking in your own strength, you are liable to stray, stumble, fall. 2. Happiness. "In His favour is life." "No peace to the wicked." 3. Honour. Associated with the servants of God, angels, archangels, &c. Yes, and with Christ Himself, whose meek was to do God's will. IV. COMBAT OBJECTIONS. 1. Sins too great for pardon. Christ's grace sufficient. 2. So weak. He takes by the hand, helps, upholds. 3. What need for being so religious? But you have no religion at all, if not wholly in earnest. 4. Not yet. This is impious as well as foolish. Every day and hour you are on the brink of death. V. YOUR REPLY. Only two answers: will, or will not. Turn not away. (*J. Woodbridge.*) *The importance of early dedication to God*.—I. THE ASSUMPTION. That the person is in a state of unregeneracy. Multitudes are thus. Refusing to listen to God. In the neglect of the claims of God there is an amount of daring of which we can hardly form a conception, especially in the case of the child of many prayers. II. THE IMITATION. Why should you from this time say, "Thou art the Guide of my youth?" 1. The claims of Him who asks it. 2. The dangers of delay. 3. The final consequences of refusal. (*D. E. Ford.*) *God condescending to be the Guide of youth*.—I. HAS NOT GOD ALREADY ACTED A MOST WISE AND FRIENDLY PART? 1. Review your general privileges. Who formed you from nothing into being? who assigned you a rank among human creatures? who prepared in a parent's heart the affections which welcomed and nourished the helpless stranger? who reared you up to youth? who kindled the dawn of reason? whose hand opened for you the warm and widening circle of friendship?

2. You are bound by peculiar obligations. It is no small thing that an heritage has been found for you in Britain. You are not the children of savages, mingling in their barbarous manners. II. IS NOT GOD ABLE TO FILL UP, THROUGH ALL FUTURE PERIODS, THE RELATIONS TO WHICH HE INVITES YOUR NOTICE? He offers Himself as a Father and as a Guide. His power, His wisdom, and His goodness will support the titles. III. DOES NOT THE SEASON OF YOUTH NEED SUCH A FATHER AND SUCH A GUIDE? What can preserve the morals of youth? Shall the frail bark live in the tempest? Shall flames surround a military magazine, and not produce an explosion? Can a lamb make its way through a herd of wolves? IV. MAY NOT THE SEASON OF YOUTH BE THE ONLY ONE THAT SHALL DISPLAY SUCH ADVANTAGES AS ARE ATTACHED TO IT? You know not that you shall survive this age; that you are under sentence is felt by yourselves, and sometimes lamented. Can you charm death away? Can you obtain a momentary respite? (*Evangelist.*) *An address to youth*.—I. YOUTH NEEDS A GUIDE.

1. We are expressly assured by the prophet, "That the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." And if this be true of old travellers who have long been moving Zion-ward, how much more of those who are only beginning to start! 2. There is one kind of knowledge in which the young must be deficient—that which is derived from trial, and which we call experience. 3. Now, too, the passions and appetites begin to rage in their violence. These becloud the understanding, and prevent reflection; and rendering them averse to reproof and impatient of control, urge them on, and plunge them into a thousand improprieties and embarrassments. II. GOD IS READY TO BECOME YOUR LEADER, and it is your duty and privilege to place yourselves under His direction. He is infinitely wise, and cannot lead you astray. He has conducted millions; and "the wayfaring man, though a fool, has not erred" under His direction. He is infinitely powerful. He can support you under the heaviest burdens, deliver you from every adversary, and "make all things work together for your good." He is infinitely kind. He will bear with your infirmities, and sympathise with you in all your troubles. And He is infinitely faithful: not a word shall fail of all that He has spoken. III. HOW YOU ARE TO ENGAGE HIS ATTENTION. "Cry unto" Him. This familiar expression intends prayer and supplication; and it prevents you from using as an excuse for the omission of the duty—that you are not masters of words, and cannot deliver yourselves in proper language. For what is prayer? Is it not the desire of the heart towards God? If you cannot pray—cannot you cry unto Him? IV. THERE ARE PARTICULAR SEASONS IN WHICH HE EXPECTS TO BE SOUGHT AFTER BY THE YOUNG, and from which He dates the expostulation—"Wilt thou not from this time," &c. 1. When they leave the house of their friends, and the wing of their relations. 2. When bereaved of their parents. 3. At the commencement of a new period of life. 4. When the young see friends or companions carried off by a premature death. 5. At times of peculiar convictions and impressions. (*W. Jay.*) *Youth encouraged to seek unto God*.—I. THE IMPORT OF THIS LANGUAGE. 1. Gratitude. 2. Confidence. 3. Prayer. 4. A determined compliance with God's will. II. THE FORCE OF THE APPEAL MADE BY GOD. 1. Tender expostulation. 2. Seasonable admonition. 3. As arising from events which point out most clearly your need of an interest in the Divine favour. (*R. Winter, D.D.*) *God to be chosen as a Guide by the young*.—I. YOU GREATLY NEED SOME FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE GUIDANCE IN THE SHAPING OF YOUR LIVES. 1. Because the path of duty and of safety is often exceedingly difficult to find. Often, when determining what you are bound to accept as duty or to receive as truth, you have many circumstances to consider, many probabilities to estimate, many opposing arguments to weigh. While the general direction in which you are to move, if you intend to live wisely, is obvious enough, you may still find perplexities at every point, to extricate yourself from which will try, perhaps baffle, your utmost wisdom. Who is sufficient for these things? 2. Because your own strong impulses are likely to mislead you. It is easy to believe that to be right or useful which accords with inclination. It is hard to think that to be obligatory, or best, to which the feelings are averse, and which involves the necessity of self-denial. 3. Because there are many who will studiously seek your ruin. (1) There are found even in the best conditions of society, the openly debased and vicious. (2) Besides these, there are many—corrupt in heart—who will seek to reach you with influences fitted to destroy your virtuous sentiments, and principles, and ultimate well-being. 4. Because so many are continually ruined. Where many fall, there is reason that all should fear,

II. THE REASONABLENESS, THE WISDOM, OF MAKING GOD YOUR GUIDE. 1. You owe it to God Himself thus to honour Him with your confidence. It is His right. 2. God alone can afford you a sufficient guidance. Where can you find another to whose care and leading you can safely and without anxiety commit the infinitely precious interests of your being? III. WHEN SHOULD GOD'S OFFERED GUIDANCE BE ACCEPTED? "From this time." 1. The present is a practicable time—a time in which without hindrance God may be intelligently and cordially accepted as a guide. 2. The present is the very time that God Himself proposes. "Remember now thy Creator." 3. It is at the present time that your need of the blessing in question is becoming manifest and urgent. 4. The present may not improbably be the only time in which you will have it in your power to secure the Divine guidance (Prov. i. 24-29). (*Ray Palmer, D.D.*) *Divine guidance for life's journey*.—Rev. Mark Guy Pearse says: "I have read somewhere of one of our naval officers who sailed from Mexico round the Cape Horn to Rio, a distance of eight thousand miles, and for ninety days neither touched land nor scarcely saw a sail. At last he judged himself to be some twenty miles from Rio, and lay-to for the night. The next morning it was a dense fog, and he came on very cautiously, and when the fog suddenly lifted there in front of them rose the well-known Sugar-loaf Rock at the entrance of Rio Harbour. Thus it is that in spite of the great and wide sea where no land-marks or guide-marks are, where are restless tides and currents and changeful winds, yet heaven stoops to teach men if they will be taught. The sun in the heavens gives every day its unerring counsel, the stars come out at night to whisper their cheery assurance. So He bringeth men to their desired haven. Now, if men can believe that, and so believe it as to trust themselves to it, I do not wonder that any can doubt that heaven bends over us to teach us where we are and whither we are going. If it is scientific to believe that heaven can guide us over the great sea, it does seem to be just simple common sense to think that heaven can lead us safe." *God the best Guide*.—The sailor, out on the restless sea, has one unfailing star to which he can always look with confidence, knowing that it will always be found at the same place. He may perhaps admire the brilliancy of Venus, or look with wonder at the ever-changing moon, but when he wants to take his bearings he looks at the unfailing, unchangeable polar-star. Thank God that we have an unfailing Guide that will remain the same when the heavens have passed away. He, our Lord and Master, is the one absolutely unfailing star of hope to which we can look with implicit confidence.

Ver. 5. *Thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst.*—*The limitation of evil*.—I. SOME OF THE RESTRAINING INFLUENCES OF LIFE. "As thou couldst." By many considerations we are restrained from fulfilling the evil impulses and designs of which we are conscious; our potential wickedness is not allowed to become actual. 1. There is the restraint imposed by revelation. The possession of God's Word was a grand discipline to the people of Israel. To know the moral perfections of God, to discern the moral significance of human life, to possess the moral law expressed with such clearness, fulness, and force, was a rare privilege. This kept Israel back from the things of lust and cruelty and shame which defiled and destroyed their heathen neighbours. Are we not to-day restrained by the same gracious influence? Our poet speaks of "the silver streak" that comes between us and the Continent, delivering our nation from fears, wars, and contagions. Is not that revelation which is in our hands a silver streak coming between us and contemporaneous paganism? 2. There is the restraint imposed by grace. The direct Divine action on our mind, will, conscience, feeling. This was the master-restraint of the antediluvian world. As a horse is held in by bit and bridle, as a ship on some rocky coast is held by her anchor, so have we all in dangerous days been restrained by the Spirit of grace. Let men quench that Spirit, and the disastrous consequence is soon revealed. 3. There is the restraint imposed by society. Our civilisation, which is the grace of God organised, is full of restraining influences to which we owe far more than we sometimes think. The civil law. Public opinion. Social etiquette. Business. Domesticity. If it should be suggested that the laws, institutions, and properties of society which forbid excess are themselves expressions of the moral sense, it will at once be palpable to most that these circumscriptions are dictated by fear, policy, and selfishness rather than by any love of righteousness for its own sake. That one wolf holds another wolf in check must not be

construed to mean that we are a flock of lambs. II. NOTWITHSTANDING THE RESTRAINTS OF LIFE, WE DISCOVER THE WICKEDNESS OF OUR NATURE BY GOING AS FAR AS POSSIBLE IN THE DIRECTION OF TRANSGRESSION. Israel hitherto had abstained from the extreme acts of transgression which would have involved immediate retribution, but they showed their disposition by playing with the fire, by trifling on the edge of the abyss. So in these days we show what we really are by going as far as we dare or can in actual disobedience. We go as far as our material will permit. "As thou couldest." As thou couldest with impunity. We are intemperate, with a due regard to our health; freer indulgence would destroy us, and that is not what we mean. We are uncharitable, with a due regard to our reputation; we must not infringe the law of libel. We are ambitious and vain; but our ostentation must be limited by considerations of pride and covetousness. As thou couldest with decency. We must not qualify our reputation; we must not be guilty of bad manners, bad form, bad taste. As thou couldest with advantage. Carrying out unrighteousness right up to the point where it ceases to be lucrative, and breaking it off just there. And let none conclude that sins toned down by such considerations are of less malignant quality, or less offensive before God, than are sins of a more violent or exaggerated order. III. MANY WOULD AT ONCE PROCEED TO GREATER LENGTHS OF WICKEDNESS IF THE RESTRICTIVE INFLUENCES OF LIFE WERE WITHDRAWN.

I. Note the extent to which men resist these saving influences. As some engineers are wishful to drive a tunnel under the Channel and establish immediate relations with the Continent, so men are busy in all directions ingeniously attempting to evade the silver streaks which heaven has mercifully placed between them and the excesses of passion and appetite. The criticism of the Bible in the literary world, the impatience felt with it in the individual life, are frequently nothing more than a revolt against its noble righteousness. We fret at the narrowness of the way which leadeth unto life. In the name of free thought, of a free press, of free institutions, the nude in art must be encouraged, "outspoken" writings protected, sexual life must be unfettered. With what strange infatuation do we rebel against and seek to escape the crystal deep which God has established between us and ruin! 2. The second sign of the irregularity and inordinateness of our desire is found in the popularity of certain imaginative literature. Modern society has put distinct and authoritative limits to many forms of indulgence; but human nature shows its old quality unchanged, for when it can no longer gratify itself in the actual world it betakes itself to the ideal world. Conclusion —1. Let us recognise the glory of God's preventing grace. The Dutch call the chain of dykes which protects their fields and their firesides from the wild sea, "the golden border." God's grace directly affecting our heart, or expressed in the constitution of society and the circumstances of life, is a golden border shutting out a raging threatening sea of evil. (2) Let us confess the folly of our self-righteousness. The consciousness of a self-righteousness often stands in the way of men attaining the righteousness which is of God, but the foregoing reflections show how little our self-righteousness is worth. Looking into our heart, we know ourselves to be worse than the world takes us to be. As Victor Hugo expresses it, "Our dark side is unfathomable. . . . One of the hardest labours of the just man is to expunge from his soul a malevolence which it is difficult to efface. Almost all our desires, when examined, contain what we dare not avow." (3) We see the necessity and urgency of the grace which converts and perfects. It is by no means wholly satisfactory that we are kept by restraining grace; the grace which converts us into a new self is what we must most earnestly covet and pursue. Christianity brings us a motive of unparalleled grandeur; it fills the soul with the highest visions, convictions, loves, ambitions. And there is a sublime concurrence of forces in its motive. (W. L. Watkinson.)

The sinner's desperate depravity:—I. GOD IN HIS PROVIDENCE HAS SURROUNDED THE SINNER WITH MANY CIRCUMSTANCES OPERATING POWERFULLY TO MODIFY HUMAN CHARACTER. 1. Education. This makes Christendom differ from the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty. 2. Human law. Look at some country in a state of anarchy. Look at some city or village where law is suspended. Look at France, while under the reign of terror, when law was abrogated, and see one company after another pass under the guillotine; and the executioners of to-day the victims of to-morrow; and, tell us, is not character greatly modified by municipal law? 3. The law of God. If men have no other belief in it, but that which may be denominated the faith of history, it still

greatly modifies human character. 4. The troublesome supervision of conscience. This everlasting censorship, while it has held men back from sin, has been hated, warred against, scowled upon, by the whole human family. 5. The whole Gospel has modified human character beyond all calculation. It so commends itself to their reason, and applies such power to their consciences, that it becomes exceedingly difficult to understand it. It is so tender, majestic, commanding, and reasonable, that it for a time melts and overawes many who ultimately reject its provisions. 6. All the Gospel institutions—every thing associated with Christian worship operates in modifying human character, and rendering it in appearance better than it is. 7. The desire of heaven has the same effect. None, perhaps, are so abandoned as not to hope that they may, after all, live and be happy after death. 8. The fear of hell. 9. The expectation of judgment. 10. Public sentiment. 11. Domestic affection. The silken cords which entwine round the family circle prevent the commission of many a crime. II. BY THESE CIRCUMSTANCES EVERY SINNER IS ACTUALLY RESTRAINED IN HIS WICKEDNESS, AND HELD DOWN IN HIS DOWNWARD CAREER. 1. Men are uneasy under these circumstances, which shows them to be restraints. Let men be unrestrained, and they will be easy. It is only pain of some kind that renders them uneasy, and willing to change their position. Hence they will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd. 2. Men are constantly trying to alter their circumstances. But they are too indolent by nature to try to alter their circumstances, unless they are circumstances of restraint. 3. When men at length alter their circumstances in any of these respects, they often show out a worse character; manifesting what they would have been before, if they might, if these restraints had been sundered and they let loose upon the world. 4. When these restraints are all removed, men are uniformly far more wicked than if they had not been imposed. III. EVERY SINNER DOES MAKE THE ATTEMPT, AND SUCCEEDS AS FAR AS GOD WILL LET HIM, TO SUNDER THESE LIGATURES THAT WOULD HOLD HIM FAST TO REASON, HOPE, AND HEAVEN. 1. See how he breaks over and breaks through the restraints of education. He tries to throw off what he knew of God, and all he had learned of the Saviour, and of the operations of the Holy Spirit; all he had learned of the operations of the Godhead, in the history of the Church. And when he cannot forget, he raves at his own recollections. 2. When he has tried for a time, but has tried in vain, to retrace the process of education, he finds himself reined in by human laws. If he cannot forget God, perhaps he can snap asunder the power of human control. He can evade all human ties. He can rise above the law, and tread it down like the mire of the street. Or he can violate its precepts and despise its regulations, and hold on and hold out in despite of all its sanctions, presuming in his heart that God will not know, neither will the Almighty consider it. Thus he blesses himself in his own delusion, and trusts for safety in his own righteousness. But he meets with more disturbance yet. 3. From the law of God. Impenitent and unbelieving, he has read in that law what, if he cannot put down, he is a ruined man: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." Thus is dashed, at the first stroke, the whole fabric of a dark and fatal idolatry. If man worships his money, or his merchandise, or his farm, or his friend, or anything but God, or gives anything else his supreme affection, even if he does not professedly worship it, he is condemned of God. And He adds, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." But how unfashionable it would be to care about this commandment, and let the apprehension that God "will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain," produce a serious moment, or a pang of distress! 4. Not quite so easily does he dispose of the troublesome supervision of conscience. This vicegerent of Heaven stays often many a month after open war is declared. It sometimes will hold close conference with the heart, although the heart may wish to be alone. It will not go to sleep in the grave: it will watch, even while the wretch is dying, to secure the honour of God, and gather courage for a fresh attack just by the dying pillow. And the agony of its first onset in the unseen world, hard by the place of dying, devils cannot know. For they have never spurned a dying Saviour, and they have never died. But all the embrasures that can be opened upon the soul by this moral avenger must be closed, or its eternal thunders will be heard and felt. 5. But still he has a slight conflict with the institutions of the Gospel. Every church-going bell fills his conscience with guilt, and each return of the day of rest reminds him of a mother's prayers. He must pervert its holy design, or writhe under the lashes of a guilty conscience.

6. The hardened sinner would dislodge himself from all thought of heaven or fear of hell. And yet these are very powerful ligatures, and often the last to be sundered. When men think of relinquishing heaven, they sometimes forget that awakening previous question, "If I abandon the thought of heaven, where shall I then be? What means that worm which never dies? What mean those chains of darkness—and that gnashing of teeth—and that quenchless fire?"

7. The sinner must have broken through all the restraints of public sentiment, before we can know how bad he would be; and this ligature he tries to snap asunder. But he will find that public very populous, before he gets through. After he has gone his round with mortals, and has learned not to care what men think of his conduct, he must cease, too, to care what is thought of his deeds in heaven.

8. There yet remains to be noticed one of the most powerful motives of restraint, the domestic affections. It is impossible to guess what men would be, till they throw off the hold, for instance, that a mother has upon a profligate son. (D. A. Clark.)

Vers. 6-11. **Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.**—*Comparative criminality*.—I. STATE THIS DECISION OF THE LORD. 1. Israel, from the time they became a distinct nation, cast off God; therefore, given into Assyrian captivity and divorced by God. 2. Judah had retained the worship of God, but revelled in idolatry. 3. Because of their apparent superiority, Judah would scarcely own her relationship to Israel. 4. Though their sins were ostensibly less, they were committed with tenfold aggravations. Their advantages had been greater; larger number of prophets sent them; enjoyed stated ordinances; presence of God in their midst (in Temple). II. CONFIRM THIS DECISION OF THE LORD. Specious insincerity is worse than open profaneness, because—1. It argues a deeper depravity of heart. 2. It casts more dishonour upon God. 3. It does more extensive injury to man. Address—(1) Those who are careless about religion. (2) Those who profess religion. (C. Simeon, M.A.) **Judah hath not turned unto Me with her whole heart, but feignedly.**—*Hypocrisy*.—The word "feignedly" is literally, with a lie. See the picture: here is one figured as a penitent woman, who comes to pray—in other words, to tell lies in the sanctuary, and to heap up falsehoods upon the altar where the fire has gone out. But is this possible? It is not only possible, it is actual, it is the history of to-day. Could we but see things as they really are, we should see that the largest figure amongst many competitive figures is that of hypocrisy. That admits of many colours and many definitions and modifications. All hypocrisy is not the same as to external attitude and bulk and colour. How subtle it is! It likes a little prayer; it does not object to go where the music is good, and where the preaching is pointless; it can speak smoothly, when it is full of anger; it can promise musically, and disappoint mockingly and triumphantly; it can sit like a saint, whilst its heart is far away or is plotting mischief. There is, then, a return to God which is no return; there is a going to church which is not going to church; there is a piety which is impious; there is a calling to God as Father which God Himself replies to ironically, as if men would call Him anything to flatter Him into the suspension of His judgment or the conferring of an immediate favour. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 12-15. **Return, thou backsliding Israel.**—*The backslider's return*.—I. THE INVITATION TO RETURN. 1. From one who (1) has been wronged (ver. 13); (2) might therefore justly be angry; (3) but is "merciful" (ver. 12). 2. To one who (1) has been grossly disobedient; (2) has been equally ungrateful; (3) is reaping consequences of disobedience and ingratitude. II. THE CONDITION OF RETURN. Confession is the condition of return, because—1. Genuine confession of sin can proceed only from genuine contrition for sin, which is not unfrequently brought about (Luke xv. 17) by a comparison of the lamentable consequences of backsliding, with happiness previously enjoyed. 2. "Godly sorrow" or genuine contrition "worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of"; i.e. it finds relief only in that confession which is the condition of return. True repentance involves—(1) Contrition for sin against God. (2) Confession of sin to God. (3) Return from sin "towards God" (Acts xx. 21). III. RESULTS OF THE RETURN. 1. God's anger will be averted (ver. 12). 2. God will Himself escort the wanderer home. 3. A happy future. Comprising (1) life under a rule which can commit no errors, legislative or judicial (ver. 15); (2) a

promise that the restored shall not "walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (ver. 17), the cause of their backsliding. (*H. A. Hall, B.D.*) *Return? Return!*—1. It is a fearful thing that a believer should backslide. (1) Such mercy has been shown to him. (2) Such love has been enjoyed by him. (3) Such prospects lie before him. (4) Such comfort is sacrificed by his backsliding. 2. It is a wretched business for the man himself, since by it nothing is gained, and everything is endangered. 3. It is injurious to the whole church to which the backslider belongs. 4. It is mischievous to the outside world. 5. What is the immediate duty of the backslider? the immediate remedy for his backsliding?—"Return."

I. WONDER AWAKENED BY THE CALL. 1. The usual jealousy of love. 2. The abundance of the sin (ver. 2). 3. The obstinate continuance in evil, notwithstanding chastisements (ver. 3). 4. The refusal of tender persuasion (ver. 4). 5. The perversion of mercy (ver. 5). 6. The warnings which had been despised (vers. 6-11). It is a great increase of iniquity when we perceive the suffering which it causes others, and yet persevere in it ourselves.

II. MEMORIES AROUSED BY THE CALL. 1. Does it not remind you of other days? (1) When you first came to Jesus. (2) When you were happy with other believers. (3) When you could teach and warn others. (4) When you began to go aside, a little. (5) When you have sinned grievously through this backsliding. 2. Indulge these memories till they affect your heart.

III. REASONS URGED FOR OBEYING THE CALL. 1. It is God Himself who utters it. 2. Anger will be removed (ver. 12). 3. Love continues (ver. 14). 4. Healing will be given (ver. 22).

IV. DIRECTIONS GIVEN TO MAKE OBEDIENCE TO THE CALL EASY. 1. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity" (ver. 13). What a simple matter! 2. Lament the evil (ver. 21). 3. Own the sad result (ver. 25). 4. Trust in God for restoration (ver. 23). 5. Heartily renew allegiance (ver. 22). **V. PROMISES MADE TO THOSE ANSWERING TO THE CALL.** 1. Special guidance (ver. 14). 2. Suitable food (ver. 15). 3. Spiritual insight (vers. 16, 17). 4. Childlike spirit (ver. 19). (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Backsliding.—Let us have up the backsliders, and ask them why they slid back. Of course they have excuses. All wrongdoers have. You interview any defaulting bank officer, &c., and they will tell you a tale of sweet and childlike artlessness to account for their weakness, as they will call it. 1. I was deluded into being confirmed by the urgent solicitations of the rector, or my parents, or my Sunday-school teacher. I was over-persuaded by my wife or my friends. I acted hastily. Now just put this into plain English and look at it. You were deluded into an attempt to rise to a higher plane. You were over-persuaded to strive to be a better man or woman. You acted hastily in resolving to strive to get the better of evil passions and ugly habits. How does that sound? 2. My rector said that there would be a great comfort in being a communicant, that it would bring a peaceful conscience, and a joy in life, and a satisfaction of heart. Now I did not find it so. After I became a communicant, my old bad feelings returned, and I gave way often to evil thoughts, words, and deeds, and the world did not change, and I was not very different, and so I stopped the whole thing. Now, if you had a very sick friend, and the doctor should leave pills which if steadily taken would bring relief, what would you reply on hearing your friend say after taking two or three, "I feel no better, I will take no more"? You would reply: "The doctor never said a dose or two would answer. He said that if persevered in the pills would bring relief." Would you blame the doctor or the medicine, if your friend's bad symptoms still continued? 3. It was such hard work. Why, there was no end to the care we had to take. We had to watch our words all the time to see that we let out no scandalous or ugly or impure ones, and our steps that we went nowhere which would be likely to peril our Christian profession. We found that to be consistent we had to struggle, and to meet opposition, and to go contrary to our own wishes, and when we fell, it was so hard to get back, we got discouraged and gave up. Young men have told me that, whom I saw, just to keep their places in the store, working like very galley slaves, thinking no self-denial too great to hold on there, rising early, going without sleep, hurrying through their meals, restraining their tempers, bearing patiently with troublesome customers and overbearing employers. Do you not see the awful inconsistency, the poor futility, of this excuse? (*C. Locke, D.D.*) *Israel invited to renew her marriage by repentance*.—I. GOD SENDS MESSENGERS OF MERCY AND NOT OF JUDGMENT (ver. 12). II. GOD REQUIRES THAT THEY HUMBLE THEMSELVES BEFORE HIM (ver. 13). III. GOD URGES THE MOST AFFECTING CONSIDERATIONS, IN ORDER TO PREVAIL UPON THEM. 1. The merciful disposition He felt

towards them. 2. The relation under which He still regarded them. 3. The benefits which He was still ready to confer upon them. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) A proclamation from the King of kings :—Backsliders are very many. Departing from the living God is no strange thing. Many Christians are one while hot, and another lukewarm, and even cold. They are diligent and fervent to-day, but idle and indifferent to-morrow. Even the best of believers are not always at their best. Who among us has not had cause to make confession that he has not kept up to his first love at all times; neither has his lamp been always clearly burning? I. THE PROCLAMATION: "Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord." 1. It was to be a proclamation, for God is King; and if His subjects rebel He does not lose the rights of His sovereignty. He sends, therefore, to them a royal message with all the power which belongs to the word of a king. "Go and proclaim." 2. This proclamation is sent to the worst of sinners, to the very basest of backsliders. They broke their marriage-bonds to the one living and true God, and made themselves loathsome in His sight by the most detestable idolatries. It is sad that there should have been such a race of backsliders; but it is glorious to think that to such as these the message of God's mercy was sent. 3. The Israelitish people were not only the worst kind of backsliders, but they had already reaped in a very large measure the result of their backslidings, for they had been carried away captive. They had suffered the loss of all things because they had departed from their God, and yet they had not learned the lesson which affliction was meant to teach. It was still needful to call them to repentance, and God bade them return to Him: His proclamation was to them. 4. I see some mercy, and that of no little kind, in the messenger who was sent to deliver this message, for it was Jeremiah, that man of a broken spirit, who could say of himself, "I am the man that hath seen affliction." II. A PRECEPT. It is a very simple one, and as short as it is clear. It is given in the proclamation,—*"Return, thou backsliding Israel."* 1. Return,—be as you were; come back: repent, and do your first works. Harken: this is the precept; return unto your Saviour; just as you are, come back to Him. Come back as you came at first, with your sin acknowledged, looking to His Cross for pardon. Did you grow too great, and think you could live without your Saviour? Return! Did you dream of being so perfect that you did not want His righteousness, for your own would suffice? Away with that glittering bauble, that idle notion of thy perfection, and come back, and beat upon thy breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Repent of thy pride, and return again to thy Lord Jesus Christ. 2. Return at once. Delays are always dangerous, but never so dangerous as when they are proposed by backsliders. 3. And come thou back with all thy heart. Let there be no mimic repentance; no pretended returning. Thou shalt find the Lord if thou seek Him with all thy heart, and all thy soul. 4. And mind that thou return practically; that is, that thy life shall be changed, thy idols broken, thy omitted duties fulfilled with eagerness, neglected means of grace pursued with fervour; that done which thou hast left undone, and that evil forsaken into which thou hast gone with such headlong folly. III. THE PROMISE. "I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you." See that anger, like a black cloud, charged not with refreshing rain, but with fire flakes that shall burn as they fall: ay, burn their way into the very core of your being, as with the fires of hell. Not a flake of it shall burn you if you return unto your God. There is full, free, and immediate forgiveness to be had. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins. Return unto Me." This is a grand motive for coming back: the sin that separates is put away. He will wash you thoroughly from your iniquity, and cleanse you from your sin, and whatsoever you need He will give to you, and He will not upbraid you. I find that the passage might be read, "I will not cause My face to fall upon you," meaning this—that if the child of God comes back, God will not look angry at him any more. "I will not cause My anger to fall upon you. I will not even cause My face to fall at the sight of you; but I will receive you graciously; I will in tender mercy put away your transgressions, and reveal My love to you." IV. THE ARGUMENT. 1. Here is, first, God's mercy. Nothing delights God more than to forgive sin: at this blessed work He is at home. He is happy at it; He finds pleasure in man's turning to Him, and finding life. Mercy as His last-born attribute. Until sin came there was no room for mercy—the mercy that forgives, and therefore mercy is God's Benjamin, the son of His right hand, and He delights to give to it ten times as much as to His other attributes when they feast together.

It is the heaven of His heaven to receive a hell-black sinner to His heart, and put away his sin. "I am merciful," saith the Lord. Therefore come to Him, and believe in His mercy; and doubt no longer, but lovingly receive what He lovingly gives. 2. As for you who once knew Him, and loved Him, and rejoiced in Him, I want you just to dwell on that second argument, namely, marriage. "Return, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord." It is done, and though you do not stand to it He does, the great transaction still stands on His part: though you believe not, He abideth faithful. He has bought you with His blood, and the price will never return into His veins. Wherefore, come back to Him. V. THE ADVICE that He here gives as to how we are to return. He says, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity." "Alas, I have so wandered!" Acknowledge it. "But I have done it so many times!" Acknowledge it. "But I have wandered against light and knowledge!" Acknowledge it. It is not a hard thing to do, to get thee to thy chamber, and before God confess thy faults. You have, first of all, to have a knowledge of it, and then to acknowledge it. Feel thy sin, and then confess it. Be convinced of it, and then plead guilty at the judgment-seat. "What am I to acknowledge?" 1. Your breach of covenant—that you have transgressed against Jehovah your God. 2. Next acknowledge your greedy sin—that thou "hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree." 3. Confess also your hardness of heart. God has spoken, and you would not hear; He has entreated, and you would not regard Him; He has come very near to you, and you have turned your back upon Him. 4. Confess also your ingratitude. His voice, which is your Father's voice, you have not heard or obeyed. What unnaturalness! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Love of the world:—I. THE GROUND OF THE APPEAL. "I am married unto you." A man to have slidden back must at one time have been forward. He cannot have truly wandered from the Lord, unless he has personally known Him. To those, therefore, who are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus is the appeal made, "Turn, O backsliding children," &c. II. TO WHOM THE APPEAL IS ADDRESSED. The Christian who seeks first his worldly advantage, and fails to see that his "chief end is to glorify God," is led step by step farther and farther from the Most High. III. THE APPEAL ITSELF. 1. The context shows the spirit in which it is to be complied with (ver. 13). First must come confession. As the old proverb has it, "Sensibility to a fault is half-way to amendment." 2. In the text itself we have the appeal in one word—"Turn." 3. The promise associated with this appeal (ver. 23). This is a promise of Almighty power. I remember hearing a brother who, when asked who converted him, replied, "God converted me, who else could do it?" So may we say of the healing of the backslider, "Who but God can do it?" Blessed be the name of the Almighty, He promises to do it. 4. The language used by the backslider as setting forth the One to whom he returns (ver. 22). (*W. P. Lockhart.*)

To backsliders:—I. THE NATURE OF BACKSLIDING. 1. It is going back. (1) Easily. (2) Gradually. (3) Silently. 2. It is generally preceded by—(1) Pride (Prov. xvi. 18). (2) Vain confidence (Matt. xxvi. 33). (3) Negligence (Matt. xxvi. 58). 3. A man may be—(1) Enticed by sinful pleasures. (2) Led back by sinful companions (1 Kings xi.). (3) Driven back by sinful fears (Matt. xxvi. 69-74). II. THE MISERY OF BACKSLIDING. 1. Heavy losses. (1) Self-respect. (2) Tender conscience. (3) Sweetest enjoyments. (4) Brightest hopes. 2. Severe disappointment. His holy expectations are lost, of what he might have been and done for Christ, and the after rewards. 3. Terrible disgrace. (1) Before the world, as a hypocrite. (2) Before the Church, as "the thief" (Jer. ii. 12). (3) Before God (Psa. li. 3-9). III. THE REMEDY FOR BACKSLIDING. "Return," &c. 1. Immediately. (1) Delay makes your case worse. (2) God is willing to pardon. (3) The Church is waiting to receive you. 2. Humbly. (1) Confessing sin. (2) Abhorring sin. (3) Forsaking sin. 3. Believingly. Remember—(1) The love of your espousals. (2) The individuality of your relationship. (3) The love of your husband. (4) Your own duty. (*The Study.*)

The mercifulness of the Divine nature:—When the Duke of Argyll was taken in rebellion in Scotland, and brought before James the Second, the King said to him, "You know that it is in my power to pardon you?" It is reported that the prisoner answered, "It may be in your power, but it is not in your nature to forgive,"—a speech which, whether true or not, cost him his life. He died like a stoic, executed at Temple Gate. What a contrast to the Divine. To err is human, to forgive is Divine. I am married unto you.—*The*

relationship of marriage :—These be dainty words—a grateful anodyne for a troubled conscience. Such singular comfort is fitted to cheer up the soul, and put the brightest hue on all her prospects. The person to whom it is addressed hath an eminently happy position. God speaks to His Church in her most abject estate, and though He does not fail to rebuke her sin, to lament it, and to make her lament it too, yet still in such an estate He says to her, “I am married unto you.” Oh ! it is grace that He should be married to any of us, but it is grace at its highest pitch, it is the ocean of grace at its flood-tide, that He should speak thus of “backsliding children.” I. CONSIDER THE RELATIONSHIP WHICH IS HERE SPOKEN OF. 1. The affinity of marriage, though exceedingly near of kin, is not one of birth. Marriage is not a relationship of natural birth but of voluntary contract or covenant. Such is the relationship which exists between the believer and his God. Whatever relation there was originally between God and man, it was extinguished by the fall. Now, Christian, just contemplate what you were, and the degraded family to which you belonged, that you may magnify the riches of His grace who espoused you in your low estate, and hath so bound Himself with all the pledges of a husband that He saith, “I am married unto you.” 2. Marriage-union is the result of choice. The first choice is with God. That choice was made, we believe, before the foundation of the world. God never began to love His people. He saw them in the glass of His decrees ; He foresaw them, with His eye of prescience, in the mass of creaturship, all fallen and ruined ; but yet He beheld them, and pitied and loved them. “They shall be Mine,” saith the Lord. Here we are all agreed ; and we ought to be all agreed upon the second point, namely, that we also have chosen our God. 3. Marriage is cemented by mutual love. Where there is not this mutual affection, it deserves not the name of marriage. Need I talk to you of the love of God ? It is a theme we are scarcely competent to talk of. 4. This marriage necessitates certain mutual relations. I cannot say “duties,” for the word seems out of place on either side. How can I speak of the great God making pledges of faithfulness ? and yet with reverence, let me word it so, for in my vocabulary I have hardly words to set it forth. When God becomes a husband, He undertakes to do a husband’s part—to nourish, to cherish, to shield, to protect, to bless those with whom He condescends, in infinite mercy, to enter into union. And now, what upon our side ? The wife has to reverence her husband, and to be subject unto him in all things. That is precisely our position towards Him who has married us. Let His will be our will. Let His wish be our law. 5. It also involves mutual confidences. In a true marriage, the husband and wife become one. Henceforth their joys and their cares, their hopes and their labours, their sorrows and their pleasures, rise and blend together in one stream. The Lord our God has said it. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” Now, Christian, just see : you stand in the relation of a spouse, and you must tell your very heart out to Christ. 6. This marriage implies fellowship in all its relations. Whatsoever a husband possesses becomes his wife’s. She cannot be poor if he be rich ; and what little she has, whatever it may be, comes to him. When Christ took His people, He gave them all He had. Now, it is saying but very little when I add, that, therefore, whatever we have, belongs to Him—oh ! it is so little, so very little, but one wishes it were more. 7. The very crown of marriage is mutual delight and complacency. The wife of a Persian nobleman, having gone to a feast which was given by the great Darius, was asked by her husband whether she did not think that Darius was the finest man in the world. No, she said, she did not think so ; she never saw any one in the world who was comparable to her husband. And doubtless that is just the opinion which a husband forms of his wife and a wife of her husband where the marriage is such as it should be. Now, certainly Christ sets a very high store upon us. He does not see us as we are, but in His infinite grace He sees us as we are to be. The sculptor says he can see a bust in a block of marble, and that all he has to do is to chip away the extra marble, and let the bust appear. So Christ can see a perfect being in every one of us, if we are His people ; and what He is about with us day by day is taking off the excrescences, making us to be like Himself. And as for us, who are His people, I am sure we can say that there is no delight which can equal communion with Christ. II. HOW FAR DO YOU AND I EXPERIMENTALLY UNDERSTAND THIS ? Oh ! blind eyes, that cannot see beauty in the Saviour ! Jesus ! they are besotted, they are mad, who cannot love Thee ! It is a strange infatuation of the sons of men to think that they can do without Thee, that they

can see any light apart from Thee, Thou Son of Righteousness, or anything like beauty in all the gardens of the world apart from Thee, Thou Rose of Sharon, Thou Lily of the Valley! O that they knew Thee! But, Christian, I speak to you. Surely you know something about this, that God is married to you? If you do, can you not say with me, "Yes, and He has been a very faithful husband to me"? Well, then, speak well of Him, speak well of Him! Make this world hear His praise! As for you who do not know Him, I should like to ask you this question, and do you answer it for yourselves. Do you want to be married to Christ? Do you wish to have Him? Oh! then, there will be no difficulties in the way of the match. If thy heart goes after Christ, He will have thee. Whoever thou mayst be, He will not refuse thee. Oh! He seeks thee! And when thou seekest Him, that is a sure sign that He has found thee. Though thou mayst not have found Him, yet He has found thee already. The wedding-ring is ready. Faith is the golden ring which is the token of the marriage-bond. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

One of a city. — *One by one*: — The revelation of God to man is progressive. A revelation depends upon the power of the person revealing to give, and equally upon the power of the person receiving to receive. God could not, if He would, reveal the whole truth concerning Himself to the human race at the outset—not because He was unable to impart, but because the human race was unable to accept. The revelation of God in human history has therefore been a gradual and a progressive revelation. The wise men of all nations have always believed in one God. But there was one nation in which the wise men were wise enough to believe that the common people should also be taught that there is one God; and so, while in all the surrounding nations the doctrine of the unity of God was an esoteric doctrine—that is, a doctrine reserved for the few—in the Hebrew nation the prophets took this interior and secret doctrine, and, by many a trope and figure, and by many a direct affirmation, gave it to the common people. And thence they went on to learn and to teach that this God is a righteous God. The gods of the nations about were either unmoral or immoral; but the doctrine of the prophets, of the Old Testament was, God is a righteous God, deals righteously, expects righteousness. Connected with that was the teaching that God stands in relation, not to the whole human race, for that was too large a doctrine for them to accept at first, but in special relation to the Jewish race; and then that He did stand in relation to the other people also, but in the relation to the other people of a judge, and in the relation to the Jewish people of a Father. And so grew up, in the earlier period of Jewish history, the notion that God had chosen one nation, and was dealing with that nation—guiding, guarding, inspiring, redeeming it. Time passes on. This nation sins more and more, and the prophets see the gathering clouds—gathering for its destruction. They see the Assyrians and the Chaldeans on the north and east gathering against the nation, and they begin to say, Although you are God's chosen people, God will punish you and carry you away captive; but still Israel is God's nation, and God will save Israel; though He carries you away captive, He will so discipline you that He will bring you back as a nation, and as a nation you shall be saved and redeemed. Time went on another hundred years or so, and the prophesied disaster drew near, and Jeremiah came, and he brought another message. He said, No, this nation is not to be saved; but God will gather out of the nation here one and there another; He is married to the nation, but the nation as a nation He has given up as hopeless; nevertheless, He will take one out of a city, and two out of a family, and will bring them to Zion; He will deal with them one by one. When Christ came upon the earth, He met the old impression that Israel was to be treated as a nation, and it almost seems at first as though He shared that hope; but His later message was, God will take away the kingdom from Israel; and will give it to a new people that will bring forth the fruits thereof; this people He will gather one at a time from all the world, gathering them into the one great Israel of God.

I. GOD AS A CREATOR AND RULER OVER NATURE DEALS IN INDIVIDUAL WAYS. Mr. Ruskin has called attention with great eloquence to the difference between the old-time workman and the new-time workman. The old-time workman worked individually, himself carved the whole piece, whatever it was, and so put himself into that carving; it was the product of his hand not only, but of his brain and his heart, and was the manifestation of himself. The modern industrial products are the products of machinery. They are multiplied and cheapened, but they are no longer individual. Now, men think of God as one who puts a great machinery in operation, and that works out the product. But

not so does the Bible represent Him, and not so does modern philosophy represent Him. God is not a first great cause. He is the perpetual, eternal, everlasting, and only cause, the cause that lies beneath all phenomena, so that every product of nature is a new and different manifestation of a God who is in every phenomenon. This is the reason for the infinite variation in phenomena. God never made two faces alike; never made two blades of grass alike; nothing that ever came from God's hand, was exactly the repetition of anything else that ever came from God's hand. II. AS IN NATURE, SO IN HIS DEALINGS WITH HUMANITY. 1. He gives to each individual in the Church and each citizen in the nation His personal work. Humanity is not like a great army that is marching along in serried rank, and if one man drops out another man can take his place; nor like a factory in which a thousand men are working, and if one drops out some one else can come in and carry on his work. It is individual and personal work, and God comes to you, and says, "I have something for you to do, and if you do not do it, it will be left undone; there will be one vacancy, one citizen left out of the assembly, one blank space in the page." 2. So He deals with each individual in all the discipline of life. He never sends a tear, a heartache, a failure, what men call a disaster, except as He sees the need for it. He knows what each soul wants, and to each one He adjusts the medicine according to the necessity. 3. So, in all the administration of His love, God deals with you one by one. We discuss the question of indiscriminate charity. The phrase is a contradiction in terms. Charity is discrimination. Love cannot be indiscriminating. God does not give His benefits by wholesale. God does not sound a trumpet when He does His alms, to gather the people to receive them. In all His benefactions, He deals with one at a time. "My God shall supply all your need"—that is Paul's declaration. Special providences! There are no other. All providences are special. God does not throw men out to the influence of certain great generic laws and then interfere to help them on special occasions. God's loving-kindness and tender mercies are over all His works. Every life is guided and directed by the hand of an infinite love, if we only will allow it to guide. (*Lyman Abbott, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. I will give you pastors according to Mine heart.—*The character and teaching of Christ's ministers*:—I. THEIR CHARACTER. To be a "pastor after God's heart," a man must not only theoretically understand, but practically feel the truths he sets forth in his teaching. How describe the burden of a guilty conscience, if he has never felt it himself? How expatiate on the love and unfold the preciousness of a Saviour, whilst himself still out of Christ? How exhort hearers to set affections on things above, when his own thoughts are entirely absorbed by things below? II. THEIR TEACHING. What they have found to be, by God's blessing, useful to themselves, they will bring before their people. They will not daub the wall with untempered mortar, crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace; but, will "cry aloud and lift up their voice like a trumpet," to warn the unconverted of their danger, and convince them of their guilt. Nor will they show the disease without, at the same time, declaring the remedy. They will prove to their hearers their numberless shortcomings, in order that they may be led the more highly to prize the Saviour's merits. Conclusion—I. Seek the increase of such pastors. 2. Help to provide for such pastors. (*C. Clayton, M.A.*) *The duty of a pastor*:—I. TO FEED THE CHURCH WITH KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING. This is by preaching the Gospel. 1. There is spiritual wisdom in understanding the mysteries of the Gospel, that we may be able to declare the whole counsel of God, and the riches and treasures of the grace of Christ unto the souls of men (Acts xx. 27; 1 Cor. ii. 1-4; Eph. iii. 7-9). 2. Authority is required. What is authority in a preaching ministry? It is a consequent of unction, and not of office. 3. Experience of the things preached. 4. Skill to divide the Word aright. 5. The knowledge and consideration of the state of the flock. 5. To be actuated by zeal for the glory of God, and compassion to the souls of men. II. CONTINUAL PRAYER FOR THE CHURCHES OVER WHICH CHRIST HAS MADE THEM OVERSEERS. 1. No man can have any evidence in his own soul, that he doth conscientiously perform any ministerial duty towards his flock, who doth not continually pray for them. 2. This is the way whereby we may bless our congregations. 3. What shall we pray for? (1) For the success of the Word that we preach unto them. (2) For the presence of Christ in all our assemblies. III. TO PRESERVE THE TRUTH AND DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL THAT IS COMMITTED TO THE CHURCH. What is required hereunto? 1. A clear apprehension in ourselves of those doctrines and truths which we are so to defend.

2. Love of the truth. 3. Let us take heed in ourselves of any inclination to novel opinions, especially in, or about, or against such points of faith, as those wherein they who are fallen asleep, found life, comfort, and power. 4. There is skill and ability required hereunto, to discover and be able to oppose and confound the cunning sophistry of adversaries. Great prayer, watchfulness, and diligence are required, that we may be able to attend unto these things. And those who are less skilled may do well to advise with those who are more exercised in them to give them assistance. 5. That we labour diligently for the conversion of souls. (*John Owen, D.D.*) *The true teacher*.—1. There are some teachers of religion who are teachers “according to God’s heart.” 2. All such teachers are the gift of God. (1) He prepares them for their office. (2) He designates the sphere of their ministry. 3. They are distinguished by the care and fidelity with which they minister to the spiritual wants of their people. (*E. Cooper, M.A.*) *Pastors according to God’s own heart*.—I. WHAT THOSE QUALIFICATIONS ARE WHICH RENDER MEN PASTORS AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART. 1. Their being sent and commissioned by God. 2. Their being thoroughly instructed in the knowledge of God’s mind and will. 3. Their being exemplary in their conversation of the goodness and purity of their own doctrine (1 Tim. iii. 12). (1) In word, that is, in observing a decent gravity in discourse. (2) In conversation; a sweet and obliging deportment. (3) In charity; a hearty goodwill to all men as we have opportunity. (4) In spirit; that is, in an active zeal for the glory of God, and the good of souls. (5) In faith, that is, in an immovable constancy and fidelity to our religion, in holding fast the form of sound words, and contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. (6) In purity, that is, in abstaining from all fleshly lusts, from worldly mindedness, intemperance, and wantonness. II. HOW MUCH SUCH PASTORS DO CONDUCE TO THE GLORY, AND BEAUTY, AND PERFECTION OF THE CHURCH. 1. In soundness of faith, to which there is nothing can more conduce than pious and learned pastors; who being not only purged from vicious affections, and inspired with an hearty zeal for truth; but also accomplished with parts and learning to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and to separate the innovations of false teachers from the ancient truths of Christianity, cannot but be highly instrumental to the restoring the faith of their Churches, wherever they find it corrupted and sophisticated, to its primitive lustre and simplicity. 2. In purity of worship; for the end of all Church assemblies being to worship God, and the worship of God consisting in a devout acknowledgment of the infinite perfections of His nature, by such internal and external acts, as right, reason, and revelation directs: all such as are truly devout, and sincerely affected with the Divine perfections, must look upon themselves, as greatly concerned to worship God, in such manner as is most suitable to His will and nature. And this the pastors of the Church are more peculiarly concerned in, being the guides of the public worship. 3. A Church’s glory and perfection consists also in the vigour of its discipline, in the just and vigilant administration of the power of the keys, in admonishing such as go astray, in excluding them the communion of the Church if they continue obstinate, and re-admitting them upon their repentance. 4. A Church’s glory and perfection consists in unity of communion and affections, so that there be no schisms in the body, but that all its members, being incorporate in the same communion, be knit and fastened to one another by the ligaments of mutual love and charity; to which excellent effect there is nothing in the world can more conduce than learned, prudent, and pious pastors. 5. The glory and perfection of a Church consists also in sanctity of manners; to promote which, also, nothing can be more conducive than pastors according to God’s own heart. (1) Their being commissioned from God to teach and govern His flock must give their doctrine a very great authority in the minds of all that have any reverence for God, and thereby render it more prevalent and effectual. (2) Their doctrine, supposing they are pious and learned, will be throughout holy, and in all points tending to promote the interest of piety and virtue. (3) Their holy doctrine will be enforced by their holy examples, which will preach more effectually than their tongues. (*John Scott, D.D.*) *The constitution, character, and duties of the Gospel ministry*.—I. GOD IS ENGAGED BY COVENANT TO PROVIDE A PERPETUAL PUBLIC MINISTRY FOR HIS CHURCH. 1. A public stated ministry in the Christian Church is a Divine institution. 2. It is the ordinance of God that a public ministry should be continued in His Church unto the end of the world. 3. God hath covenanted with His Church to supply her congregations with a public ministry—“And I will give you pastors.” (1) Promises, made upon the footing of a permanent relation

between God and His Church, which have respect to a benefit of a permanent nature, are to be understood as securing to the Church that benefit indefinitely throughout every period of time. (2) Many promises delivered by the prophets were designed to refer immediately to the New Testament Church; and were so applied by the apostles of our Lord. Some of these refer to the Christian ministry (Isa. lii. 6, 7, 10; Rom. x. 14, 15). (3) The Redeemer, in whom the promises are made, and in whom they are accomplished, has solemnly engaged never to leave His Church entirely destitute of a public ministry. He walks amidst the golden candlesticks. He holds the stars in His right hand. He gives power to His witnesses.

II. GOD HATH SET DISTINGUISHING MARKS UPON THE MINISTRY, OF WHICH HE APPROVES.—"Pastors according to Mine heart." 1. The pastor according to God's heart has received a regular call to the ministry. (1) The call of God to ecclesiastical office is inward, when there is a Divine influence experienced upon the mind, inclining and commanding the person to devote himself to the service of the Church. (2) It is outward, when accompanied with external evidence for the satisfaction of the Church. The inward call may satisfy a man's own mind; but others must, in order to receive Him, have some external evidence. (a) Ordination constitutes the call of God to the ministry of reconciliation in the Gospel Church (1 Tim. iii. 1-7; Titus i. 5-9; Rom. x. 15). (b) Ordination to the holy ministry is to be performed by imposition of hands (1 Tim. v. 22, iv. 14; Heb. vi. 2; Acts xiii. 2, 3). 2. The pastor according to God's heart has a life corresponding to the functions of his holy office. (1) A ministry evidently impious will meet with few advocates. This evil can be tolerated only in a Church which has far departed from truth and holiness. (2) The pious minister is constrained by the love of a crucified Saviour to diligence in his sacred office. He perceives the danger of sinners; and, anxious for their salvation, he warns them of it frequently and fervently. From house to house he visits, examines, exhorts. In afflictions, he soothes; in temptation, admonishes; in sickness, comforts; and in death, resigns their departing spirits into the hands of that God who created both him and them. (3) The pastor, who is near the heart of God, is faithful to God and His Church. He deals plainly with sinners, uninfluenced by their frowns or their smiles.

III. THE SUM OF PASTORAL DUTY IS THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH. 1. The pastor according to God's heart preaches to his congregation the Gospel of Christ. This is the food which he diligently provides for immortal souls. 2. The pastor of whom God approves is in duty bound, from time to time, to examine the religious state of his congregation. 3. It is the duty of the Christian pastor to administer the sacraments of the New Testament to the members of his Church. 4. It is the duty of a Christian minister to exercise authority over his flock. This is necessary to their edification, and is implied in feeding with knowledge. The power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is in the hands of every Christian minister. (*A. M'Leod, D.D.*) *Pastor's office no sinecure*:—"To a person who regretted, to the celebrated Dr. Johnson, that he had become a clergyman, because he considered the life of a clergyman an easy and comfortable one, the Doctor made this memorable reply: "The life of a conscientious clergyman is not easy. I have always considered a clergyman as the father of a larger family than he is able to maintain. No, sir, I do not envy a clergyman's life as an easy life, nor do I envy the clergyman who makes it an easy life." *The pastor's obligation to feed the people*:—"The Rev. Robert Hall of Bristol was asked what he thought of a sermon which had been delivered by a proverbially fine preacher, and which had seemed to excite a great sensation among the congregation: "Very fine, sir," he replied, "but a man cannot feed upon flowers."

Ver. 16. The ark of the covenant of the Lord.—*The ark of the covenant*:—"When inward piety is low the externals of religion are frequently cried up. Those who know nothing of God are the very people to exclaim concerning themselves and their brethren, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these." The more phylactery, the less sanctity. On the other hand, whenever the Spirit of God is largely poured out, although the ordinances of God are carefully attended to, yet as external things they are sure to be put into their proper place, and that proper place is a secondary one. **I. THE SYMBOL REVERENCED.** 1. The ark of the covenant was the object of great reverence, and very fitly so, because it symbolised God's presence, the presence of Jehovah, the living God, in the midst of His people. 2. That presence of God meant blessing; for God was with His people in love to them. The Lord abides not with His enemies,

but with His chosen. So long as He gave the token of His presence it was a sign that He had not cast them off as hopeless. 3. The ark was held in reverence by the Israelites because it was their leader. When the time came to march through the wilderness the ark went in the forefront. 4. The ark was to the Israelites, after their wanderings were over, the fixed centre of their nationality, even as while they were in the wilderness it had always been placed in the centre of the camp. 5. Marvel not that the men of Judah paid great reverence to this ark when, in so many ways, it was a token for good to them. What they did to this ark is mentioned in the text. First, they recognised it as the ark of the covenant of the Lord. They were wont to say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." They spoke much of it, and prided themselves upon the possession of it. Nay, they not only spoke of it, but they loved it; for we read, "Neither shall it come to mind," or as the margin has it, "Neither shall it come upon the heart." In the next place, they remembered it, as the text plainly informs us. If they were captives they prayed in the direction in which the ark was situated; wherever they wandered they thought of God and of the coffer which represented His presence. Next, they visited it. On certain holy days they came from the utmost ends of their land, in joyful companies, singing from stage to stage, and making joyful holiday as they went up to the place where God did dwell between the cherubim. Visiting it, they were accustomed also to speak highly of it; for in the margin of your Bibles you will find, "Neither shall they magnify it any more." They used to tell to one another what the ark had done; the glory that shone forth from it, the acceptance of the offering whose blood was sprinkled upon it on the day of atonement, and the testimony which was heard from between the cherubic wings. II. THAT REVERENCE OBLITERATED. They were to say no more, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." Yet that fact was to be a blessing. They were no more to speak of the ark itself, because they would have that which the ark was intended to foreshadow. 1. Our Lord Jesus by His coming has put out of His people's thoughts the material ark of the covenant, because its meaning is fulfilled in Him; and this, first, in the sense of preservation. He said, "Thy law is within My heart." It was not within His heart alone, but within all His life; His whole thoughts, words, and acts went to make up a golden chest in which the precious treasure of the perfect law of God should be contained. 2. Next, the ark signified propitiation; for over the top of the sacred box, which held the two tables of the law, was the slab of gold called the mercy-seat, which covered all. When God looks down upon His law, He does not see it nakedly, but He beholds it in the person of His Son. He sees it there perfectly preserved, without taint or flaw of any kind, and He rejoices therein. 3. The next word is a very blessed one, and that is covenant. The ark was called "the ark of the covenant." Ah, how soon we should lose the sweet things of God if we were under the covenant of works, and how soon we should miss the gentle sovereignty of His shepherd rod! I thank God that in Christ Jesus we have a covenant of grace which can never fail, and never can be broken, and in Him we have all that our souls desire: pot of manna and rod of Aaron, covenant provision and covenant rule we find in Him. 4. Because this ark was the ark of the covenant of God it was from it that He was accustomed to reveal Himself, and so it is called the "ark of testimony." We say no more, "The ark of the testimony," but we rejoice that God was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, and saw the Father in the Son. 5. This ark also signified enthronement; for the top of the ark was, so to speak, the throne of God. It was "the throne of the heavenly grace." If you would see the throne of God, behold the person of the Christ; for in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Oh, what a blessing to have such a throne to come to—to Jesus Himself, who is the throne of the invisible God! 6. As it was the place of God's enthronement, so it was the door of man's approach. You and I need not speak of the ark of the covenant; for we have a blessed way of approach. We do not come to Christ once in the year only, but every day in the year, and every hour of the day. 7. The ark was the place of gracious power. On the top of the mercy-seat stood cherubic figures, types of angelic power, and of all the powers of providence which God is pleased to use in the behalf of His people. Yet we will not speak of the ark, neither will we remember it, neither will we visit it; for we see in Christ Jesus that all the power of God is on our side: He is "God with us," and if God be with us, who can be against us? 8. The ark was much revered by the Jews, because it was the centre of their nationality.

Find me a dozen spiritual men, and describe their different modes of thought; but let them sit together and begin to talk of the things of God, and of the covenant of grace, and of the work of the Spirit in the soul, and of the preciousness of the blood of Jesus, and you will see that they are one. There is, there must be, an essential unity among those who are quickened by the Spirit: and I rejoice that the name, the person, and the work of Jesus are at this hour the centre of Christendom. III. THIS REVERENCE TRANSFERRED. 1. Let us say that Jesus is our covenant. We are told, "They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord." People must talk, it is natural to them—what else are their tongues for? Let us, then, say concerning Christ that He is the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Say this, say it often, nobody will rebuke you; it is a subject upon which you may be as fluent as you please. This is a kind of note of which the human ear, when once it is cleansed, never grows weary. 2. The text takes you a step further; for it says of the original ark, "Neither shall it come to mind," or (I give the margin), "Neither shall it come upon your heart." Let Christ come upon your heart and dwell there. Oh, love the Lord, all ye His saints! You can love other things too much; but not your Lord. 3. And, next, if we should ever grow dull or cold at any time, let us take the third step in the text, and let us remember the Lord. O memory, leave no other name than that of Jesus recorded upon thy tablets. 4. The next thing is, let us visit Him. We cannot set out on journeys now to go to Jerusalem on foot,—little bands of us together; yet let us visit Jesus. Let us continually come to the mercy-seat. No prayer, no power. The ark of the covenant is gone when the people no longer come together to cry unto the Lord. 5. The last thing is, "Neither shall that be done any more"; but the margin has it, "Neither shall that be magnified any more." Transfer your reverence, then, and as you cannot magnify the literal mercy-seat, so let and magnify Christ, who is the real mercy-seat. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) Christ, the true ark of the covenant:—I. A MOST ALARMING AND UNWELCOME ANNOUNCEMENT. That the ark would disappear, and another not be made. Israel's safety and prosperity were connected with the ark of covenant. By some regarded with superstitious awe rather than reverential fear; yet by all as of incalculable value to the nations. II. A BITTER AND IRRECONCILABLE LOSS. 1. Prophecy soon fulfilled. 2. Loss deeply lamented. III. A SURPASSING COMPENSATION PREDICTED. 1. Must have seemed incredible at the time; yet afterwards proved consolatory. 2. How was the prediction fulfilled? In the appearing of Christ, the antitype of the ark. IV. THE REALISATION IN CHRIST OF ALL THE ARK SYMBOLISED. 1. The Divine nearness. 2. The Deity bending mercifully over men. 3. The helpful and healing grace of God. Conclusion—1. Israelites who early became Christians, and enjoyed the presence of Christ on earth, must have readily surrendered and forgotten the ark in the realisation of Jesus and His tender grace. 2. Believers, though now not realising Christ bodily among them, experience His Spirit's indwelling, revealing Christ within. 3. Contrite sinners can rejoice in the tenderness, lowliness, and compassion of Christ. (*R. Gordon, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. **The throne of the Lord.**—*The Church Christ's throne*:—1. Jerusalem had been of old the throne of God: the symbol of God rested on the ark. Hence called "the city of the Great King." 2. Jerusalem became the throne of God as never before when Emmanuel visited her. Yet she rejected her King. 3. Christ by His death founded a kingdom in which His Church has become the true throne of God. I. IN THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS THE KINGLY POWER AND AUTHORITY OF CHRIST IS MANIFESTED. Each case is a victory of Christ over the "enmity" of the carnal mind and the resistance of hellish foes. II. IN MAINTAINING HIS ASCENDENCY OVER THE LIVES AND AFFECTIONS OF HIS CONVERTS. "Law in their members" at war with Him. The world strives to wrest them from His rule. Satan strives to recover his lost power. But they are held "in obedience to Christ," and "kept by the power of God unto salvation." III. IN GOVERNING THE WORLD PROVIDENTIALLY FOR HIS CHURCH'S ADVANTAGE. Christ reigns as mediator: works all things for our good and His glory; and by, and for, and from His Church He puts forth His power, that shall subdue all enemies under His feet. How does Christ's rule affect individual members of His Church? 1. To what extent can and may they enjoy personally the presence of their King? Sits enthroned in their heart and affections individually. 2. Christ must hold unrivalled and unlimited sway and sovereignty over their lives. His kingship

absolute: their affections undivided: they habitually and entirely under the constraining influences of His love. 3. They will recognise that His care extends to every individual believer, sending expressions of His kindness and love to each, and never—save in faithfulness—afflicting them. (*R. Gordon, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. **How shall I put thee among the children.**—*Put among the children* :—
I. A MOST DELIGHTFUL CONDITION OF PRIVILEGE AND ENJOYMENT. 1. A real and endearing relation, not a mere figure or shadow. Though all worlds wait on His will, God's heart is a Father's heart; and its home, its place of joy and singing, is "among the children." 2. This relationship implies dependence. The two principles of trust and obedience constitute the great requirements which the Head of the redeemed family urges upon all His children. 3. The relation between child and parent implies solemn obligations. The children of God are required to exhibit a character and conduct in harmony with their illustrious relationship. The glory of the Father, the honour of His name; the welfare of the whole household of faith; the furtherance of sacred truth in the world are interests dear to their hearts. They are partakers of the Divine nature, "each one resembles the children of a king." 4. This relation implies the possession of privileges—"If children then heirs," &c. All that the Jew possessed in Canaan, all that Adam delighted to see in Paradise, falls short of the expectations of the believer. The inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and it fadeth not away. **II. SOME FORMIDABLE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF CONFERRING THE BLESSINGS OF SONSHIP.** 1. This relation between God and man is not natural. "By nature children of wrath," &c. 2. Justice demands the infliction of the penalty of sin. Mercy pleads for compassion and forgiveness. In the courts of earthly sovereigns there is no escape from the dilemma. The sovereign can punish, and thus inflict justice; or pardon and show mercy. But in Christ all the requirements of law are satisfied, while the freest manifestation of mercy is made. 3. The character and condition of the sinner himself. Shall the leper be brought into companionship with the pure and the sound? Shall the outcast and the profligate nestle with the virgin and the holy? **III. THE SOLUTION OF THE DIFFICULTY, AND THE PROCESS OF ATTAINING THE FULL ENJOYMENT OF THE PRIVILEGE.** "Thou shalt call Me, My Father." 1. Prayer is the birth-cry of the soul. Like that first welcome sound by which the mother knows she has a living child. Every kind of sorrow and distress have driven men to their knees, but there are no prayers, for their fervour, like those which are the fruit of conviction of sin. 2. The spirit of adoption. "My Father." Not by the thunders of Sinai, or the curses of Mount Ebal, are men preserved in Christ Jesus, but by the all-powerful grace of the Holy Spirit. 3. The salvation of a child of God is evinced by the spirit of perseverance. (*W. G. Lewis.*) *Among the children* :—**I. A DIFFICULT QUESTION.** 1. As to the Holy Lord. 2. As to the unholy person. 3. As to the family. 4. As to the inheritance. **II. A WONDERFUL ANSWER.** 1. It is from God Himself, and is therefore a perfect answer. 2. It is in the Divine style: "Thou shalt"; and "thou shalt not." Omnipotence speaks, and grace reveals its unconditional character. 3. It is concerning a Divine work. 4. It is effectual for its purpose. **III. A MATCHLESS PRIVILEGE.** 1. We are indeed made children of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. 2. We are as much loved as the children. 3. We are treated as the children. (1) We are forgiven as a father forgives his children. (2) We are clothed, fed, and housed as children. (3) We are taught, ruled, and chastened as children. (4) We are honoured and enriched as children. 4. We are placed under filial obligations—to love, honour, obey, and serve our Father. This should be regarded as a high honour, not a burden. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Regeneration* is not a change of the old nature, but an introduction of a new nature. Not "Ishmael changed," but "Isaac born," is the son of the promise. (*Ibid.*) *Adoption* :—Whom God adopts, He anoints; whom He makes sons, He makes saints. (*Watson.*) *A wonderful change* :—One of my parishioners at East Hampton, converted after having lived, through three or four revivals, to the age of fifty, and having given up hope, used to exclaim for several weeks after his change, "Is it I? Am I the same man who used to think it so hard to be converted, and my case so hopeless? Is it I? Is it I? Oh, wonderful!" (*Lyman Beecher.*) *The true source of salvation* :—**I. HOW THE OBSTRUCTIONS TO THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS SHALL BE SURMOUNTED.** 1. God Himself presents to them the formidable difficulty. Jews always obdurate. How restored to favour of God? (1) Extent of their wickedness forbids it. (2) Honour of God forbids it. To admit rebels to privileges

cacourages rebellion. 2. These obstacles, though formidable, shall be surmounted. As God spake the universe into existence, so will He form the "new creation."

II. HOW ALONE THE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF OUR SALVATION CAN EVER BE OVERCOME. 1. There are immense difficulties. Our wickedness equals or exceeds that of the Jews. 2. But these shall be overcome. God will interfere for us in a way of sovereign grace and by the exercise of His almighty power. Conclusion—1. To those who question the possibility of their own salvation. God is able. 2. To those who have entertained no such fears. You think salvation easy; but only Christ's blood could atone for such sin as yours; only the Divine Spirit could renew your depraved heart. 3. To those who profess to have been brought into the family of God. Obey and trust Him, as your "Father"; let nothing lead you to "turn away from Him." (C. Simeon, M.A.)

Vers. 21-25. **Return . . . and I will heal your backslidings.**—*Hope for the worst backsliders*:—I. THE CALL FROM GOD. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." 1. It is a call to come back to God; and that means, first, remember Him; begin to think of Him; let Him be a living God to you. 2. The next thing is, really turn to Him. 3. There is one word in this call from God which proves that you are invited to come back just as you are. He says, "Return, ye backsliding children"; not "Return, ye penitent children." I notice also that He does not say, "Heal your wounds first, and then come back to Me"; but He says, "Return, ye backsliding children," with all your backslidings unhealed,—“and I will heal your backslidings.” II. THE METHOD OF OBEYING THIS CALL. 1. He who would return to God, and find salvation, must distinctly renounce all other trust except that which God Himself gives him and sets before him in the Gospel. First, there must be a distinct renunciation of all righteousness of your own. The next thing that you must renounce is, your own strength. With that must also go all trust in your own knowledge and abilities, and even in your own understanding. 2. There must also be a hearty, true-minded acceptance of God alone as our one hope. Notice how the text says, "Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel." There must be no playing at this acceptance of God as our one hope; there must be no mocking of God by a pretended yielding up of ourselves to Him. It must be a true acceptance of God, to be our God henceforth and for ever. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The essence of love*:—I. A KINDLY REMEMBRANCE. God, speaking to backsliders, says, "I remember thee." II. A SHOCKING CALAMITY. Ye who once were as a lighthouse set upon a rock, to guide men, are now a delusion and a snare. Your light has gone out. What a corruption there would be if it were not for the salt of the ocean. When you were converted to God you were the salt in the ocean of humanity, but now the salt hath lost its power. You are useless, and humanity seethes in the pollution of sin. You live probably in a house where there are wicked ones; you work amongst swearers, and sceptics, and drunkards, but you are powerless. The salt has lost its savour. Oh, backslider, dismantled, ruined, empty, may God rebuild you! III. A LOVING MESSAGE. "Return." Have you read of the widow whose daughter fell into the pathway of wrong? One night the poor girl returned to her mother's cottage. She went up the garden path and stood in the little porchway, and, to her surprise, she saw the door a little way open. She pushed it and entered. She went into the little room which used to be her own, and found a night-light burning there, and her bed ready, as it always had been. She lay upon the bed, and was awoken by her mother's kiss. "Mother, how is it that you left the door unlatched and the light burning?" "It was that you might not have a minute to wait when you came back." This is just the way in which our heavenly Father treats us. It is the essence of love! IV. A GRACIOUS PROMISE. Poor backslider, you are wretchedly miserable; for God's message has sunk very deep into your heart. You have drunk from the cup of sin; but you have also been bitten by the poisonous serpent, and the worm of unhappiness is gnawing at your heart. God says, "I will heal thy backslidings." He will not let the wound keep running. He will heal it; not like the burns and scalds that have left terrible marks upon our flesh. When we return to God He heals the wound; and there shall be no mark left of it, for He says, "I have blotted out thy transgressions." (W. Birch.) *Backsliding children*:—I. WHAT IT IS TO BACKSLIDE. In Scripture the word "backslide" means a turning away from God altogether. It is usually, if not always, the sin of idolatry; it is the wife departing from her husband, as in this chapter (vers. 1, 2, 8; Prov. xiv. 14).

There may be in a spiritual sense a real though not apparent departing from God. There may be an unfaithfulness, not an act only, but a state. There may be half-heartedness for a time. The once tender conscience may become hardened; the once lowly spirit may become lifted up. With some it shows itself in worldly entanglements, seeking increase of business. In the midst of all this there may be no grossness, but specious arguments for exculpation. But there is woeful neglect of secret transactions with God. Prayer is not wholly omitted, but not conscientiously followed up. Perhaps there may be a lightness of spirit in prayer; perhaps there may be hardness. There may be an expressed value for the doctrines of grace; but they are as opiates to lull to sleep, not as stimulants to rouse to action. But, irrespective of all false notions with respect to the truth, there is oft much backsliding. The comforts of life have acted, it may be, as drags upon the wheels. Perhaps the very trials of life, instead of drawing us as magnets, have acted as repellants, and driven us away from God. Perhaps very weariness of body and exhaustion of mind have led to secret neglectings of God, and what was occasional at last became habitual. It is by the small edge of the wedge the whole wedge is at last inserted. When a river bursts through its embankment, one little spadeful of earth might have stopped the flood. He that despiseth small things shall fall by little and little. But the point is this—there may be fearful backsliding in heart, and not a speck of grossness in the life; and satisfied am I, that if we do not feel this, we shall, if we are God's children, be taught it, it may be with many stripes.

II. THE TENDER EXPOSTULATION. "Return." Here were idolaters in the grossest sense, and yet were they called to return. Before any symptom of amendment, any humblings of soul, yet "Return." So "Hearken unto Me," not ye broken-hearted only that walk, or are beginning to walk, righteously, but "ye stout-hearted that are far from righteousness." What an aspect of tenderness! and what losers are they that see not this! The first overture was from God. The outstretched hand to an idolater, to a rebel. Oh, how clearly does it show us that if there were no election, there would be no salvation. Nature will reject all providences, all mercies, all overtures, even the outstretched hand of God.

III. THE ANSWER. "Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God." See the overcoming power of love. There was reproof of their departures, expostulation with them for their sin, there was displeasure for their iniquities, but there was the most winning display of love in them all, and it was this which overcame. Force may compel, fear may deter, reason may persuade, and the Holy Spirit may use them all, but the great principle that moves the human heart is love. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

An invitation to backsliders:—The Jews were a people prone to idolatry. Though favoured with peculiar privileges, they were "bent to backsliding." At the time when these words were addressed to them, Josiah sat on the throne. He was a pious king and strove to uproot idolatry. His efforts were seconded by Jeremiah; but both king and prophet failed. Many years before, the ten tribes of Israel, for their apostasy, had been carried into captivity. "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto Me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord" (ver. 10). This state of things deeply affected the prophet's mind, and caused him to give utterance to the most plaintive and pathetic language.

I. THE CHARACTERS ADDRESSED. "Backsliding children." 1. These are undutiful children. They have proved unfaithful to their solemn vows and sacred obligations—to their Christian brethren—to their God and Father. He said, "Surely they are My people, children that will not lie"; but they "turned back and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow." What crime can equal that of rebellion against parental authority? An unfaithful servant or steward is bad enough, but an unfaithful, undutiful child is vastly worse. 2. Ungrateful children. And theirs is ingratitude of the basest kind. It resembles the ingratitude of a freed slave who forgets his emancipator, and sells himself again into bondage. 3. Unwise children. Are they not unwise who forsake their own mercies and follow after lying vanities; who prefer broken cisterns to the fountain of living waters? 4. Unhappy children. They are often unhappy in their circumstances. Others may enjoy the world, but they cannot. Recollections of their "lost Paradise," and apprehensions of future wrath, tend to embitter every earthly comfort. 5. Unsafe children. Heaven's just wrath is awakened against them. Hell's blackest gloom and fiercest flame await them. 6. But children still. Though they have forfeited the privileges of adoption, and have been deprived of the witness of the Spirit, their relation to God as their Creator is

not dissolved, and their former interest in His favour is not forgotten. II. THE INVITATION GIVEN. "Return." 1. By sincere repentance. 2. Earnest prayer. 3. Evangelical faith—faith in Christ. 4. Renewed self-dedication. III. THE PROMISE MADE. "I will heal your backslidings." The Lord heals backslidings in many ways,—frequently by restoring. 1. Providential blessings. Many men are chastised here that they may not be punished hereafter. The Israelites never departed from God without feeling the effects of His displeasure in their temporal circumstances. 2. Peace of conscience. 3. Purity of heart. How polluted is the heart of a backslider! His last state is worse than his first. 4. Honour and usefulness. (*J. Hodgson.*) Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God.—*True repentance* :—I. IT PROCEEDS FROM THE INMOST HEART. 1. Weeping (ver. 21). 2. Shame (ver. 25). II. IT IS FREE FROM ALL DISSIMULATION. Its principle is sorrow at having grieved God by the abuse of His love (ver. 21). III. IT IS MADE KNOWN BY THE HONEST FRUITS OF REPENTANCE. 1. Apostasies healed (ver. 22). 2. Detestation of evil (ver. 24). 3. Yearning for the Lord (ver. 25). (*Origen.*) *Conversion to God* :—I. WHAT IS IT FOR SINNERS TO COME TO GOD? 1. A relinquishing of everything that is contrary to God, and keeps us at a distance from Him. 2. A making use of Christ as the way to God. (1) There would have been no place for repentance if Christ had not interposed with His blood. (2) There never would have been any principle or exercise of repentance if Christ did not produce it by His Spirit. 3. A giving up of ourselves to God, and resting in Him as our end. II. HOW SHOULD SINNERS COME TO GOD, IN OBEDIENCE TO THE PRECEPT, AND UPON THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE PROMISE? 1. How must they come in obedience to the precept? (1) Sinners are to come to God humbly; and that in consideration of the command of God, upon two accounts. All acts of obedience to God are to be performed with humbleness of mind. Returning to God after former acts of disobedience requires special humiliation. (2) We are to come to God readily. When God is so kind to admit your return, there is no reason that He should wait for it. 2. How must they come upon the encouragement of the promise? (1) Sinners are to come to God believingly, with regard to the promise: for these two reasons,—(a) If faith be not the spring of all our motions towards God, they cannot be acceptable to Him. (b) The promise does encourage such a faith, as much as we need or can desire. Besides His gracious entreaties, affectionate offers, importunate pleadings, you have His positive assurances that He will receive you if you return (2 Cor. vi. 17). (2) Sinners must come joyfully to God. The promise is ground of rejoicing, as well as of hope and trust; and God never designed that our sorrow for sin should be so extreme as to stifle or drown the joy of conversion. God who makes the promise rejoices in the performance (Zeph. iii. 17; Luke xv. 15). We who have the benefit of the promise must needs be still doubtful of it if we do not rejoice in it. If we had faith suitable to the faithfulness of God, it would transport the soul into an ecstasy, that we who have lifted up our heels so oft against God should be taken into His arms. III. WHEREIN LIES THE BLESSEDNESS OF THIS? 1. When a sinner comes back to God he is brought out of a most miserable, wilderness condition, wherein if he had remained he must have perished. 2. When a sinner comes to God salvation comes to him. 3. When a sinner comes home to God, all his fellow-creatures shall be some way or other serviceable to him, either willingly and gladly, or by constraint and over-ruling necessity. 4. When a sinner is come to God he must visit God by prayer in all his necessities, and be sure of sufficient relief. 5. A sinner that is come to God may sweetly walk and converse with God, through the residue of his life; and the benefit and sweetness of such communion is not to be imagined by those that have it not; they that are far from God can be no judges of the blessedness of those that are near unto Him. 6. A sinner that is come to God may go to Him with comfort and confidence at death, whether sooner or later. IV. USE. 1. This shows that they who will not come to God are not come to themselves (Luke xv. 17). 2. Ministers will have a dreadful and unpleasant account to give of those whom they leave unpersuaded. 3. God will be justified in their condemnation, to whom His precepts and promises avail nothing. 4. The devil can lay no blocks in our way against our coming unto God but what we may easily remove or courageously leap over, if we look no further than this text. 5. How unreasonable would it be if any of the storms we meet with in our way to God should ever drive us back, or shipwreck our faith! 6. How happy would it be if the efficacy of this doctrine were equal to the concernment of it! It extends to all that are born into this

world, and therefore should operate upon all. (*T. Cruso.*) *The call of God obeyed*.—I. THE STATE OF THE PERSONS HERE ADDRESSED. "Backsliding children."

1. They had forgotten the Lord their God. All sin may be traced to this. God is forgotten by us. We forget the majesty and purity of His nature; His nearness to us; that His eye is ever upon us; and that darkness and light are both alike to Him. We forget His unspeakable love and goodness, and our manifold, increasing obligations. Strange that, amidst innumerable tokens of remembrance, we should be careless and thoughtless! 2. They had perverted their way. This is the natural effect of forgetting God. Have not we perverted our way? In innumerable instances we have struggled against the voice of reason, the voice of conscience, the voice of God; and, against the plainest dictates of His Word, have wandered in foolish, forbidden paths. 3. They were filled with painful regret. "The high places" were the seat of Israel's idolatry: there they committed abomination, and provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. But where they sinned, there they gave vent to their sorrow; and there they supplicated Divine forgiveness and favour. And, truly, if we are the subjects of genuine repentance, we shall do the same: where we have sinned, we shall sorrow too. II. THE GRACIOUS LANGUAGE OF GOD TO THESE BACKSLIDING CHILDREN. 1. A friendly call. "Return." Doubtless authority marks this word, and the word of Jehovah is never to be trifled with. It is an invitation given; but it is also a command, which may not be slighted; a solemn charge, which cannot with impunity be refused. 2. A precious promise. "I will heal," &c. (1) Backsliding inflicts a disease, a dangerous and fatal disease. But the promise before us implies that God is ready to restore health and cure. (2) The effects of sin are numerous and destructive. Sin not only dishonours God, and wounds the soul, but it creates a thick cloud of mental darkness: it is the fruitful source of trouble and disquietude. But when the Lord promises to "heal" backslidings, He engages to extract this bitterness, to avert this punishment. (3) The promise here is not indiscriminately given; it is to the sinner that "returns" to God. "Return, and I will heal your backslidings." He does this by an act of sovereign favour (*Mic. vii. 18. 19*).

III. THE OBEDIENT REPLY OF THESE PEOPLE. 1. This reply is practical: "We come unto Thee." As the prodigal: he did not spend his time in fruitless wishes, or satisfy himself with good intentions and right resolutions: his language was, "I will arise, and go to my father." Immediately, "he arose, and came to his father." 2. The reply is prompt; made with the utmost readiness, and given without the least demur. The call is, "Return"; the answer instantly subjoined is, "Behold, we come." It reminds us of the promptness of the Psalmist, in his compliance with the voice of heaven (*Psa. xxvii. 8*). 3. The reply is deliberate. The note of attention intimates this. "Behold! we come." Though the penitent believer is ready, he is not rash; though, under the influence of Divine grace, he soon determines, he does it advisedly; his repentance is of that kind which never needs to be repented of. 4. The reply is unanimous. Here is the prayer and resolution of the Church: she prays as one person, actuated by one spirit; draw me: she resolves as many persons, answering, with cheerful concurrence, "we" will run after Thee. 5. The reply springs from a clear conviction of duty, interest, and obligation. "Thou art the Lord our God." It is the language of faith, and hope, and love; especially of gratitude, and self-dedication. (*T. Kidd.*) *Return to God*.—1. In the first place, we see what a true recovery from this state really is, "Behold, we come unto Thee." This is true repentance. It is coming back to God, a returning home. There may be a turning to doctrinal comfort, and no returning to God. Till this, the backsliding continues. "Behold, we come to Thee," say all returning backsliders; we come and lay our sins, our idols, ourselves, at Thy feet. And nothing short of this is real repentance, anything short of this is, under fair pretences, soul-deceptions. 2. But what else does it imply? Returning by the right way—faith. There is no real return to God but in the way we first met Him—in Jesus: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." All the tears, all the sorrow and resolutions of amendment, have no power to bring us back to God. But when faith lays hold upon Jesus and His great atonement, it brings me up at once to God. I hang back no more. I hide myself no more. I make no vain excuses now. I hate my sins. I lie low. It is a valley, and it suits the lowly lily well. 3. And who is the author of all this? The same blessed Spirit who first revealed Jesus, and God the Father in Him. And nothing short of this. When sin in any measure regains power, a deadening process instantly begins. The soul is commanded to confess; but

in proportion to the length of time of the departure, and the degree of power of it, there seems an inability to confess. There is a want of spiritual sensibility. Oh then, how should we beware of the first "appearance of evil"! "Beware, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." 4. Consider the great motive by which it is led back, the motive by which He works. It is the overcoming power of love. There was displeasure. Wounds were inflicted, wounds pungent and trying—wounds full of anguish were they, such as no human balm could assuage; but it was but the varied countenance of love. These wounds did but speak two things—His unsullied holiness, and equally His untiring love. The subject has a twofold bearing. First, as it regards our treatment of others, then that of our own souls. 1. First, others. We are all, as saints, more or less called amid our familiar friends and associates, to deal with those in whom we hope there is a spark of grace, yet little true, spiritual, holy light. 2. And now a few words to the believer in reference to himself. It may be that some one may be conscious—This is my own state. I have been not merely to-day, nor yesterday, but for many yesterdays, departing from God. Alas! that this should be so common. But, however, trifle not with it. It is not to be trifled with. Seek instant healing. Tarry not. Every instant of delay only increases the disease. Nothing but the blood of the Lamb can heal. Take heed that it be applied by none but the Holy Spirit. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

God forgotten:—Lady Glenorchy, in her diary, relates her being seized with a fever, which threatened her life, "during the course of which," she says, "the first question of the Assembly's Catechism was brought to my mind—'What is the chief end of man?'—as if some one had asked it. When I considered the answer to it,—To glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever,—I was struck with shame and confusion. I found I had never sought to glorify God in my life, nor had I any idea of what was meant by enjoying Him for ever. Death and judgment were set before me; my past sins came to my remembrance; I saw no way to escape the punishment due unto them, nor had I the least glimmering hope of obtaining pardon through the righteousness of another." From this unhappy state she was shortly after delivered, by faith in the Lord Jesus. (*W. Whitecross.*)

The call to repentance and its response:—You may pound a lump of ice with a pestle into a thousand fragments, but it will still continue ice. But bring it beside your own bright and blazing fire, and soon in that genial glow, the living waters flow. A man may try to make himself contrite. He may search out his sins and dwell on all their enormity and still feel no repentance. But come to Jesus with His words of grace and truth. Let that flinty, stony spirit bask in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, then will it melt. (*James Hamilton.*)

Responding to the call:—It is as when a man is in court, and is called for, to go into the witness-box. He is standing in the crowd, and his name is called: what happens? As soon as he hears his name he begins to push through the throng to reach his place. "What are you at?" says one. "I am called," says he. "Stand back; why do you push so?" says another. "I am called by the judge," says he. A big policeman demands, "Why are you making such confusion in court?" "But," says the man, "I am called. My name was called out, and I must go." If he cannot come, if it is not possible for him to get through the throng, one of the authorities calls out, "Make way for that man—he is summoned by the court. Officers, clear a passage and let him come." Such is the kind of response which God looks for as He calls sinners to repentance. "Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God."

The far-reaching consequences of sin:—For many years the trees of the forest had been lopped, and now, though the new ownership and laws forbade that any hatchet should be lifted up upon any tree, they could not outgrow the olden days. The drunkard is such a pollarded tree, he may stop drinking, but his body will long suffer. The same applies to all unchastity. Sometimes the mind rather than the body suffers, and memories of sin deform the intellectual powers, even after the sin is discontinued. False teaching is another form of lopping, affecting the soul. What branches of Bible truth some are giving up, with the result of hindered and deformed growth—growth never recovered. Thus in the natural, physical, mental, and spiritual realm lopping is a serious business.

CHAPTER IV.

VERS. 1-4. If thou wilt return, . . . and if thou wilt put away thine abominations . . . then shalt thou not remove.—*The pleadings of God* :—A strange ministry is that of Almightyness. It is almighty—almost. So we come upon a mysterious “if” in all the history of God’s administration. “If thou wilt return”—why not make them return? Here man is stronger than God. We have seen in innumerable instances how true it is that God, who can handle universes, can do nothing with the heart He has made except with the heart’s consent. Behold God, then, as a pleader. “If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto Me : and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of My sight,”—if thou wilt swear, “The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness,”—if thou wilt do these things, the issue will be glorious ; it will also be beneficent, it will have an evangelistic effect upon the world. The meaning is, the heathen nations round about shall see thy return, and they will begin to own the power of God. That is the converting force that must be brought to bear upon the whole of the nations. The Church must be so beautiful as to attract attention. When Christians do right, pagans will believe ; when Christians claim their uniqueness of quality and exemplify it, the men who get up arguments against Christianity will be ashamed of their own ingenuity, and run away from the things their hands have piled, saying, We cannot build fortresses against such quality of character. This is true missionary work. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Putting away of sin* :—A great warrior was once persuaded by his enemies to put on a beautiful robe which they presented him. Not suspecting their design, he wrapped himself tightly in it, but in a few moments found that it was coated on the inside with a deadly poison. It stuck to his flesh as if it had been glued. The poison entered into his flesh, so that in trying to throw off the cloak, he was left torn and bleeding. But did he for that reason hesitate about taking it off? Did he stop to think whether it was painful or not? Did he say, Let me wait and think about it awhile? No! he tore it off at once, and threw it from him, and hastened away from it to the physician. This is the way you must treat your sins if you would be saved. They have gone into your soul. If you let them alone you perish. You must not fear the pain of repentance. You must cast them from you as poison, and hasten away to Jesus Christ. Do this, or your sins will consume you like fire. (*T. Meade.*) *And thou shalt swear.—On swearing* :—I. THE COMMAND. Did Christ countermand this? (Matt. v. 34.) The Son forbid in the Gospel what the Father bids in the law? God bids thee swear, so thy oath be truthful and needful ; Christ forbids swearing which is truthless and needless. II. THE FORM. God bade us swear ; now He tells us how. “The Lord liveth.” It is, then, impiety to swear by creatures. God prevents all evasion by the name He here gives—“the Lord” ; not any god the swearer would substitute, as some swear by angels, called in Scripture “Elohim,” and superstition worships them as gods. III. THREE PARTICULARS. 1. “In truth.” Perjury is impious—makes that which is the sign and seal of truth, the cloak of falsehood. 2. “In judgment.” Swear not upon guess only. 3. “In righteousness.” To any act against right or religion bind not thyself, let not any bind thee. (*R. Clerke, D.D.*) *Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.—Soul agriculture* :—I. Proper attention to the SOIL. 1. Variety of condition. 2. Capability of improvement. II. Proper attention to the SEED. 1. Care in selection of true spiritual seed. The Gospel—(1) Perfect in itself. (2) Fitted to grow in all climates. (3) It does not sow itself. (4) It is the support of life. 2. Attention must also be paid to its growth. III. Proper attention to the SEASON. 1. Youth. 2. The season of moral seriousness, when the heart has been softened. (*Homilist.*) *The life of the sinner a foolish agriculture* :—The people referred to as sowing among thorns are those, perhaps, who are endeavouring by religious study and effort to get the seeds of Divine good into them when their hearts remain full of worldly things. I. A GRAND EVIL. Sowing precious seed in bad soil involves three things. 1. Loss of seed. The precious grain has been thrown away. 2. Loss of labour. All the efforts employed go for nothing. 3. Loss of hope. All the bright anticipations of a glorious future frustrated. II. AN URGENT DUTY, “Break up your fallow ground.” This means in one word

evangelical repentance for sin. 1. This in moral, as well as material, agriculture is hard work. A skilful ploughman, a strong plough and a vigorous team are necessary. It is hard work to repent. 2. This in moral, as well as in material, agriculture is indispensable work. (*Ibid.*) *The fallow ground broken* :—

I. THE NECESSITY OF FALLOWING THE GROUND is obvious to all who are practically acquainted with tillage : and such as are experimentally informed on the subject of the evil and barrenness of their own hearts, will admit the absolute requirement of a similar mental process. All your carnal hopes, and criminal opposition to the Divine will, must be completely eradicated. II. THE NATURE of this part of a farmer's business will well illustrate the correspondent toil of a believer. No attempt to cleanse the heart, however disagreeable, is intentionally neglected by the sincere believer—no effort is relied upon ; all is subservient to the expected influences of heaven. III. THE ADVANTAGES of this procedure. Those who make thorough work with their own hearts, will find that their religious joys and better hopes, though delayed, shall be most vigorous ; their subsequent sufferings from the grieving thorn and pricking brier shall be fewer ; and a richer harvest shall at length crown their toil. 1. If you desire permanent prosperity and joy in the Holy Ghost, break up the fallow ground—sow not among thorns. 2. Be personal in this labour. Turn your eyes from others to yourself. 3. Remember your own unworthiness, and the poverty of your unassisted endeavours. (*W. Clayton.*)

Ploughing and sowing :—This season of spring, with its ploughing, and sowing, and opening of life, typifies the time which God has given for forming in us enlightened principles and virtuous habits, holy motives and pure desires, and for becoming possessed of the grace and goodness which Jesus has to impart, in order that we may grow up into the Divine life of God, which shall abide with us through old age as the source of true enjoyment, and as the first beginnings of eternal glory. The ploughshare of the Divine Word must pierce into us, and break up our hardness and indifference, and make us impressible and movable, to fit us for bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. For example, the seed-time of life, like that of spring, regulates and determines the moral results which the future shall unfold, whether in time or in eternity. Our life on earth is the scene of moral causes and operations—the sowing-time of our spirit—the period for the earnest cultivation of our moral nature ; and it is to us all the more important, because it is far-reaching in its effects, stretching beyond the present earthly existence into eternity, bearing the flowers and blossoms of spiritual beauty and grace, a manifestation of Deity in humanity. And if these moral causes do not operate—if the seed-time of life be wasted—if the cultivation of the moral nature be neglected, equally true the effects of such a life are eternal, stretching beyond the present earthly existence, and bearing into eternity the fruits of moral depravity and corruption. Now, this cultivation of our moral nature is no easy task. Even in matters connected with this life, if we neglect any duty from time to time, or if we delay entering upon any employment necessary to our material or social well-being, indolence increases, disinclination to perform the duty strengthens, dislike to the employment springs up, until habit entirely unfits us for action. In the same way, to ignore religious truth in its relation to our heart, and to neglect religious duties, is to deepen false impressions, strengthen ignorant prejudices, and confirm evil habits. This also is certain, that if good seed is not germinating in our hearts, thorns of evil are, do what we will. If, for instance, our mind is not exercised with religious truth, and no effort made on our part to understand intelligently the revelation which God has made of human salvation ; or if the heart be unopened to the power of the Divine Spirit and the moral impressions of Divine truth ; and if we continue to refuse accepting Christ as the Saviour of our soul ; then our mental and moral nature will become as hard-baked fallow ground, almost impenetrable to the ploughshare of heaven. The indifference of the mind to religious truth keeps the heart spiritually cold, and the coldness of the heart induces in the mind a distaste for spiritual things. On the other hand, any powerful awakening in connection with religion or religious truth, whether it affect the mind alone, or the heart alone, or both together, is in the highest sense beneficial to our soul. Whatever acts on the mind so as to turn it in upon itself, whatever makes the soul depend upon God, and believe in an invisible spiritual world as a reality, though accompanied with strong excitement or inward conflict, is good, and leads to spiritual power. Besides, the precise form of treatment that does good to one spiritual nature, is not always successful with every other, even in like circumstances, any more than the same

culture would be successful with different soils in the same climate. We cannot, therefore, project our own feelings and experience into the mind and soul of others, as if we were examples of the only way in which Divine grace and power plough all human souls for the seed of salvation. This breaking up of our moral nature is nothing else than the softening of our hearts under the influence of Divine truth—a humble, penitent spirit, a constant sense of the evil of sin, a willingness to be reconciled to God, whom our transgressions have offended, and an earnest desire after a holier life in God. It is only in such a heart as this that Divine truth will take root, and grow up and bring forth fruit. As the ground must be broken before the tiny fibrils of the root can descend into the earth, which they do, as by a sensitive instinct, in search of vegetable nourishment and life; so the spiritual nature must be humbled and made penitent—broken under a sense of sin, and under the operation of Divine law—in order that the seed of the Divine Word may hide itself deep down into the subsoil of the soul, until it establishes itself firmly there. While the tangled threads of the root are shooting themselves downwards, and gathering strength and nourishment from the soil, the blade in spiral form shoots itself upwards to the light, and the leaf opens, then comes the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, ripe for the sickle of harvest. In the same way Divine truth and heavenly principles, spiritual thought, emotion, and life descend and ascend, as by an unchangeable law. In every truly spiritual life there is this twofold operation—a movement upwards and downwards, a working within and without, a meditative disposition expressing itself in active habits, believing prayer, conjoined with earnest effort in doing good. (*W. Simpson.*) *The duty of moral cultivation* :—Our nature at its largest is but a small farm, and we had need to get a harvest out of every acre of it, for our needs are great. Have we left any part of our small allotment uncultivated? If so, it is time to look into the matter and see if we cannot improve this wasteful state of things. What part of our small allotment have we left fallow? We should think very poorly of a farmer who for many years allowed the best and richest part of his farm to lie altogether neglected and untilled. An occasional fallow has its benefits in the world of nature; but, if the proprietor of rich and fruitful land allowed the soil to continue fallow, year after year, we should judge him to be out of his wits. The wasted acres ought to be taken from him and given to another husbandman who would worthily cherish the generous fields, and encourage them to yield their harvests. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A fallow field* :—Do you know what happens to a fallow field? how it becomes caked and baked hard as though it were a brick? All the friable qualities seem to depart, and it hardens as it lies caked and unbroken; I mean, of course, if year succeed year, and the fallow remains untouched. And then the weeds! If a man will not sow wheat, he shall have a crop for all that, for the weeds will spring up, and they will sow themselves, and in due time the multiplication table will be worked out to a very wonderful extent; for these seeds, multiplying a hundredfold, as evil usually does, will increase and increase again, till the fallow field shall become a wilderness of thorns and briars and a thicket of dock nettle and thistle. If you do not cultivate your heart, Satan will cultivate it for you. If you bring no crop to God, the devil will be sure to reap a harvest. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 11-13. *A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people, not to fan, nor to cleanse.*—*Untempered judgments* :—The prophet intimates that God will one day send a judgment upon His people comparable only to the sirocco of the desert. The harvestman welcomes almost all the winds of the summer time but this. Their gentle currents lend themselves to the winnowing processes that are necessary to complete the toil of the year. But the sirocco comes with no element of helpfulness or beneficent service in its terrible wings. It is the agent of unmixing ruin, overthrow, death; the symbol of judgment without mercy. The successive invasions that were soon to close in upon the Holy Land were to be of this unmixing character. The flower of one generation was to perish in the overthrow. Whole districts were to be depopulated and re-peopled by alien races. The wind that came from the desert came to crash and to scorch and to destroy. It was “not to fan, nor to cleanse.” Some men claim that all judgment must be ultimately purifying. This inspired utterance however assures us that there is such a thing

in the Divine economy as punishment that is purely punitive and not disciplinary. I. LET US INQUIRE IF THIS PENAL ELEMENT HAS A PLACE IN THE BEST HUMAN GOVERNMENTS. If we work out to its logical conclusion the theory that all punishment must be disciplinary only, we shall be bound to adopt methods of procedure in our law courts more grotesque than the most audacious caricature has ever imagined. We must have no short sentences if all penalty is to be educating. We have no right to discharge a man, however slight his transgression, till he has given sufficient assurance that his character has been entirely transformed. Judge and jury would no longer need to concern themselves with the particular category into which his crime came. The only question for them to ask would be, how far does the root of evil go down in this man's character? and what amount of force will be necessary to pull it up? Some men, who are incapable of amendment through pain, can perhaps be stirred to better desires, or at least taken away from their criminal tendencies, by wholesome excitements. Experts would have to step into the witness-box. In some cases it might be found that a garrotter would be more sensibly improved by wholesome excitements than by flogging. Carlyle inveighed from time to time against this unhealthy sentimentalism, which would sap the foundation of all human and Divine law alike. In the "Life of Bishop Wilberforce" reference is made to a party at which Monckton Milnes, Thomas Carlyle, and other distinguished men were present. The conversation turned upon the question of capital punishment. Mr. Monckton Milnes was arguing against death-penalties, on the ground that we could not know how far the offender was responsible and consciously wrong. Carlyle broke out, "None of your heaven-and-hell amalgamation companies for me! We do know what is wickedness. I know wicked men I would not live with: men whom under some conceivable circumstances I would kill or they should kill me. No, Milnes; there is no truth or greatness in that. It's just poor, miserable littleness. There was far more greatness in the way of your German forefathers, who, when they found one of those wicked men, dragged him to a peat bog, and thrust him in, and said, 'There! go in there. There is the place for all such as thee.'" II. IF THIS PENAL ELEMENT IS ADMITTED INTO HUMAN GOVERNMENTS, UPON WHAT CONCEIVABLE PRINCIPLE CAN IT BE EXCLUDED FROM THE DIVINE? Many causes combine to weaken the sense we have of our own authority to punish wrong-doing. It is a strictly delegated authority. We always feel ourselves bound to greater restraint and circumspection in the exercise of delegated than original rights. We often feel ourselves incompetent judges of all that has transpired. We judge and punish in dim twilights. That tends to make us hesitating and indeterminate. And then the sense of our own authority to judge and to punish is weakened by the recollection we have of our own desert of punishment in many things. Unless the offence is very flagrant, we fear to incriminate ourselves by judging another. And yet, notwithstanding all these things, we are absolutely sure of our clear abstract right to punish even in cases where the punishment has no educating purpose to fulfil to the individual, whatever it may have to the community. How much stronger is God's right! His authority is original, and not delegated. He guarantees in every soul He judges the sufficiency of the past training and discipline. He dwells in the perfect light. His judgment can never be unnerved by the fear of error. III. Disciplinary are distinguished from penal judgments, not so much by any quality in the judgments themselves, as by THE TEMPER OF THOSE WHO BECOME THE SUBJECTS OF SUCH JUDGMENTS. The question whether purely penal elements can enter into God's government is one that must be looked at from the standpoint of the transgressor rather than that of the Judge. Are there incorrigible elements in human nature? As a matter of fact, judgments very often fail to sober and to purify here. There are men who can never be taught wisdom by the longest succession of business reverses. There are men who, humanly speaking, can never be taught common morality, however heavy the penalties they are made to pay for its breach. There are worldly men whom no number of sicknesses and providential bereavements can discipline into religiousness. Where there are unreformable elements in human character, disciplinary judgment necessarily passes into the purely punitive stage. It is often argued that the keener judgments of the life to come will produce penitence in those who have continued stubborn under the milder judgments of the present life. There is not only no proof of that, but nothing even to suggest that it is probable. We cannot predicate anything from the cumulative power of pain. The wind does not become purifying by mere increase of the force with which it

blows. After reaching a certain pitch of violence it can neither "fan nor cleanse." IV. The judgment that has passed out of the disciplinary into the penal stage for the individual is still **DISCIPLINARY IN ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE RACE AT LARGE.** The wind that blows to crush and to scorch and to uproot in one zone of the earth, after it has passed into new latitudes, and been tempered by the seas over which it travels, may become a wind of winnowing beneficence. The penal visitation of one generation may become the saving chastisement of the generation that follows it. We must not get into the habit of supposing that God's purposes ever terminate in the individual. That mystery of unending punishment, which seems to frustrate the Divine purpose of mercy to the individual, may fulfil a purpose of gracious admonition to the race. The law of vicariousness pervades the moral universe just as widely as the law of gravitation overspreads the natural universe. There is a priesthood of vicarious judgment as well as of mercy. As great fires are kindled in times of plague to burn up the germs of infection floating in the air, so the atmosphere of God's universe may need to be kept pure by the flames of a quenchless Gehenna. (*T. G. Selby.*)

Ver. 14. Wash thine heart from wickedness. — Purity necessary to salvation: — I. THE NATURAL DEPRAVITY OF THE HUMAN HEART. 1. This doctrine requires definition. Depravity of the heart includes — (1) The entire absence of the Divine image. (2) A natural aversion to God and godliness. (3) A universal propensity or disposition to evil. 2. This doctrine demands evidence. (1) Divinely revealed. (2) Practically exemplified. (3) Deeply lamented. **II. THE SPIRITUAL PURITY WHICH THE LORD REQUIRES.** 1. The possibility of obtaining purity of heart. This appears from — (1) The design of redemption (Heb. ix. 13, 14). (2) The ability of the Saviour (John i. 16; 1 Cor. i. 30). (3) The promises of Scripture (Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27; 1 Pet. i. 3, 4). (4) The experience of believers (Rom. vi. 22; 1 John i. 7). 2. The important duty of seeking purity of heart. **III. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF PERSONAL HOLINESS.** 1. A necessary property of religion. 2. A necessary meetness for heaven. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The heart to be kept pure: —* "You have seen," said Spurgeon, "the great reservoirs provided by our water companies, in which the water to supply thousands of houses is kept. Now the heart is the reservoir of man, and our life is allowed to flow in its proper season. That life may flow through different pipes — the mouth, the hand, the eye; but still all the issues of hand, of eye, of lip derive their source from the great fountain and central reservoir, the heart; and hence there is great necessity for keeping this reservoir in a proper state and condition, since otherwise that which flows through the pipes must be tainted and corrupt." **How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? — Vain thoughts: — I. CHARACTERISTICS.** Those thoughts are vain — 1. From which we do not and cannot reap any good. 2. Which cannot associate in any agreement with useful and valuable ones. 3. Which have to be kept out in order for the mind to attend to any serious or good purpose. 4. Which dwell largely and habitually on trifling things. 5. Which trifle with important things. 6. Which are fickle, not remaining with any continuance on a subject. 7. When the mind has some specially favourite trifle, some cherished, idolised toy. 8. Which continually return to things justly claiming a measure of attention, when the thinking of them can be no advantage. 9. When the mind dwells on fancies of how things might be or might have been, when the reality of how they are is before us. 10. Which men indulge concerning notions and schemings of worldly felicity. **II. CORRECTIVE.** 1. Have specified subjects of serious interest to turn to when thought reverts to those vanities. 2. Make a sudden charge of guilt on your mind when vain thoughts prevail. 3. Have recourse to the direct act of devotion. 4. Interrupt and stop them by the question, What is just now my most pressing duty? 5. Have recourse to some practical occupation, matter of business, or a visit to some house of mourning. 6. Constrain your habitual thinking to go along with the thoughts of those who have thought the best, by reading the most valuable books. 7. Think to a certain purpose — towards a purposed end. 8. Reflect on how many things we have to do with which vain thoughts interfere; and also, what would have been the result of good thoughts instead of so many vain. 9. Discipline of the thoughts greatly depends on the company a man keeps (Prov. xiii. 20). 10. If the complaint be urged, that this discipline involves much that is hard and difficult, we answer, It is just as hard as to do justice to a rational and immortal spirit

placed here a little while by God for its improvement, and then to go where God appoints. Hard, but indispensable. (*John Foster.*) *Bad lodgers, and how to treat them*.—I. HERE ARE CERTAIN BAD LODGERS. 1. Many thoughts may be called vain because they are proud, conceited thoughts. Thus, whenever a man thinks himself good by nature, we may say of his thoughts, "Vanity of vanities: all is vanity." If you are unrenewed, and dream that you are better than others because your parents were godly, it is a vain thought. Every thought of self-righteousness is a vain thought; every idea, moreover, of self-power—that you can do this and do that towards your own salvation, and that at any time when it pleases you you can turn and become a Christian, and so there is no need to be in a hurry, or to seek the help of the Holy Spirit:—that also is a vain thought. 2. Another sort of vain thoughts may be ranged under the head of carnal security. The poet says, "All men think all men mortal but themselves," and often as the saying is quoted never was a proverb more generally true. 3. I know another set of thoughts: they are better looking, but they are equally vain, for they promise much and come to nothing: they are vain because they are fruitless. These vain thoughts are like the better order of people in Jerusalem—good people after a sort—that is to say, they really thought that as God threatened them with judgments, they would turn to Him. Certainly they would. They had no intention of being hard-hearted. Far from it; they owned the power of the prophet's appeal; they felt a degree of awe in the presence of the just God as He threatened them, and of course they meant—they meant to wash their hearts, and they meant to put away all their forbidden practices; not just yet, but by and by. Some men brood so long over their future intentions that they all of them become addled eggs, and nothing whatever is hatched. O man, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it," do it, do it "with thy might." II. NOW, LET ME SHOW WHAT BAD LODGERS THEY ARE. 1. First, they are deceitful. The man that says, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee," does not send for Paul any more: he never intended to do so. A man says, "To-morrow"; but to-morrow never comes. When that comes which would have been "to-morrow" it is "to-day"; and then he cries, "To-morrow," and so multiplies lies before God. 2. Vain thoughts are bad lodgers, for they pay no rent; they bring in nothing good to those who entertain them. There is the lodger of self-righteousness, for instance: what good does self-righteousness ever do to the man who entertains it? It pretends to pay in brass farthings: it pretends to pay, but the money is counterfeit. What good does it do to any man to harbour in his mind the empty promise of future repentance? It often prevents repentance. 3. The next reason for the ejection of these lodgers is this: that they are wasting your goods and destroying your property. For instance, every unacted resolution wastes time, and that is more precious than gold. It also wastes thought, for to think of a thing and to leave it undone is a waste of reflection. It is a waste of energy to be energetic about merely promising to be energetic; it is a great waste of strength to be for ever resolving to be strong, and yet to remain weak. 4. Worst of all, these vain thoughts are bad lodgers because they bring you under condemnation. There have been times when to entertain certain persons was treason, and many individuals have been put to death for harbouring traitors. Rebels condemned to die have been discovered in a man's house, and he has been condemned for affording them a hiding-place. Now, God declares that these vain thoughts of yours are condemned traitors. Are you going to harbour them any longer? III. LET US SEE WHAT TO DO WITH THESE BAD LODGERS. 1. The first thing is to give them notice to quit at once. Let there be no waiting. When a man is converted it is done at once. There is a line, thin as a razor's edge, which divides death from life, a point of decision which separates the saved from the lost. 2. Suppose that these vain thoughts will not go just when you bid them begone. I will tell you what to do to get rid of them: starve them out. Lock the door, and let nothing enter upon which they can feed. 3. The best way in all the world that I know of to get rid of vain thoughts out of your house—these bad lodgers that have gone in and that you cannot get out—is to sell the house over their heads. Let the house change owners. When you have done that, you know, it will be the new owner that will have the trouble of turning them out; and He will do it. I recommend every sinner here that wants to find salvation to give himself up to Christ. Ah, now the stronger than they are has come, and He will bind the strong ones, and He will fling them out of window, and so break them to pieces with their fall that they shall never be able to crawl up the stairs again. He knows how to do it.

He can expel them; you cannot. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Vain thoughts*:—Heart compared to house, to entertain and lodge guests; into which, before conversion, all the light wanton thoughts that post up and down in the world have open access; while they, like unruly gallants, revel day and night, and defile those rooms they lodge in. "How long?" whilst I, with My Spirit, and Son, and train of graces, stand and knock, and cannot find admittance? **I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THOUGHTS?** 1. The internal acts of the mind; reasonings, resolutions, consultations, desires, cares, &c. (1) The thinking, meditating, musing power in man, which enables him to conceive, apprehend, fancy. (2) Thoughts which the mind frames within itself (Prov. vi. 14; Jas. i. 15; Isa. lix. 4-7). (3) Thoughts which the mind in and by itself begets and entertains. 2. What vanity is. (1) Unprofitableness (Eccles. i. 2, 3). (2) Lightness (Psa. lxii. 9). (3) Folly (Prov. xii. 11). (4) Inconstancy (Psa. cxliv. 4, cxlvi. 4). (5) Wicked and sinful (2 Chron. xiii. 7; Prov. xxiv. 9). **II. THE PARTICULARS WHEREIN THIS VANITY OF THE THINKING, MEDITATING POWER OF MAN CONSISTS.** 1. In regard to thinking what is good. (1) A want of ability to raise and extract holy and useful considerations and thoughts from the occurrences and occasions which surround us. (2) A loathness to entertain holy thoughts. (3) The mind will not be long intent on good thoughts. (4) If the mind think of good things, it does so unseasonably; intrudes on prayer and interrupts it (Prov. xvi. 3). 2. The readiness of the mind to think on evil and vain things. (1) This vanity shows itself in foolishness (Mark vii. 22), which proves itself in the unsettledness and independence of our thoughts. (2) If any strong lust or passion be up, our thoughts are too fixed and intent. (3) A restless curiosity concerning things not affecting us. (4) Taking thought to fulfil the lusts of our flesh. (5) Acting sins over again in our imagination. **III. REMEDIES AGAINST VAIN THOUGHTS.** 1. Get the heart furnished and enriched with a good stock of sanctified and heavenly knowledge in spiritual truths. 2. Endeavour to preserve and keep up lively, holy, and spiritual affections in the heart. 3. Get the heart possessed with deep and powerful apprehensions of God's holiness, majesty, omniscience, and omnipresence. 4. In the morning when thou awakest, as did David (Psa. cxix. 18), prevent the vain thoughts the heart naturally engenders by filling it with thoughts of God. 5. Have a watchful eye upon thy heart all day; though vain thoughts crowd in, let them know that they pass not unseen. 6. Please not thy fancy too much with vanities and curious flights (Job xxxi. 1; Prov. iv. 25). 7. Be diligent in thy calling (2 Thess. iii. 11; 1 Tim. v. 13); only, encumber not the mind too much (Luke x. 41). 8. In thy calling and all thy ways commit thy goings to the Lord (Prov. xvi. 3). (*T. Goodwin, B.D.*) *Vain thoughts*:—**I. WHAT ARE VAIN THOUGHTS?** 1. Unprofitable imaginations. 2. Unscriptural opinions. 3. Unholy desires. 4. Unseasonable ideas. **II. THE SOLEMN INQUIRY.** "How long?" 1. Shall it be till some temporal judgment be sent to awaken you out of your carnal security? 2. Till habit rivets these vain thoughts, and makes repentance and conversion harder than ever? 3. Till the grieved Saviour forsakes thee, and the resisted Spirit ceases to strive with thee? 4. Till the sentence goes forth, cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground? (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *The vanity of man as a thinker*:—**I. IT IS THE GLORY OF MAN THAT HE CAN THINK.** 1. Thought brings the outward universe into man's soul, and thus makes it his own. 2. Thought enables us to subordinate the outward world to our service. 3. By the power of thought we construct new universes. 4. Thought determines our condition. (1) Even materially, it influences our health, shapes our countenance, tunes our voice. (2) Spiritually, our condition is almost absolutely governed by thought. By thought we can pierce the heavens, enter into the holy of holies, hold fellowship with the Infinite. By thought we can break forth from our own little earthly sphere—make God our centre, and run a wider and brighter orbit than the stars. **II. IT IS THE CURSE OF MAN THAT HE THINKS WRONGLY.** 1. Vain thoughts find a lodgment in the minds of some. If the thoughts cherished be vain, the life pursued will be vain. In order in some measure to estimate the amount of vain thought cherished by men, let us do three things. Compare the true theory of happiness with the conduct which men pursue in order to obtain it; the true theory of greatness with the efforts which they put forth in order to realise it; and the true theory of religion with their conduct in relation to it. 2. The expulsion of vain thoughts is a matter of urgent importance. (1) They can be got rid of. By consecration of our energies to true work. By companionship with truthful souls. By realising the constant presence of the heart-inspecting

God. By a change in the governing dispositions of the mind. (2) The urgent necessity of this. They waste the mental life; corrupt the heart; imperil the soul. (*Homilist.*) *Vain thoughts*.—I. THE EVIL OF PERMITTING VAIN THOUGHTS TO LODGE WITHIN US. By vain thoughts may be meant all unlawful desires, vile affections, wicked tempers, and mischievous imaginations of every kind. If these, or any other evil thoughts to which we are subject, lodge in our breasts, they must render our persons abominable to God, corrupt all our performances, and produce many bitter fruits. II. THE NECESSITY OF WASHING OUR HEARTS FROM WICKEDNESS. As it would be madness in the husbandman to sow his seed upon ground that was covered with thorns, so it is equally foolish to expect the fruit of good-living in any person whose heart lies fallow, unbroken, and overspread with the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, which our Saviour calls thorns. (*W. Richardson.*) *The place of thought in the making of character*.—Anyone who has visited lime-stone caves has noticed the stalactite pillars, sometimes large and massive, by which they are adorned and supported. They are nature's masonry of solid rock formed by her own slow, silent, and mysterious process. The little drop of water percolates through the roof of the cavern and deposits its sediment, and another follows it, till the icicle of stone is formed, and finally reaching to the rock beneath, it becomes a solid pillar, a marble monument which can only be rent down by the most powerful forces. But is there not going forward oftentimes in the caverns of the human heart a process as silent and effective, yet infinitely more momentous? There in the darkness that shrouds all from the view of the outward observer, each thought and feeling, as light and inconsiderable perhaps as the little drops of water, sinks downward into the soul, and deposits—yet in a form almost imperceptible—what we may call its sediment. And then another and another follows, till the traces of all combined become more manifest; and if these thoughts and feelings are charged with the sediment of worldliness and worldly passion, then all around the walls of this spiritual cavern stand in massive proportions the pillars of sinful inclination and the props of iniquity, and only a convulsion like that which rends the solid globe can rend them from their place and shake their hold. (*American National Preacher.*) *Bad lodgers*.—John Huss, seeking to reclaim a very profane wretch, was told by him that his giving way to wicked, wanton thoughts was the original of all those hideous births of impiety which he was guilty of in his life. Huss answered him, that although he could not keep evil thoughts from courting him, yet he might keep them from making a lodging-place in his heart; “as,” he added, “though I cannot prevent the birds from flying over my head, yet I can keep them from building nests in my hair.” *Vain thoughts*.—A true Christian, who, by experience, knows what it is to deal with his own heart, finds it infinitely more difficult to beat down one sinful thought from rising up in him than to keep a thousand sinful thoughts from breaking forth into open act. Here lies his chief labour, to fight against phantasm and any apparitions, such as thoughts are; he sets himself chiefly against these heart-sins, because he knows that these are the sins that are most of all contrary to grace, and do most of all weaken and waste grace. Outward sins are but like so many caterpillars that devour the verdure and flourishing of grace; but heart-sins are like so many worms that gnaw the very root of grace. (*Bp. E. Hopkins.*)

Vers. 19-20. I am pained at my very heart.—*The prophet's lamentations over his people's doom*.—I. THE COMPLAINT OR LAMENTATION ITSELF. 1. The parts affected. The soul and inward man. (1) The secrecy of it, the mind and soul being inward and hidden. (2) The mind receives and digests the thoughts. (3) The mind is the mother of thoughts, conceiving and generating them. 2. The grief of those parts. (1) God need not go far for the punishment of wicked men; He can do it from within themselves; can punish a man with his own affections and thoughts. (2) What good cause we have to regulate and control our affections, avoid passion and excess of emotion, take care to be pacific, and enjoy a sabbatic tranquillity in our spirits. 3. The passage or vent. (1) The speech of discovery. He cannot help revealing these workings of his own spirit. (2) The speech of lamentation. He must bewail and utter complaint, his anguish was so great (Job vii. 11). II. THE GROUND OR OCCASION OF HIS LAMENTATION. 1. The tidings or report itself. (1) The trumpet of providence. (2) The trumpet of the Word. (3) The trumpet of vision, or extraordinary prophetic revelation. 2. The conveyance of it to the prophet. (1) The soul,

through the corporeal organ of hearing. (2) The soul immediately, as being that which had communion with God. (3) The soul emphatically; that is heard, indeed, which is heard by the soul. Hence—(a) God's excellency: He speaks. (b) Man's duty: he hears. 3. The improvement or use he makes of it. (1) His meditations aroused his affections. (a) This is the aim of a revelation. (b) We should endeavour to bring revelations for others to our own spiritual advancement and profit. (2) What these affections were which the tidings aroused. (a) Anger at his people's obstinacy. (b) Fear of the coming judgment. (c) Grief at his people's state and doom. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) **The alarm of war.**—*War*!—"The alarm of war." A dreadful alarm; one that conjures up horrors and miseries that can scarcely be too deeply coloured. It sends a shudder through the system to think of the wealth of faculty and of resource that is expended over the problem how men can most effectually blow up and slay their fellows, and spread ruin and devastation upon the earth. Strip the thing of all the plumage of romance; look at it in its naked literalness, and it is simply horrible. That is true, too true, undeniably true. But let us learn a lesson. What capacities of heroism, of lofty patriotism, of courageous and unstinting self-sacrifice are called forth by the sound of the trumpet! Well, if only this potency of action, this burning enthusiasm, could be transferred to the Holy War that we are called to wage—ay, what then? Who are the real world heroes? An Alexander, a Napoleon? No, not the wakeful conquerors whose path has been as the whirlwind, but the men and women of whom the world often heard little, for the world does not know its best benefactors—the men and women who have broken the chains of the slave; who have lifted the poor from the dunghill; who have spoken the word of truth for which the soul of man was waiting; who have helped their kind to nobler and higher life; and all and only for God and for humanity. To them the statues and the monuments should be reared, and the canvas animated, and the laurel entwined. They are your leaders, O Christian people. Their fight is your fight, and it is His fight who is the Captain of our salvation. If I were to say to you in regard to this highest and noblest warfare, as Marshal Blanco said to the Cuban Spaniards, "Do you swear to follow in this fight?" would you reply "Yes, we do"? I suppose you would. But just pause. Have you ever parted with a single comfort, with an enjoyment, with something that you feel to be good, if not necessary for your well-being; a something to which you are quite entitled; to secure an unselfish end; to better some cause; to get more into the inner place of human soul; to spread the knowledge of God's Christ and of your Father's kingdom in our world? Oh, that as we raise the vision of one kind of war that is blistered all over with mourning, lamentation, and woe, oh, that there might rise upon our souls the vision of that other war that has no such blisters, that is written all over with the characters of true, noble, glorious life or death! Oh, that this vision might take some shape and some consistency and some solidarity within us. There is no life that is worth anything that is not a fighting life. God made us to fight; He set us in the world to fight. The enemy is around us, before us, without us, aye, and within us. I ask, who of you are ready, humbly, reflecting, but earnestly, to lift up your hand to Him, your risen Lord, who is beckoning you, and say, "By Thy help, Lord, I will. Here am I. I have been but a laggard; I have been content to fight in the rear. Take me on to the van, and let me have some worthy part with Thee in this great holy war. Here am I, Prince of Peace, send me." (*J. M. Lang, D.D.*) **The alarm of war:—I. OF HEARING THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET, AND THE ALARM OF WAR.** 1. We ought to have our ears open to the voice of God in the dispensations of His providence (*Mic. vi. 9*). 2. When we hear the sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war, we ought to consider the causes of these alarms. The prophets often denounce war as a judgment of God against His people, or against the Gentiles. In publishing such threatenings they, for the most part, speak of the sins that have provoked God to afflict His creatures with this calamity; and when they do not specify the grounds of the Lord's controversy, as in chap. xlix., they leave no room to doubt that God is justly displeased. God has just reason, for our sins at present, not only to threaten, but to punish us with His vengeance. We ought to wonder at His forbearance, that He has not long since caused the sword to reach unto the whole of the nation, to avenge the quarrel of His covenant. 3. The probable or possible consequences of these alarms of war ought to come under our view when we hear the sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war. When we make that preparation which religion enjoins against possible evils, if these evils should not overtake us, we are no losers,

but gainers. The fear of evil has often been productive of much good. "Happy is the man who feareth always," and especially in times when there is peculiar cause of fear; "but he who hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." II. THE IMPRESSION WHICH THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET AND THE ALARM OF WAR OUGHT TO MAKE UPON US. 1. Those external scenes of distress which are the consequences of war must give pain to a heart that is not contracted and hardened by a reigning selfishness of spirit. 2. Souls precipitated into an eternal world must awaken awful sensations in those who believe that, when the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it. 3. The influence that wars may have upon the interests of religion is a source of anxious concern to the lovers of God (Lam. i. 9, ii. 6, 7, 9). Amidst the ravages of war, even in our own times, we have too often heard of the alienation or destruction of houses ordinarily employed in the services of religion. Should God, in His wrath, refuse us His help against those who threaten the subversion of our liberties, who can foresee what dismal consequences in the state of religion would ensue? 4. God's indignation, apparent in the alarms of war, ought to impress every mind with deep concern. III. WHAT IMPROVEMENT IS TO BE MADE OF THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET AND OF THE ALARM OF WAR? 1. Let us consider our ways, and inquire how far we are chargeable with those provocations of the Divine majesty which expose us to danger from our enemies. When God threatens judgments, He observes our behaviour. He returns and repents when men are ready to acknowledge their offences, and to forsake them; but woe to those who are at ease in their sins, and never inquire what are the causes of the Lord's contendings with them. 2. We ought to humble ourselves before God, on account of our iniquities. Observe in what manner Ezra and Daniel bewailed and confessed their own iniquities, and the iniquities of their people (Ezra ix; Dan. ix.). What would we think of a child that did not mourn when his father was justly displeased with him? We would think that he was cursed with a disposition that totally disqualified him for enjoying the sweetest pleasures that man can taste. By this similitude the Scripture teaches us how unnatural a thing insensibility to the chastisements of the Divine hand ought to be reputed (Num. xii. 14). 3. Supplications for pardoning and reforming grace ought to accompany our humiliation. We are greatly encouraged to pray by the many examples of successful petitioners for public mercies in Scripture. The ways of God are everlasting. He delights in mercy. He puts words into our mouth for imploring His mercy. He hath left us many promises of merciful returns to our prayers, that we may be encouraged to come boldly to His throne of grace for mercy to ourselves, to our friends and brethren, to the Church, to our king and country. 4. We are warned by the sound of the trumpet and the alarms of war to make God our refuge, and the Most High our habitation. To trust to ourselves is the fruit of atheism. If there is a God, He rules in the army of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth; and He does according to His pleasure. He sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. He bringeth the princes of the earth to nought; He maketh its judges as vanity. "But the name of the Lord is a strong tower of defence," some may say, "only for the righteous (Prov. xviii. 10). And we are conscious of so many evils, that we have no reason to hope for protection from the Holy One, who takes no pleasure in wickedness, and will not suffer evil to dwell with Him." It is true, the Lord our God is holy; but it is true likewise, that He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. "Him that cometh unto Me," says Jesus, "I will in no wise cast out." You have perhaps heard some ridiculous stories of men that, by some magical secret, were rendered invulnerable in battle. You would not be afraid to encounter the most formidable armies if you were masters of such a secret; but, if thou canst believe, "all things are possible to him that believeth." "He that liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die." Who is he that can kill those who cannot die? The words, you will say, must be figuratively understood; for who is the man that liveth, and shall not see death? But, however they are to be understood, they are true and faithful sayings of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, of Him that liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore, and holds the keys of the spiritual world, and of death. You are called to mourning in days of danger, but not to that kind of mourning which swallows up the soul. You are called to mourn, that you may rejoice; to be afflicted for your sins, that you may flee from wrath to Christ, and find in Him safety, security, and joy. 5. The sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war is a loud call to us to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well. Our faith

in God is a delusion if we hold fast our iniquities. Our faith in Christ, if it is genuine, will purify our hearts and lives. We are exposed to danger, not only from our own personal sins, but from the sins of our fellow-subjects; and therefore we ought not only to forsake sin, but to use all our influence to turn other sinners from the error of their ways. It is a righteous thing with God, that those who do not duly oppose the prevalence of sin should share in the miseries which it brings. We ought not only to renounce all iniquity, but to live in the habitual practice of every duty which God requires. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 20. Suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment.—*Sudden sorrow*:—Jeremiah was describing the havoc of war, a war which was devastating his country and bringing untold miseries upon the people. How grateful we ought to be that war is not raging in our own land. Blessed be the Lord, who has given centuries of peace to the fertile hills and valleys of His chosen isle. There are, however, in this land, and in all lands, whether at war or peace, many calamities which come suddenly upon the sons of men, concerning which they may bitterly lament, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled and my curtains in a moment." This world at its best is not our rest. There is nothing settled below the moon. We call this *terra firma*, but there is nothing firm upon it; it is tossed to and fro like a troubled sea evermore. We are never for any long time in one stay; change is perpetually operating. Nothing is sure but that which is Divine; nothing is abiding except that which cometh down from heaven. **I. A SUDDEN SPOILING HAPPENS TO HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS.** 1. Let us look at the history of human righteousness, and begin in the garden of Eden, and lament the fall. Adam in his perfection could not maintain his righteousness, how can you and I, who are imperfect from the very birth, hope to do so? 2. A second instance of this very commonly occurs in the failure of the moralist's resolutions. See yonder young people, tutored from their childhood in everything that is good: their character is excellent and admirable, but will it so abide? Will not the enemy despoil their tents? 3. Another liability of human righteousness is one which I must not call a calamity, seeing it is the commencement of the greatest blessing: I mean when the Spirit of God comes to deal with human righteousness, by way of illumination and conviction. Here we can speak of what we know experimentally. How beautiful our righteousness is, and how it flourishes like a comely flower till the Spirit of God blows upon it, and then it withers quite away, like the grass in the hot sirocco. The first lesson of the Holy Ghost to the heart is to lay bare its *deceivableness*, and to uncover before us its loathsomeness, where we thought that everything was true and acceptable. I would ask all who are under conviction of sin to answer this question, "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" May you reply, "We know what we will do. We will flee from self to Jesus. Our precious things are removed, and our choice treasure is taken from us; therefore do we take the Lord Jesus to be our all in all." 4. But there will come to all human righteousness one other time of spoiling, if neither of those should happen which I have mentioned before. Remorse will come, and that very probably in the hour of death, if not before. **II. The words of our text are exceedingly applicable to THE SPOILING OF ALL EARTHLY COMFORTS.** 1. Sudden destruction to all our earthly comforts is common to all sorts of men. It may happen to the best as well as to the worst. As darts the hawk upon its prey, so does affliction fall upon the unsuspecting sons of Adam. As the earthquake on a sudden overthrows a city, so does adversity shake the estate of mortals. 2. Sudden trial comes in various forms. Here below nothing is certain but universal uncertainty. One way or another, God knoweth how to bring the rod home to us, and to make us smart till we cry out, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment." 3. Now this might well be expected. Do we wonder when we are suddenly deprived of our earthly comforts? Are they not fleeting things? When they came to us did we receive a lease of them, or were we promised that they should last for ever? All that we possess here below is God's property; He has only loaned it out to us, and what He lends He has a right to take back again. We hold our possessions and our friends, not upon freehold, but upon lease terminable at the Supreme Owner's option; do you wonder when the holding ceases? 4. Since these calamities may be expected, let us be prepared for them. "How?" say you. Why, by holding all earthly things loosely; by having them as though you had them not; by looking at them as fleeting, and never expecting them to abide with you. 5. Let us take care to make good use of our comforts while we possess them. Since

they hastily fly by us, let us catch them on the wing, and diligently employ them for God's glory. Let us commit our all to the custody of God, who is our all in all. Such a blessed thing is faith in God that if the believer should lose everything he possesses here below he would have small cause for sorrow so long as he kept his faith. 6. But let us solemnly remind you that in times when we meet with sudden calamity God is putting you to the test, and trying the love and faith of those who profess to be His people. "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" You thought you loved God: do you love Him now? You said He was your Father, but that was when He kissed you; is He your Father now that He chastens you? III. There may come a **SUDDEN SPOILING OF LIFE ITSELF**. In a moment prostrated by disease and brought to death's door, frail man may well cry out, "How suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment!" 1. It is by no means unusual for men to die on a sudden. 2. Not one man or woman here has a guarantee that he or she shall live till to-morrow. It is almost a misuse of language to talk about life insurance, for we cannot insure our lives; they must for ever remain uninsured as to their continuance here. "When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?" When on a sudden the curtains of our tent shall rend in twain, and the tent pole shall be snapped, and the body shall lie a desolate ruin, what shall we then do? I will tell you what some of us know that we shall do. We know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. As poor, guilty sinners we have fled to Christ for refuge, and He is ours, and we know that He will surely keep what we have committed to Him until that day: therefore are we not afraid of all that the spoilers can do. We are not afraid of the spoiler; but, O worldling, when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? (*C. H. Spurgeon*.) *The wailing of the bereaved*.—I. Our first sorrowful theme is **SUDDEN BEREAVEMENTS**. Alas! alas! how soon may we be childless; how soon may we be widowed of the dearest objects of our affections! Ah! this were a sad world indeed, if the ties of kindred, of affection, and of friendship all be snapped; and yet it is such a world that they must be sundered, and may be divided at any moment. 1. Let us learn to sit loose by our dearest friends that we have on earth. Let us love them—love them we may, love them we should—but let us always learn to love them as dying things. Oh, build not thy nest on any of these trees, for they are all marked for the axe. See thou the disease of mortality on every cheek, and write not "eternal" upon the creature of an hour. 2. Take care that thou puttest all thy dear ones into God's hand. Thou hast put thy soul there, put them there. Thou canst trust them for temporals for thyself, trust thy jewels with Him. Feel that they are not thine own, but that they are God's loans to thee; loans which may be recalled at any moment—precious benisons of heaven, not entailed upon thee, but of which thou art but a tenant at will. 3. Further, you who are blessed with wife and children and friends, take care that you bless God for them. Sing a song of praise to God who hath blessed you so much more than others. 4. And then permit me to remind you that if these sudden bereavements may come, and there may be a dark chamber in any house in a moment, and the coffin may be in any one of our habitations, let us so act to our kinsfolk and relatives as though we knew they were soon about to die. II. **SUDDEN DEATH**, AS WE VIEW IT MORE PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO OURSELVES. There are a thousand gates to death. How many there be who have fallen dead in the streets! How many sitting in their own homes! Well, our turn must come. Perhaps we shall die falling asleep in our beds after long sickness, but probably we shall be suddenly called in such an hour as we think not to face the realities of eternity. Well, if it be so, if there be a thousand gates to death, if all means and any means may be sufficient to stop the current of our life, if really, after all, spiders' webs and bubbles are more substantial things than human life, if we are but a vapour, or a dying taper that soon expires in darkness, what then? 1. Why, first, I say, let us all look upon ourselves as dying men, let us not reckon on to-morrow. Oh! let us not procrastinate; for taken in Satan's great net of procrastination, we may wait, and wait, and wait, till time is gone, and the great knell of eternity shall toll our dissolution. 2. And then take care, I pray you, that you who do know Christ not only live as though you meant to die, but live while you live. Oh, what a work we have to do, and how short the time to do it in! 3. And let us learn never to do anything which we should not wish to be found doing if we were to die. We are sometimes asked by young people whether they may go to the theatre, whether they may dance, or whether they may do this or that. You

may do anything which you would not be ashamed to be doing when Christ shall come. III. THE SUDDEN CHANGE WHICH A SUDDEN DEATH WILL CAUSE. You see yonder Christian man, he is full of a thousand fears,—he is afraid even of his interest in Christ, he is troubled spiritually, and vexed with temporal cares. You see him cast down and exceeding troubled, his faith but very weak; he steps outside yon door, and there meets him a messenger from God, who smites him to the heart, and he is dead. Can you conceive the change? Death has cured him of his fears, his tears are wiped away once for all from his eyes; and, to his surprise, he stands where he feared he should never be, in the midst of the redeemed of God, in the general assembly and church of the first-born. If he should think of such things, would he not upbraid himself for thinking so much of his trials and of his troubles, and for looking into a future which he was never to see? See yonder man, he can scarcely walk, he has a hundred pains in his body, he is more tried and pained than any man. Death puts his skeleton hand upon him, and he dies. How marvellous the change! No aches now, no casting down of spirit, he then is supremely blest, the decrepid has become perfect, the weak has become strong, the trembling one has become a David, and David has become as the angel of the Lord. But what must be the change to the unconverted man? His joys are over for ever. His death is the death of his happiness—his funeral is the funeral of his mirth. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Wise to do evil.**—*Reader to do evil than good*:—This is a mystery, and yet nothing is more palpable and provable. How easily we learn to go down to hell! What a toil it is in all life to climb, until we get into the meaning of it, and become real mountaineers; then we say, Let us go upward, for we feed upon the very wind, we grow strong by the very exercise; we want to stand upon the highest pinnacles of nature. But how easy it is not to obey! how easy not to go to church! How delightfully easy to throw off the yoke and to terminate the discipline of life! Employers of labour know this; labourers themselves are well acquainted with it; all schoolmasters and trainers of the young would assent to the proposition instantly and without reserve, and every living man would say, That is true. If that is true, the whole point is yielded. Why should it be true? The direct contrary ought to be the case: it ought to be hard to be crooked and rough and foolish and vain and worldly. It ought to be almost impossible for a man made in the image and likeness of God to drink himself to death, to rob his neighbour, to play the fool, to sleep with the devil. Given creation at the beginning, and it never could occur to the finite intellect as a possibility that man should think one ignoble thought, utter one untrue word, commit himself to one dishonourable policy; the exclamation would be, It is impossible! But we have done it! We have broken all the ten commandments one by one; we have shattered them in their totality; we have run away from God. We have done miracles which have astounded the heavens. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Godlessness is supreme folly**:—Do you count him a wise man who is wise in anything but in his own proper profession and employment, wise for everybody but himself, who is ingenious to contrive his own misery and to do himself a mischief, but is dull and stupid as to the designing of any real benefit and advantage to himself? Such a one is he who is ingenious in his calling but a bad Christian, for Christianity is more our proper calling and profession than the very trades we live upon; and such is every sinner who is "wise to do evil, but to do good has no understanding." (*J. Tillotson.*) **Piety—the truest wisdom**:—If any man's head or tongue should grow apace, and all the rest of the body not grow, it would certainly make him a monster; and they are no other that are knowing and talkative Christians, and grow daily in these respects, but not at all in holiness of heart and life, which is the proper growth of the children of God. (*H. G. Saller.*)

Ver. 30. **Though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair.**—**Hypocrisy discovered**:—This renting of the face is, literally, enlarging of the eyes through kohl or antimony—a trick of artificial beauty. And the poor creature has taken out her best clothes, painted herself with the fairest colours, done all she could from the outside, and behold the issue is: "Thy lovers will despise thee"—they will see through thee. The knave shall know that he is more seen through than he supposes. He is very skilful up to a given point. The accusation relates both to men and women; charges can easily be made, but it is the whole human nature that is involved in this impeachment. There is clothing, and there is painting, and there is decoration with gold, and there is renting of the face;

but after all is over men feel that this is unreal, untrue, utterly rotten at the core ; they say this is "a goodly apple rotten at the heart." Let us understand this, that whether we be discovered now or then, we shall be discovered. The hollow man shall be sounded, and shall be pronounced void. Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting ; and thou, poor fool, hast covered up the hectic flush of consumption with indigo that will wash off, or with some other colour that can be cleansed away ; thou hast made thyself look otherwise than as thou art ; but all that is external shall be taken from thee, and thou shalt be seen in thy naked hideousness and ghastliness. This is right ! The revelation will be awful ; but it ought to be made, or heaven itself will be insecure. Oh, what disclosures then ! The canting hypocrite without his cloak ; the skilful mocker who has lost his power of jesting ; the knave who always said a grace he had committed to memory before he cut the bread he had stolen ; the preacher who knew the right, and yet the wrong pursued ; the fair speaker, who knew the very subtlety of music as to persuasion, and yet decoyed souls down the way at the end of which is hell. Then the other revelation will also be made. There may be men of rough manners who shall prove to have been all the while animated by a gentle spirit ; there may be those who have been regarded as Philistines who are God's gentlemen ; there may be those who have been thought as unworthy of courtesy who shall be set high among the angels. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-9. *Run ye . . . and see . . . if ye can find a man.*—*A man ; or, The Divine ideal unrealised.*—I. THE DIVINE IDEA OF A MAN. One "that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth." This involves—1. A righteous working out of the Divine will so far as it is apprehended. 2. An earnest endeavour for further knowledge of the Divine will. 3. How different is the Divine ideal of a man from that which popularly prevails. (1) The ideal of the muscular—force. (2) That of the secular—wealth. (3) That of the intellectual—knowledge. (4) That of the vain—show. II. THE LAMENTABLE RARITY OF A MAN. 1. A sad revelation of the moral condition of Jerusalem in the days of the prophet. Such corruption amongst a people who had such religious privileges, and in the very scene where the temple stood, shows the wonderful forbearance of God and the terrible perversity of the human heart ! 2. The condition of our own age. Verily, we are a fallen people. III. THE SOCIAL VALUE OF A MAN. "And I will pardon it." For the sake of a man, God promises to pardon Jerusalem. The value of a man to society, to the race, is everywhere represented in the Bible. 1. A man is a condition on which God favours the race. Sodom and Gomorrah. 2. A man is an agent by which God improves the condition of the race. He educates, purifies, saves man by man. (*Homilist.*) *The sinfulness of Jerusalem.*—1. Deliberate and wilful perjury (ver. 2). So familiarised with oaths as not to care whether the matter sworn to was true or false. 2. Idolatry. Strange to see how madly this people ran after the lying vanities of the Gentiles, after they had received such manifold and undeniable proofs of the power, wisdom, and goodness of a living God, who was present with them ; after so many laws enacted against idolatry, so many signal judgments inflicted on them for falling into this sin, such a hedge set about them to keep them from mingling with other nations, lest they should learn their ways. 3. Adulteries and fornications. This was a crime of a high nature, a complication of sins, and productive of so many sad consequences that death was the just punishment allotted to it. 4. Their shameful prevaricating with God's Word, and torturing it to make it speak contrary to its genuine meaning. To this end they encouraged false prophets, who would prophesy smooth things, &c. 5. They were very unthankful to God, and insensible of His blessings conferred upon them. 6. They were very fraudulent in their dealings one with another, both in word and deed. 7. That which portended the extirpation of these Jews was, that not only all the forecited iniquities were notorious in practice, but were moreover approved of, as it were, and settled among them by common consent. 8. This is enough to prove that it was fit for nothing but the fire, and it hath received that just recompense of reward.

And the history of it is recorded for the instruction of all other cities who have the sacred Scriptures to instruct them. They may hear Jerusalem warning them, saying, "Look upon me, and learn to fear God. Will ye steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, and sacrifice to the idols of your own imagination, and hope to escape the wrath of God better than I have done? Let my calamities conduce to your salvation, and put away those sins from among you which have laid me in ruinous heaps, and turned me into a monument of the Divine fury. Look upon me, and learn to fear God." 9. Those who are enemies to religion, and help to banish the fear of God out of the world, by denying the authority of His Word, or by putting a wrong sense and construction upon it, are as bad members as can be found in any society of men, because they do what they can to subvert the very foundations of truth, and deprive us of the last remedy which is left to repair the breaches of piety and virtue in a sinful world. (*W. Reading, M.A.*)

A man.—We all know the two meanings of the word man—the one which distinguishes a human being from a beast, the other which is applied only to those who possess the highest qualities of manhood. Such are the salt of the earth, such would have been the saviours of Jerusalem. Ay, such an one was the Saviour of this world, the man Christ Jesus. A union of qualities is needed to make up a man in this high but true sense. These qualities are partly physical, partly mental, and partly spiritual. We know what false ideas are attached to manliness. It is often entirely associated with brute strength. He is a man, think many, who has the greatest strength of arm and power of body. But though beneficial, and often beautiful, this manly strength does not make the man. In some of the most splendid specimens of bodily physique you have the mind of a child and the weakness of a fool, or, still worse, the unrestrained appetites of the beast, or the desperate wickedness of a fiend. How often, too, are the views of men taken as the stamp of manhood. Too often the youthful ideal of manliness is not self-restraint, but self-indulgence, to abandon duty, to pursue pleasure, to wreck the happiness of others, to be lord of one's self, that heritage of woe—how many cherish these as the highest functions of a man! There may be other false ideals, but I wish to come to the scriptural ideal of the man who, if he could be found, would have saved the city and state of Jerusalem. What are the leading characteristics? To do justly, to seek truth. How commonplace, how stripped of the glory and pride dear to young imaginations, how possible for all to reach.

I. The first test, whether we are worthy to be called men, is **THE RIGHTNESS OF OUR ACTIONS, THE INTEGRITY OR JUSTICE OF OUR DOINGS.** What is our conduct in life? Are we conforming ourselves to the Divine standard? Let us look at detail in right-doing in the different positions which we are called to fill. A deal of our lives is spent in our homes. There, if anywhere, we are genuine. We cannot seem to be what we are not before those who know us best, and who can read us through and through. How often there we fail to be men! The man who does justly is eminently tender, willing to enter into the feelings of others, to deal justly with them, to extend to them the sympathy of his strong nature. He is also helpful. The very presence of some men is helpful; you may not ask their advice, but to know they are near you is in itself a strength; and in the home relationships is it not the special province of the father, the husband, the son, the brother, to be helpful, to lift burdens, to smooth difficulties, to unravel the knots of this tangled existence? Do you not know homes where they who should be helpful only hinder the family life, where they are burdens and disgraces, taxing not only the family love, but wasting means all too narrow, and depriving their own kindred of their due share of life's blessings? Such are not men, still less are they men who presume on others' weakness. Many a husband shelters himself under his wife's love from the penalties of his neglect, if not of worse treatment. Many a lad, who, above all, wants to be thought manly, takes advantage of his parents' fondness, and wastes their hard-earned money in riotous living, while they believe it is being usefully spent on his education or advancement in life. Such men will never save a State, will never rise to such a height of nobility that they can leaven with the true spirit of goodness and righteousness the mass around them.

II. The second test of manhood is **SEEKING TRUTH.** Truth is, in the Old Testament, not only mental but moral, is not only intellectual knowledge, but the knowledge of God and of His will. We need in this present day men equally ready to seek truth in all spheres of knowledge—in science, in philosophy, in politics, in religion. We cannot be too earnest in seeking all light, wherever it comes from. We should

remember the words of the poet: "Truth is the strong thing; let man's life be true," and we should pursue our search in humility, in reverence, and in faith—above all, in regard to Divine things. That is a duty laid upon us all—to seek God, who is truth; to cleave to Him at all costs; to do His will, whatever it be. We may be mistaken as to what His will is; we may be troubled by doubts and difficulties, moral or intellectual; but we must remember that if we try to do justly we shall know the doctrine whether it be of God. III. In doing justly, in seeking truth, you will be men because you will be FOLLOWERS OF THE MAN CHRIST JESUS. When we think of Christ as man we too often think only of His sorrow, of His persecution, of His death. True man He was in all these points, and nothing soothes us more in our time of trouble than that blessed knowledge. But I wish you to realise Him as man not only in the weakness but in the strength of humanity. I wish you to recognise in Him the ideal man, who did justly and sought truth. Think of His life, of His tenderness to His mother, of His helpfulness to His friends. Think of the ideal which He set before men. "Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?" is His counsel to the multitude eager for the outward. "Lay not up treasure upon earth" is His warning to the rich and over-careful. "One thing is needful" is His reply to the cumbered housewife. Read these Gospels, and tell me if there ever breathed a purer, more righteous, more unselfish spirit. (*J. R. Milford Mitchell, D.D.*) *The courage of the true prophet*:—"It is difficult," says a great historian, "to conceive any situation more painful than that of a great man condemned to watch the lingering agony of an exhausted country, to tend it during the alternate fits of stupefaction and raving which precede its dissolution; and to see the symptoms of vitality disappear, one by one, until nothing is left but coldness, darkness, and corruption." Such was the fate of Jeremiah. His writings are among the saddest in Scripture. He was no Elijah, no Isaiah, no John the Baptist, no Savonarola, not a man of mighty thunderings, whose strong spirit can face corrupted nations and never quail. There are some men whose courage seems to rise in proportion as they have to face insensate fury of opposition. Such was the spirit of Phocion. "Have I said anything wrong then?" he exclaimed, when the Athenians cheered his speech. Such was the spirit of Timon, of "the noble heart, which, strongly loathing, greatly broke." Such was the spirit of Coriolanus. Such was the spirit of the great Scipio. Christians who believe that Christ really did mean something when He said, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you,"—Christians, a few of them, have also believed that there is a heatitude of insolence and of malediction. "Heavens! what mistake have I made?" was the answer of a strong governor when told that he was beginning to get popular. But Jeremiah was not naturally a man of this strong fibre. Timid, shrinking, sensitive, he was yet placed by God in the forefront of a forlorn hope, in which he was, as it were, predestined to failure and to martyrdom. In this chapter Jeremiah is striving to bring home to his people that things are not as they should be. Diogenes, in Athens, searched the streets with a lantern at noonday to find a man; Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, says that neither in its streets, nor in its broad places, can he find one man, one just, strong servant of the Lord. He thought, perhaps, that had there been such, God might pardon Jerusalem as He had once pardoned Sodom. But he could not find them. He found profession, but not sincerity; chastisement, but not amendment; remorse, but not repentance. Then he thought, "I have been too much among the multitude, who are ignorant and foolish; I will go to the upper strata of society; I will get me to the great men, to the priests, the statesmen, the men of culture; they surely have had leisure to learn the way of the Lord and the judgment of their God." But the prophet was utterly disappointed; the upper thousands were worse and more helpless than the lower myriads; they had altogether broken the yoke and burst the bands, and so he adds—"Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the evening shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities." What was the exact idea of the threatened punishment we do not know. The general meaning is clear; the days were evil alike among high and low; there were carelessness, unbelief, self-seeking, insincerity, and, amid all, men were completely at their ease; they were quite secure that no evil could happen to them. Jeremiah thought differently; he knew that greed, falsity, unreality, corruption, cannot last. God cannot for ever bear with them; men cannot for ever endure their burden; they may be long-lived, but doomsday comes to them in the end. Has it not always been

so ? The great world empires of idolatry—what could once have seemed more secure than they were in cruel strength ? Where are they now ? In any age, whenever any true prophet has spoken, the world has always been thrown into violent antagonism ; it denies him every quality he possesses ; he may be the humblest of men, but he will assuredly be charged with pride, Whom makest thou thyself ? If he be hopeful, he will be called Utopian and impractical ; if he be despondent, he will be called maudlin ; if he feels strongly, he is excited and an enthusiast ; if he speaks strongly, he is gushing and hysterical ; in the one case he is a Samaritan, and in the other “ he has a devil.” A sneer has been made on the very name of the prophet of whom we are speaking, and the world thinks it has effectually depreciated any warning about present evil or future peril, when it has called it a Jeremiad. Neither the world nor the Church can tolerate a prophet until they have killed him : kings cannot away with him. Ahab imprisons Micaiah, Joash kills Zechariah, Herod slays John in prison, Eudoxia banishes Chrysostom, Sigismund burns Huss. Priests hate him with still more perfect hatred ; the priests of Jerusalem ridicule Isaiah ; the priest Pashur put Jeremiah into the stocks ; the priest Amaziah expels Amos ; the priests Annas and Caiaphas slew the Lord of glory ; the priest Ananias bid them smite Paul over the mouth. The true prophet, if God ever give us one again, must face all this. He, like St. Paul, must be weak and despised for Christ’s sake. But, besides this, he will especially have to bear the one charge which has always been brought against all prophets since the world began—that what he says is exaggerated, and that what he says is uncharitable. Doubtless, the impatient Amaziahs and the Pashurs of Jeremiah’s day said, “ What business has this man to bring such sweeping accusations ? Look at our priests, how active they are, how many services they have, how careful they are to burn exactly the two kidneys with the fat ; look at the scribes, how accurate they are in counting the very letters of Scripture ; look at all the eminently respectable persons who go to church and pay their tithes of mint and of anise and of cummin. And as for danger, that is all hysterical nonsense. This is not the Lord’s messenger ; evil shall not come upon us.” Yes, but it did come before Jeremiah was hurried to his death ; it came as with a deluge ; it came as with a thunder crash ; it came as with a hurricane. On these conventional priests, on these careless aristocrats, on these money-making middle classes, on these immoral multitudes the flash fell, and the glory and freedom of Israel were hurled for ever into the dust. Thousands who are not prophets might draw a very flattering picture of this age, which might be represented as nearly all that could be wished ; they could point to its placid comfort, its domestic virtues, its slightly expanded egotism, and say there never was an age so respectable ; they would point to all the threepenny pieces, and even to all the shillings in the plate, and say there never was an age so charitable ; they would point to the endless multiplication of sermons and services, and say there never was an age so deeply religious ; they would point to the mushroom growth of fussy organisations, and say that the Church never was so vigorously zealous. I fear that the truth would force the prophet to speak ; he would point out the great gulf fixed between true religion and sentimental formalism ; he would say that the sums that the nation dribbles in charity are in relation to its wealth no proof of our magnanimity, but the measure of our indifference ; he might say that in spite of all our organisation, all the religious machinery in London is put into play on Hospital Sunday with the result of collecting some £20,000, which you will see perhaps in the paper the next day has been given in a two days’ sale for china and *bric-a-brac*. He might say that sermons and services, day after day, may perhaps only be treading into deeper callosity the self-satisfaction of Pharisaic hearts ; he might say that the praise of our languid virtues was the best opiate to lull our souls into indifference and let them rot asleep into the grave. (*Dean Farrar*.) *True manhood* :—We are to set before us an ideal of manly character and life, and practically to seek its realisation. Of the elements of true manhood, let us specify the following : —I. INTEGRITY. There are statesmen who tell us that morals have no place in politics. But the true statesman makes a conscience of politics. Again, there is perhaps a higher moral sentiment developing in business ; yet one still hears of an undue advantage being taken of profiting by a man’s ignorance or necessities, and that even by religious tradesmen. II. PURITY. Some men boast of foul passions as the marks of manhood. It is effeminate to be pure. Initiation into vice is the baptism of manhood. But moral determination is

altering that. A total abstainer is no longer jeered at. III. RELIGION. I do not mean the religion of monks, or of ecclesiastics, or of sentimentalists, but the religion of Jesus Christ, a reverent recognition of God, of holiness, of human life. Can anything be more noble than fidelity to the noblest things we know? Has the world any nobleness like the nobleness of holy character? (*H. Allon, D.D.*) *Right kind of men* :—I. IN THE ESTIMATION OF GOD THE TRUE EXCELLENCE OF MAN IS MORAL AND RELIGIOUS. 1. A strict obedience to the Divine will as far as it is known. 2. An earnest endeavour to attain an accurate acquaintance with the Divine Word. II. THERE ARE STATES OF SOCIETY IN WHICH MEN OF THIS DESCRIPTION ARE EXCEEDINGLY RARE. 1. They may be removed by death. 2. They may be withdrawn into concealment. 3. They may be reduced in numbers by the progress of degeneracy. III. IN THE WORST STATES OF SOCIETY SUCH MEN ARE VERY VALUABLE. 1. They avert Divine judgments. 2. Draw down Divine blessings. 3. Promote the work of reformation. (*G. Brooks.*) *Wanted* — *A man* :—Philosophers in all ages have complained that human creatures are plentiful, but men are scarce. But philosophers made their ideal too high, their conception of what man ought to be too lofty. I have no sympathy with the cynic of whom history informs us, that, being ordered to summon the good men of the city before the Roman censor, proceeded immediately to the graveyard, called to the dead below, saying he knew not where to find a good man alive; or that gloomy sage, that prince of grumblers, Thomas Carlyle, who described the population of his country as consisting of so many millions, "mostly fools," and who could speak in praise of no one but himself and Mrs. Carlyle, the latter deserving all the praise she got for enduring him. When any one complains, as Diogenes did, that he has to hunt the streets with candles at noon-day to find an honest man, we are apt to think that his nearest neighbour would have quite as much difficulty as himself in making the discovery. If you think there is not a true man living, you had better, for appearance, put off saying it until you are dead yourself. In looking for a man, look for a man with a conscience—a man who, like Longfellow's honest blacksmith, can "look the whole world in the face, and fear not any man." Look for a being that has a heart. A warm, loving nature is true manliness. In looking for a man, look for a magnanimous man; a broad mind, that not only observes what passes in the limited range of its own sphere, but is not afraid to look abroad; is far-sighted and not afraid of excellence in others. In your search for "a man," look for a being that has a soul—the capability of solemn thought. Thousands to-day worship Bacchus and Venus. Their hearts are set on "having a good time." Others apply themselves so intensely to their business that they find pleasure only in worshipping the mighty dollar. The man who so inordinately loves money for its own sake, and becomes insensible to all refined enjoyments, after a while ceases to be a man. Faith in Jesus Christ makes manly men. He is our model—a model containing all the elements of true manhood; a model of sympathy and love; a model of purity and uprightness. Christ-men are wanted. (*M. C. Peters.*) *A man* :—Two things, according to this text, are needed to make a man: practice and principle—principle sought out with a view to practice, practice conform to principle, and both according to what is right and true; both are morally, mutually helpful, both are necessary. You may be as strong as a lion, fleet as a deer, brave as a bulldog, beautiful as a gazelle, clever as Satan, but unless you seek the truth, and do the right first and foremost in the face of day, you have not yet come up to the mark of a man. Is that what the world says and thinks? Oh no. Its heroes, perhaps yours, are too often not the morally good, but daring adventurers, successful soldiers, like athletes, quick-witted speculators, fortune-making merchants, subtle-tongued declaimers, gifted writers, skilful artists, politic statesmen, wearers of titles, and so on. These are the men that too often the world takes its praises and its prizes to, heedless of character and principles, pleading its own large-mindedness in putting truthful and righteous men behind and below mere physical and intellectual power and agility. These are the favourites that the base and meaner sort go gaping after and copying, and thus it is that it often happens that real men are comparatively rare and hard to find. (*J. S. Drummond.*) *The value of one true man to the State* :—What have men and women to look to for the defence and prosperity of nations? Astute diplomatists, enlarged navies and armies, and forts and guns, scientific discoveries, commercial treaties, cultivation of art, legislative enactments? Think of these what you please. I tell you that at these are not, any nor all of them, the true shields and

saviours of nations ; these do not form the backbone and centre of a strong body politic. It is not for these that God is sending upon us any blessing ; not the providing of such that will lead Him to say, " I will pardon Jerusalem and scatter the swollen storm-clouds " What was it then ? It was a man. Goethe says no greater good can happen to a town than for several educated men thinking in the same way about what is good and true living in it. But Goethe's standard is insufficient ; it falls short of the Divine. The defenders and the benefactors of nations and of their fellow-men are the morally and religiously good in them ; men whose lives are regulated by the teachings of God ; men who seek to act as Christ did are the men that are worthy, and that are looked upon by God as blessings to the nations. Ay, and even one such is a mighty pillar, and on occasion even one such may be the saviour and mainstay of the State. (*Ibid.*) *Make yourself a man* :—When President Garfield was a boy, and was asked what he would be, his reply was : " Well, first of all, I must make myself a man ; for, if I do not succeed in that, I shall not succeed in anything." *Godly men the preservative of society* :—One of the greatest services which a man can render society is to believe the truths of God sincerely, and maintain them steadfastly. It is the happiest state for a community when there exists within it a vigorous Christianity—a phalanx of strong minds, fully persuaded as to the revealings and requirements of the Most High. Like the willows by the water-courses which are not only green, but whose roots, penetrating and interlacing in the soft and spongy soil, prevent it from being swept away by the rushing torrent, these men of gentle manners, but profound convictions, are the living network, the rampart of roots unnoticed and unthanked, who keep society from crumbling piecemeal into the gulf of licentiousness and atheism and crime, which is for ever surging and foaming past it. Like the metallic clamps and rivets, the bands and girders, which, in a region of earthquake, keep the precarious houses from tumbling to pieces, law and police magistracy are a mere mud masonry, and but for the binding power of such consciences, but for the fastening force of their convictions who believe in God, in the upheavings of man's passions, in the volcanic throes of his lust and violence, the framework of society would soon be shaken all to pieces. Like the fragments of iron in a mass of stone, which draw it towards the magnet, it is the " faith which He finds in the earth," which at any period draws the earth towards its Maker, or makes a community " a people near to God." (*James Hamilton, D.D.*) *A hero is a real man* :—What is it to be a " hero " ? A " hero " is simply the English form of the Greek "*heros*," which primarily meant a " man," a real man, a separate and unmistakable man, as distinct from "*anthropos*," or mankind in general. By a recognition of this very truth, that a man's distinctness as a man among men works and measures his exceptional character and capabilities, the Greeks came to call a grand man, or a great or pre-eminent man, a hero, as another way of saying that he was a " distinguished " man. " Dost thou know what a hero is ? " asks Longfellow ; and then gives answer, " Why, a hero is as much as one should say—a hero." A hero is a man. There is heroism in all real manliness. A real man is a real hero. This it is which gives force to Carlyle's question, " If hero means sincere man, why may not every one of us be a hero ? " The answer is, that it requires character, exceptional character, to make one willing to be a man. Most men are afraid to be themselves. They shrink from being " distinguished." Their preference is to conform themselves to the common standard of their sphere—to be like others, rather than to be like themselves alone. Where this feeling prevails, heroism is an impossibility. One acting on this preference cannot be distinguished. He who is unwilling to exercise and assert his character, in spite of all the world, cannot be recognised as the possessor of character. He cannot be measured apart from the common standard to which he, of choice, conforms himself. (*Great Thoughts.*) *Manliness* :—Ask a young woman what quality in a man she admires most, and the answer you are sure to get is manliness. The answer is highly creditable to the feminine taste. God also puts a great value on true manhood. I. TRUE MANHOOD. Many spurious standards of manhood are met with in the world. By many young men, unfortunately, it is thought manly to be a proficient in swearing, in gambling, in drinking, in forbidden pleasure. Not to " toe the line " in these evil customs is to be pronounced no man at all. According to this breed of youth, piety is held at a considerable discount ; it is not a thing for men, however it may suit parsons, Sunday-school children, and old women of both sexes. Now look at the type of manhood spoken of in our text,

According to our text a man is one who doeth righteousness and seeketh after the truth. Not the man of great muscularity and great physical power. Not the man who has seen much of the world, so called, which too often means a man who has worked for the wages of sin, which is death; neither of these is the true type of manhood according to Scripture. Let no one, misled by a popular confusion of ideas, dislike our text because it brings a man's own imperfect righteousness before our attention. It is most true that no measure of human righteousness can ever avail the sinner as a substitute for the righteousness of Christ by faith. A sinner's heart resembles Lady Macbeth's hands, stained beyond all human cleansing. We cannot and we need not by our own efforts establish a righteousness able to justify and make reconciliation for the ungodly. Yet that does not mean that we may be callous about the sovereign claims of God's eternal laws of righteousness. It is of the essence of Christian duty and Christian manhood to love righteousness and hate wickedness. The true man is he that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth. See where the true man should be found, in the broad places, in the streets, in the thoroughfares, the market places; the spot where the struggle of daily life is fought out. In other words, the true man is contemplated under the character of a man right in the whirl of the stream—a merchant, a craftsman, a trader. And as every varied situation in life has its own special temptations and virtues—as the virtue of the soldier is courage and his temptation faint-heartedness. There are graces and virtues that belong to the home, domestic virtues, cloister graces—gentleness, forbearance, devoutness; and these, too, form part of a true man's outfit in life. But the virtue of the market-place is right dealing and integrity, and he who in the competition of the market-place, in its barterings and changes, keeps his hands clean, his name honourable, his character honest, is, according to the verdict of Scripture, a true man. From these words it would appear that such men were scarce in Jeremiah's day. Are they more plentiful now? Yes, I believe they are. A dreadful state of society. Multitudes of males, but not one man. Multitudes of gentlemen, but not one honest man. Yes, surely we are better to-day, thank God. Yes, we all know men who would rather empty their pockets of shillings than fill their mouths with lies. And what are they? They are men. They are the saviours of society, they are the salt of the earth. But unrighteousness is still, as it ever has been, man's chiefest sin. II. THE VALUE OF TRUE MANHOOD. The value of true manhood is seen, not in its scarceness, but in the splendour of its reward. What is true manhood's reward? God does a wonderful thing, all because a true man or two are found in the wicked city. What is that? He forgives the wickedness of the corrupt and unfaithful city (Jeremiah v. 7-9, 23-31). Could it be easy for God to overlook the errors of such a people? You think so? Easy for God Almighty, though not for us. Well, perhaps you are right. If so, why stand aloof from such a forgiving and merciful God? Let us not fail to see that here in Jeremiah's time God expresses Himself willing to pardon the wicked for the sake of the righteous few, as He undertook to do in the time of the patriarch Abraham (Genesis xviii. 23). See, then, the nature of true manhood's rewards. God does not promise that when the true man is found He will honour and reward him. Surely in being a true man he has honours and rewards that cannot be exceeded. Jerusalem is to enjoy the reward. She is to be spared for his sake. Something like this happens in the experience of our great military heroes, our Wellingtons, our Wolsleys, our Robertses. No doubt some of these splendid captains have, at duty's call, covered the battlefield with their men and scored brilliant fighting victories that had very little meaning or importance to us as a nation. But putting aside these cases—take the case of wars in which both great heroism has been shown and the cause has been worth fighting for: when the great captain comes home, what does he find awaiting him: stars and stripes, treasure and titles? Ay, all that, but more than that. Not only has his heroism won all these more or less precious honours for himself, but what is better, because it concerns more people than himself, he has secured for his country a standing, a place, a position, which it may be she never enjoyed before. And that to a true man is reward more sweet and satisfying than all the poor personal honours that can be put upon his head. The worst calamity to a people is not when its trade and commerce decline, but when its supply of true men fails. Our thoughts, when we think of truest manhood, cannot help turning to the Lord Jesus Christ, that man who is our "hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest." For the sake of this one Man, all our sins are freely pardoned. (*H. F. Henderson, M.A.*)

Ver. 3-8. **O Lord, are not Thine eyes upon the truth?**—*Truthfulness*:—The allusion is not to doctrinal truth, or truth in the abstract, but to practical truth as it should exist in the hearts and lives of men. The Lord bade them produce a single truthful man in all Jerusalem, and Jeremiah answers that if truth were to be found the Lord Himself best knew where it was, for His eyes were ever upon it. Look well at this picture of the progress of the deceitful. They begin with being dishonest to their fellow-men, and at last they become Satan's commission agents, trappers for the devil, fowlers who ensnare men as bird-catchers take the winged fowl. This was the state of affairs in Jeremiah's time. We have not, I trust, quite such a condition of things among us to-day, as a plague universally prevalent, but we have much of the disease of deceit in all quarters, high and low, and to what a head it may come time alone can show. **I. THE UTTER FOLLY OF ALL PRETENCE.** 1. Hypocrisy is useless altogether, for God sees through it. The instantaneous imagination which flits across the mind like a stray bird, leaving nor track nor trace, God knows it altogether. 2. Nor is it only useless: it is injurious. You spoil your sacrifice if there be any tincture of the odious gall of hypocrisy about it. Everything about you and me that is unreal God hates, and hates it more in His own people than anywhere else. 3. Moreover, pretence is deadening, for he that begins with tampering with truth will go on from bad to worse. Once begin to sail by the wind of policy and trickery and you must tack, and then tack again and again; and as surely as you are alive, you will yet have to tack again; but if you have the motive force of truth within you, as a steamboat has its own engine, then you can go straight in the teeth of wind and tempest. 4. Falsehood and pretence before God are damnable. I cannot use a less forcible word than that. I have constantly seen almost all sorts of people converted—great blasphemers, pleasure-seekers, thieves, drunkards, unchaste persons, and hardened reprobates,—but rarely have I seen a man converted who has been a thorough-paced liar. The heart which is crammed with craft and treachery seems as if it had passed out of the reach of grace. **II. THE GREAT VALUE OF TRUTHFULNESS.** The great value of it is this—that it alone is regarded by God in matters of religion: His eyes are upon that which is truthful about us. For instance, suppose I say "I repent." The question is—Do I really and from my heart sorrow for sin? The same holds good in reference to faith. A man may say, "I believe," as thousands say their creed,—“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,” and so on. Ah, but do you trust in God with your whole heart? Are you sincerely believing in God and God's Word, and God's Son, and God's Gospel?—for, if not, all your professed faith is useless. As to love to Christ, you know how very easy it is to sing sweet hymns about love to Jesus, and yet how few are living so as to prove their attachment to the Redeemer. The same truth bears upon all the ordinances of religion. When we professed to worship God, how much praise was there in the song? As much as the heart made. As to prayer. "A large prayer meeting." Yes, but the largeness of the number of attendants is not always a gauge of the quantity and power of prayer. The quantity of heart in the prayer decides its quality. This is equally true of all your private worship. That daily reading of the chapter is a very excellent thing; but do you read with your soul as well as with your eyes? That morning prayer and that evening prayer, those few minutes snatched in the middle of the day—these are good. I will not wish you to alter the regularity of your devotion, but still it may all be clockwork, godliness with no life in it. Oh, for one single groan from the heart! **III. THE INFLUENCE OF TRUTHFUL MEN.** 1. It is so great with God that one of them can save a city from destruction. Hence the value of good men in bad localities. When you go into a hamlet or village where there is no religion, do not be so very sorry at your position, for God may have great ends to be served by you. All light must not be stored up in the sun; scatter it over earth's poor lands that need it, lest all the trees of the field die in perpetual night. God blesses us to make us blessings. Ask of God that you may be so sincere, so truthful, that He may bless those round about you for your sake. 2. This influence is such that it never was attributed to any man on account of his riches. No. The Lord is no respecter of persons, and He seeth not as man seeth. Sincerity before God is approved; true reliance upon Christ the Lord accepts: and for this He blesses us, and others through us. 3. And, mark you one other thing. If you are upright before God, and you should happen to fall among people that despise you and reject you—it is a sad thing to have to say, but it is true, and a proof of

the great influence of truthful men,—your word, when you speak for God, shall be like fire, and those round about you shall be wood, and it shall devour them. If you are not a savour of life to life to men, you will be a savour of death to death to them. IV. THE NECESSITY AND THE MEANS OF OUR BEING TRUE AND SINCERE BEFORE HIM WHOSE EYES BEHOLD TRUTHFULNESS. 1. These times require it. This is an age of tricks and policies. Oh, the lying puffs you meet with everywhere in books and broadsides innumerable. Meet the prince of darkness with the light; he cannot stand against it. Our times require our sincerity. 2. So does our God also require it. I have already spoken to this, and I need not repeat the solemn strain. 3. So do our souls require it. Our eternal welfare demands it. Oh, there must be no mistake about our being true before God, for when it comes to dying work, nothing will stand us then but sincerity. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved.—*God's chastisements designed for man's conversion*:—I. Turning to the Lord presupposes A DEEP CONVICTION THAT YOU HAVE GONE ASTRAY, both from way of duty and of safety. That all your highest interests have been neglected. 1. The exceeding sinfulness of sin. 2. The purity and strictness of God's law, the equity and terror of its penalty. 3. Your obligations to Him as Creator, Preserver, Redeemer. II. Turning to God supposes A FULL CONVICTION OF THE NECESSITY OF IMMEDIATE RESPONSE. 1. If you die in your present condition, you will certainly be lost. 2. You have no time for delay. 3. It will wound your heart to think this work has not been done long ago. III. If afflictions should prove the means of turning you to God, they will rouse you to most earnest persevering endeavours that you may truly find Him. 1. Pray without ceasing. 2. Accustom yourself to solemn meditation. 3. Seek the society of those who know the Lord. IV. If afflictions should turn you to God, you will be made deeply sensible of your inability, and the necessity of the Holy Spirit's grace to your conversion. 1. Your endeavours avail to avoid hindrances and seek helps. 2. Yet your own heart is against you, and the disease of sin is irrecoverable but by Divine grace. V. If ever you turn to the Lord, you will realise that CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY OF ACCESS TO GOD. You will come as criminals upon the footing of grace, not merit; will renounce all your righteousness; a broken-hearted rebel. Till then, you have nothing to do with Jesus. VI. If you are turned to God, you will experience A GREAT CHANGE IN TEMPER AND CONDUCT. 1. Heart and mind will take a new bias; thoughts and affections towards God; aspirations towards heaven; Jesus dear to you; all things become new. 2. Your practices will follow the inward impulse and principle of religion. VII. If turned to the Lord, your MIND WILL HABITUALLY RETAIN THAT TURN. Your religion not a transient fit, but permanent and persevering. (*President Davies.*)

Unsanctified affliction:—I. SOME OF THE FORMS OF UNSANCTIFIED AFFLICTION. 1. Insensibility. 2. Hardihood. II. SOME OF THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS EVIL MAY BE KEPT AWAY. 1. By seeking to ascertain and to accomplish the design of our affliction. 2. By repressing every tendency to murmuring or impatience. 3. By avoiding immoderate sorrow. (*G. Brooks.*)

Fruitless chastisement:—Chastisement is designed by God to bear fruit in a purged and penitent heart; but it may be so neglected, resisted, or abused, as to become fruitless. I. THE SIGN OF FRUITLESS CHASTISEMENT IS IMPENITENCE. 1. Chastisement is the red-lamp warning of danger, and urging us to stop in the course we are pursuing. 2. But, that it may serve this purpose, there must be—(1) Reflection; (2) Sorrow for sin; (3) Return. II. THE CAUSE OF FRUITLESS CHASTISEMENT IS HARDNESS OF HEART. 1. Insensitiveness. The sufferer may feel the smart of the lash on his back, and yet be dead to the sting of shame in his heart. 2. Wilful resistance. The evil is in the will that refuses to yield to the mercy that comes disguised in bitterness. III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF FRUITLESS CHASTISEMENT IS AN AGGRAVATION OF FUTURE EVILS. The rebellious sufferer may imagine that he is free to do as he will with his sufferings; but even they are talents for which he will be called to account. For observe—1. God's searching watchfulness. "O Lord, are not Thine eyes," &c. God searches the heart He chastises. He sees the rebellious thought, the stubborn self-will. 2. Man's increased guilt. The more there is done to awaken a consciousness of sin, the more culpable is the indifference still persisted in. IV. THE REMEDY FOR FRUITLESS CHASTISEMENT IS TO BE FOUND IN THE GRACE OF THE GOSPEL. This will give—1. The new heart; 2. The promise of forgiveness. Christ brings love and hope, and thus He brings also the tears of repentance. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Unsanctified affliction:—This might not unfitly be called one of the lamentations

of Jeremiah. The words may suggest to us the consideration of a subject more or less belonging to all of us, namely, the danger of unsanctified or unimproved afflictions. The remedies of heaven cannot be inoperative; they must aggravate the maladies which they are not allowed to heal, and will make the face harder than a rock, if they induce not a tender and softened heart. **I. UNSANCTIFIED OR UNIMPROVED CHASTENING.** 1. The first impression in the text seems to set forth that misuse of it which comes of insensibility. "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction." The language may be taken to describe, not so much the receiving of correction in the spirit of defiant and avowed contempt, as the act of setting lightly by affliction, of not bestowing upon it the attention it deserves, having no reverence for its Author, and no consideration for its design or end. A calamity may visit us, but we think only of its human author; sickness may lay us prostrate, but science is sufficient to explain how it came,—it is chance or a skilled hand that causeth the shaft to pierce between the joints of the harness, and there is some poison in the atmosphere which has caused the withering of our favourite gourd. Thus, placing secondary agencies before our eyes, we can see no further, and look no higher. We see, then, why God was angry with the Jews, and why He will be angry with us, when His chastisements are received with unreflecting indifference. It is that, whether avowedly or not, such insensibility amounts to atheism. On this view—unavowed, of course—is based the indifference of unconverted men under chastisement: they feel that it is not correction, but the natural result of some law which no one can help. Why should they grieve at that which comes of an unhindered, self-governing, moral necessity? 2. But the text adverts to a yet more offending and presumptuous deportment under affliction, namely, when the chastisements of God are received in a stout-hearted, rebellious, defying spirit. Not only have they refused to receive correction, but they have made their faces harder than a rock. In this case, as we see, God is not left out of sight. On the contrary, He is believed and felt to be the Author of all permitted sufferings. The awful impiety is, that He is regarded as the unjust Author. We stand amazed at the impiety of that Roman emperor, who, because the lightning flash interrupted the pleasures of his banquet, feared not to hurl his blasphemous reproach against the powers of heaven. But let us consider how much of the spirit of these men is in us, when we indulge in angry chafings at the arrangements of Divine Providence; full of fury, like a wild bull in the net, or fretting as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. How often do you find people under bitter reverses angry and out of humour with everybody about them; with friends who have had nothing whatever to do with their trouble, nay, who perhaps are trying all in their power to lighten them; but the fire of anger is in their bosom, and it must vent itself somewhere; it would vent it on God if it dared, but this is too dreadful to think of; yet it is with Him that they are at anger, and the thought of the heart is as much theirs as ever it was Jonah's, that they do well to be angry. Extreme, therefore, as the case of the text may seem to be, it is an extreme to which any rebellious thoughts may ultimately lead us, if not watched over and prayed against in their first beginnings. **II. HOW THESE DREADFUL EFFECTS MAY BE PREVENTED, AND THE CHASTENINGS OF GOD TURNED TO A SANCTIFIED ACCOUNT.** 1. First, we must be careful to acknowledge the design of God in sending our trials, and do all we can to bring that design about. Our trials may be of different kinds, one man being afflicted with this and another with that. Every heart has its own plague, and every soul its own leprous spot, and the Great Physician mixes our cup accordingly; that is, as pride lifts up the heart, or covetousness enslaves the will, or as vanity fills the mind, as human idols are exalted to Christ's throne, or the love of this present world makes us slothful in the ways of God, does He apportion to each His remedial sorrow, to each His purging fire. Now this being so, can it be otherwise than displeasing unto God, if we take the smiting patiently, but still refuse the correction; if we submit to the discipline, but disregard the profit; if we allow the ploughshare of affliction to go over us, and yet check the springing up of those peaceable fruits of righteousness which chastisement yieldeth to them that are exercised thereby? The rod has a voice, and you must hear what it says. 2. Again, in order that chastening may be blessed to us, we must have a care that we do not become weary under it, however long it may continue. He who faints under the Divine correction first makes sure that he shall faint, and then, by casting off all effort, brings about the fulfilment of his own prophecy. He makes himself helpless. The feebleness of his graces arises

from want of exercise. He has hung up his shield of faith, he has cast off his helmet of hope, he wields the sword of the Spirit with an unsoldierly and trembling hand, and then he wonders that he faints in the day of battle. Chastisement thus received will yield no peaceable fruits of righteousness. So far from our trials being designed to supersede the exercise of our spiritual graces, the great battle of our faith is to be fought on this field. 3. In like manner we are in danger of losing the benefit of chastening, when, through immoderate grief, we unfit ourselves for the active duties of life. The connection between our bodily and mental states is so intimate, that long-continued disturbance of the one will always be followed by serious derangement of the other. Hence it is that protracted and cherished griefs are found to produce a general disturbance in our active and intellectual powers; duties are neglected, a state of apathy is induced, and all the higher demands of our social position are made to wait on a sinful and unprofitable grief. Conceive rightly of Him from whom that chastening comes, as of infinite holiness to do nothing unjust, of infinite love to do nothing unkind, of infinite wisdom to do nothing unsuitable to your best, truest, everlasting interests. And then conceive rightly of yourselves, as transgressors from the womb, as children of disobedience, as outcasts by nature from light and hope, and enemies by works from truth and godliness. And then consider what God sends trials for, and the certainty that, received aright, they shall all work together for good. The arrows of God can never miss their aim; with Him there are no bows drawn at a venture; His shafts speed home infallibly. Taken from the quiver of infinite love, winged with purposes of unerring mercy, they make no heart wounds which they do not more kindly heal, and kill nothing in us which were not better dead. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) **They have refused to return.**—*Decided ungodliness.*—

I. WHO HAVE REFUSED TO RETURN? 1. Those who have said as much. With unusual honesty or presumption, they have made public declaration that they will never quit their sinful ways. 2. Those who have made a promise to repent, but have not performed it. 3. Those who have offered other things instead of practical return to God—ceremonies, religiousness, morality, and the like. 4. Those who have only returned in appearance. Formalists, mere professors, hypocrites. 5. Those who have only returned in part. Hugging some sins while hanging others. **II. WHAT THIS REFUSAL UNVEILS.** 1. An intense love of sin. 2. A want of love to the great Father, who bids them return. 3. A disbelief of God: they neither believe in what He has revealed concerning the evil consequences of their sin, nor in what He promises as to the benefit of returning from it. 4. A despising of God: they reject His counsel, His command, and even Himself. 5. A resolve to continue in evil. This is their proud ultimatum, "they have refused to return." 6. A trifling with serious concerns. They are too busy, too fond of gaiety, &c. **III. WHAT DEEPENS THE SIN OF THIS REFUSAL?** 1. When correction brings no repentance. 2. When conscience is violated, and the Spirit of God is resisted. Repentance seen to be right, but yet refused: duty known, but declined. 3. When repentance is known to be the happiest course, and yet it is obstinately neglected against the plainest reasons. 4. When this obstinacy is long-continued, and is persevered in against convictions and inward promptings. 5. When vile reasons are at the bottom: such as secret sins, which the sinner dares not confess or quit; or the fear of man, which makes the mind cowardly. **IV. WHAT IS THE REAL REASON OF THIS REFUSAL?** 1. It may be ignorance, but that can be only in part, for it is plainly a man's duty to return to his Lord. No mystery surrounds this simple precept—"Return." 2. It may be self-conceit: perhaps they dream that they are already in the right road. 3. It is at times sheer recklessness. The man refuses to consider his own best interests. He resolves to be a trifier; death and hell and heaven are to him as toys to sport with. 4. It is a dislike of holiness. That lies at the bottom of it: men cannot endure humility, self-denial, and obedience to God. 5. It is a preference for the present above the eternal future. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **Refusal to return.**—Lord Byron, a short time before death, was heard to say, "Shall I sue for mercy?" After a long pause he added: "Come, come, no weakness; let's be a man to the last!" **Surely these are poor; . . . I will get me unto the great.**—

The ignorance of the poor and the insolence of the great.—**I. THE CHARACTER OF MANY OF THE POOR AS HERE DESCRIBED.** 1. Their obstinacy in sin was owing to their ignorance. (1) Of religion. (2) Of God's providences. 2. Their ignorance was in great measure occasioned by their poverty. (1) This deprived them of education. (2) All their thoughts and cares are about their

worldly wants. (3) They absent themselves from God's house because of poor attire. (4) They associate with persons like-circumstanced and like-minded, who encourage one another in neglect of religion. (5) They thereby lose all self-respect, sin impudently, and "glory in their shame." II. THE CHARACTER OF THE GREAT AS HERE DESCRIBED. 1. They had a better knowledge of religion than the poor. 2. They acted as bad as the poor, or worse. 3. Their conduct was chiefly owing to their greatness. (1) Lifted up with pride, they resented admonition. (2) They think religion is only to restrain the vulgar, not to bind those in rank. (3) They shrink from showing reverence for God and being exact in religious observances. (4) Worldly things have mischievous influence upon their hearts. (5) Flattered by others, they forget or but formally pay homage to God. (6) They mind earthly things, neglecting the culture and interests of the soul. Application — 1. Learn what is the most important and profitable knowledge. 2. The advantages of being placed in the middle condition of life (Prov. xxx. 8). 3. What an excellent charity it is to furnish the poor with the means of knowledge. (*Job Orton, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. *Shall I not visit for these things?—Unsanctified affliction followed by heavier judgments:*—The physician, when he findeth that the potion which he hath given his patient will not work, he seconds it with one more violent; but if he perceive the disease to be settled, then he puts him into a course of physic, so that he shall have at present but small comfort of his life. And thus doth the surgeon, too: if a gentle plaister will not serve, then he applies that which is more corroding; and to prevent a gangrene, he makes use of his cauterising knife, and takes off the joint or member that is so ill-affected. Even so God, when men profit not by such crosses as He hath formerly exercised them with, when they are not bettered by lighter afflictions, then He sends heavier, and proceeds from milder to sharper crosses. If the dross of their sins will not come off, He will throw them into the melting-pot again and again, crush them harder in the press, and lay on such irons as shall enter more deep into their souls. If He strikes and they grieve not, if they be so foolish that they will not know the judgment of their God, He will bring seven times more plagues upon them, cross upon cross, loss upon loss, trouble upon trouble, one sorrow on the neck of another, till they are in a manner wasted and consumed. (*J. Spencer.*)

Ver. 10. *Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the Lord's.—Storming the battlements:*—I. I shall regard this text as spoken concerning THE CHURCH. The Church has very often gone to king Jareb for help, or to the world for aid; and then God has said to her enemies, "Go ye up against her; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the Lord's. She shall not have them. I am her battlement. She is to have none other." 1. The Church of God has sometimes sought to make the government its battlements. 2. There are churches who make battlements out of the wealth of their members. Now, we do love to have wealth and rank in our own midst; we always thank God when we have brought among us men who can do something for the cause of truth; we do bless God when we see Zaccheus, who had abundance of gold and silver, giving some of his gifts to the poor of the Lord's family; we like to see the princes and kings bringing presents and bowing before the King of all the earth:—but if any church bows before the golden calf, there will go forth the mandate, "Go ye upon her walls; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the Lord's." 3. There are some other churches relying upon learning and erudition. The learning of their minister seems to be a great fort and castle. Never let it be said that I have despised learning, or true knowledge. Let us have as much as we can. We thank God when men of learning are brought into the Church, when God renders them useful. But the Church nowadays is beginning to trust too much to learning; relying too much on philosophy, and upon the understanding of man, instead of the Word of God. 4. But I think that the worst battlement the churches have now is an earthwork of great and extreme caution. It is held to be improper that certain obnoxious truths in the Bible should be preached; sundry reasons are given why they should be withheld. One is, because it tends to discourage men from coming to Christ. Another is, because certain persons will be offended on account of these rough edges of the Gospel. God's Church must be brought once more to rely upon

the pure truth, upon the simple Gospel, the unalloyed doctrines of the grace of God. Oh, may this Church never have any bulwark but the promises of God! II. We shall now address the text to the CHRISTIAN—THE REAL CHILD OF GOD. The true believer also has a proneness to build up sundry "battlements," which "are not the Lord's," and to put his hope, his affection, in something else besides the word of the God of Israel. 1. The first thing whereof we often make a fortress wherein to hide is—the love of the creature. The Christian's happiness should be in God alone. He should be able to say, "All my springs are in Thee. From Thee alone I ever draw my bliss." We fix our love on some dear friend, and there is our hope and trust. God says, "What though ye take counsel together, ye have not taken counsel of Me, and therefore I will take away your trust. What though ye have walked in piety, ye have not walked with Me as ye should. Go ye up against her, O Death! Go ye up against her, O affliction! Take away that battlement—it is not the Lord's." 2. Many of us are too prone to make battlements out of our past experience, and to rely upon that instead of confiding in Jesus Christ. There is a sort of self-complacency which reviews the past, and says, "There I fought Apollyon; there I climbed the hill Difficulty; there I waded through the Slough of Despond." The next thought is, "And what a fine fellow am I! I have done all this. Why, there is nothing can hurt me. No. If I have done all this, I can do everything else that is to be accomplished." What does God say whenever His people do not want Him; but live on what they used to have of Him, and are content with the love He once gave them? "Ah! I will take away your battlements." He calls out to doubts and fears—"Go ye up upon his walls; take away his battlements, for they are not the Lord's." 3. Then again we sometimes get trusting too much to evidences and good works. We often get a pleasing opinion of ourselves: we are preaching so many times a week; we attend so many prayer meetings; we are doing good in the Sabbath school; we are important members of the Church; we are giving away so much in charity, and we say, "Surely I am a child of God. I am an heir of heaven. Look at me! See what robes I wear. Have I not, indeed, a righteousness about me that proves me to be a child of God?" Then we begin to trust in ourselves, and say, "Surely I cannot be moved; my mountain standeth firm and fast." Do you know what is the usual rule of heaven when we thus boast? Why, the command is given—"Go ye up against him, to the foe; make not a full end: take away his battlements; for they are not the Lord's." And what is the consequence? Why, perhaps, God suffers us to fall into sin, and down goes self-sufficiency. Take care of your graces, Christians! III. Now, to bring the text to THE YOUNG CONVERT, to the man in that stage of our religious history which we call conversion to God. 1. In the forefront of the city of Mansoul frowns the wall of carelessness—an erection of satanic masonry. It is made of black granite, and mortal art cannot injure it. Bring law, like a huge pickaxe, to break it: you cannot knock a single chip off. At last a gracious God cries out—"Take away her battlements, they are not the Lord's." And at a glance down crumbles the battlement. The careless man becomes tender-hearted; the soul that was hard as iron has become soft as wax; the man who once could laugh at gospel warnings, and despise the preaching of the minister, now sits down and trembles at every word. 2. The first wall is surmounted, but the city is not yet taken: the Christian minister, under the hand of God, has to storm the next wall—that is the wall of self-righteousness. How hard it is to storm this wall! it must be carried at the point of the bayonet of faithful warning; there is no taking it except by boldly climbing up with the shout of, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." 3. Thus the double rampart is passed, but another still opposes our progress—Christ's warriors know it by the name of self-sufficiency. Oh! blessed day when God directs His shots against that. IV. I take this passage as it respects THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER AT LAST. How many there shall be at the last great day who will sit down very comfortably behind certain battlements that they have builded! There is one man—a monarch: "I am irresponsible," says he; "who shall ever bring anything to my charge? I am an autocrat: I give no account of my matters." Oh! he will find out at last that God is Master of emperors, and Judge of princes; when his battlements shall be taken away. Another says, "Cannot I do as I like with my own? What if God did make me, I shall not serve Him. I shall follow my own will. I have in my own nature everything that is good, and I shall do as my nature dictates. I shall trust in that, and if there be a higher power He will exonerate me, because I only followed

my nature." But he will find his hopes to be visionary, and his reasons to be foolish, when God shall say, "The soul that sinneth it shall die"; and when His thundering voice shall pronounce the sentence—"Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire." Again, there is a company of men joined hand in hand, and they think they will resist the Eternal, yea, they have a plan for subverting the kingdom of Christ. They say, "We are wise and mighty. We have fortified ourselves. We have made a covenant with death and a league with hell." Ah! they little think what will become of their battlements at the last great day, when they shall see it all crumble and fall. With what fear and alarm will they then cry: "Rocks, hide us! Mountains, on us fall!" (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Man's battlements or God's battlements:—These words show us that if we would ensure safety we must embrace God's plan of salvation. I. MAN'S BATTLEMENTS. 1. Some build battlements without Christ as the corner-stone. To read His history, admire His character, wonder at His miracles; but to leave out all the mystery of the Incarnation, to deny the efficacy of the blood-shedding, to substitute reason for faith, is to build battlements which are not "the Lord's." 2. Some build battlements with their own merits. As in the former case the foundation was faulty; so here is the superstructure. The "good heart" and the "good life" and the "good intentions" will not bear scrutiny. Salvation is of grace, and not of debt. 3. Others build battlements of external forms and ceremonies. They are like that foreign people who rear walls of painted canvas, guarded by painted sentinels, and armed with painted guns. There is no reality in such a religion. II. WHAT, THEN, ARE GOD'S BATTLEMENTS? 1. Repentance. No one strikes the penitent who confesses error, and asks forgiveness with many tears. 2. The second line of defence is Faith. Repentance does not save. We are saved by grace, through faith. 3. There is a third range, higher still, Holiness. A man may tremble behind the battlements of faith, even as the devils believe and tremble. That man only is safe and happy who is penitent, believing, and holy. (*J. Bateman, M.A.*)

The danger of false confidences:—Oh, that England would learn that increased wealth and swollen fortunes and material prosperity are no signs of a nation's strength. Pagan Rome was never richer than when she had scarce a freeman left. In the Middle Ages, Papal Rome stood raking into chests the countless gold of her jubilee, just before she suffered her most humiliating shame. Spain was dropping to pieces of inward decay when all the gold of the New World was flowing into the treasure of her kings. "Your glory," said Oliver Cromwell, "is the ditch which guards your shores. I tell you your ditch will not save you if you do not reform yourselves." Some nations have had a false ideal of absolutism, many, and especially modern nations, have had a false ideal of liberty. (*Dean Farrar.*)

The removal of false trusts and defences:—It was a great mercy for our city of London that the great fire cleared away all the old buildings which were the lair of the plague, a far healthier city was then built; and it is a great mercy for a man when God sweeps all his own righteousness and strength, when He makes him feel that he is nothing and drives him to confess that Christ is all in all, and that his only strength lies in the might of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes in a house of business an old system has been going on for years, and it has caused much confusion and allowed much dishonesty. You come in as a new manager, and you adopt an entirely new plan. Now try if you can, and graft your method on to the old system. How it will worry you. Year after year you say to yourself, "I cannot work it; if I had swept the whole away and started afresh, clear from the beginning, it would not have given me one-tenth of the trouble." God does not intend to graft the system of grace upon corrupt nature, nor to make the new Adam grow out of the old. Salvation is not of the flesh, but of the Lord alone. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

False refuges:—I. WORTHLESS REFUGES TRUSTED IN. 1. Infidelity. Such a rampart is nothing more than a deliberate closing of the eyes to danger. It is like the sand in which the foolish ostrich hides its head and thinks himself safe. It is like watching an avalanche descending upon us and consoling ourselves that we are only led by a fanciful vision. 2. Personal merit. There are those who exercise far higher thoughts of human nature and of their own particular abilities than the case justifies. And they estimate their good qualities so highly that they think they surely ought to obtain some recognition from the Almighty. 3. Divine Fatherhood. Some think that because God made man He is therefore a universal Father, and they assume that a Father could not be so unkind to His children as to let justice overpower mercy. II. WORTHLESS REFUGES DENOUNCED. "Go ye up and destroy."

1. The Author of this destruction. The immediate instrument may be man's natural enemies, but the real author is God. He will cast down all false hopes and crush all evil anticipations. 2. The reason assigned—"For they are not the Lord's." 3. The limitation—"Make not a full end." The object is not destruction of the soul, but the taking away the false hopes which lull it into fancied security. God takes away earthly hopes, so that He may bestow heavenly ones. He crushes worthless props, so that He may lay under us His eternal arms. (J. J. S. Bird, B.A.)

Ver. 14. I will make My words in thy mouth fire.—*The potential word* :—Three elements of the power of the Gospel are here found. I. The I WILL of the Almighty. That will is an ocean deep and wide as eternity and infinity. In that shoreless deep all the mighty orbs, suns, systems floated first by mere will of Jehovah. To that will every line of inspiration becomes either a ray of light, law, and peace, or a thunder-bolt of justice. II. "THE WORDS OF THY MOUTH." The language is human, but Divine in its source. In all the dealings of heaven with our race, created instruments have been used. A long line of prophets and patriots have been guided with the authority and power from the eternal throne. So that whether Jehovah will to rouse all the stormy elements of clouds above, and waters beneath, as by a shepherd's staff, and styled the rod of God, on the kingdom of Egypt, or drive a broad dusty highway through the waves of the sea,—it is the same glorious God that is present in this sacred book. Ten thousand angels of the life-guard around heaven's throne could not change the heart of the weakest child. But aided by the will of the eternal majestic "I" of the text, a babe in the manger at Bethlehem will awaken a song that shall ring out in anthem heard far up among the golden spheres of heaven, and echo round and round our redeemed and regenerated world. III. A FIRE purifies gold, but consumes the chaff. (W. H. Van Doren, D.D.) *God's Word as fire* :—It seems to me that the Word of God in our churches is too much like a sight which you not infrequently see in our streets in winter : a heap of coals cast down from a cart in front of a house upon the frosty ground, with the snow lying all around it, and falling upon it from the bosom of the storm. It is a remarkable conjunction when you come to think of it—a heap of coals and a heap of snow. The snow lies upon the heap of coals as cold and unmoved as it could lie over a heap of granite stones; and yet that heap of coal contains a vast quantity of potential heat, heat enough to melt all the snow in the street and convert for the time being the winter around into summer. But so long as the coal is as cold as the snow, so long does it produce no effect. Supposing you were able to apply a burning coal from your kitchen fire to the cold coal outside, what a wonderful change you would produce. You would let loose the potential heat; you would transform that cold inert mass of coal into a fiery furnace, which would melt and evaporate all the snow around it. And more marvellous still would the effect of the Word of God be upon you, coming to your cold, hard, frost-bound heart, with power from on high kindled with the fire of God's Holy Spirit. The potential heat in it would be set free, and it would transform your whole nature and life. (H. Macmillan.)

Ver. 19. When ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the Lord our God all these things unto us?—*In the time of tribulation* :—I. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD AS THAT SUPREME RULER OF ALL FROM WHOSE HAND AFFLICTIONS COME. It is one great secret of that peace which passeth all understanding to mark the hand of God in all the changes and sorrows of this ever-varying scene of things; the want of this it is which so frequently leaves the men of the world a prey to vexation and despair. Secondary causes are but the links in the chain of providence; follow them by the light of God's Word and the guidance of a simple faith, and you will find that chain depending from the very throne of God Himself, held in His own hand; every part of it adjusted as He sees it best to permit, according to the counsel of His own will. II. A CONVICTION THAT WHEN GOD SENDS AFFLICTION HE HAS A REASON FOR WHAT HE DOES. 1. God often uses affliction for the purpose of correcting His children's faults, and bringing them to a sense of their guilt. 2. The promotion of our growth in grace is another reason of God's afflictive dispensations. Holy men are by trial weaned from a vain and evil world; are brought more and more to realise experimentally what religion is; and are enabled to enjoy in a peculiar manner the consolation of the Gospel of Christ. III. A WISH TO KNOW WHAT

THAT REASON IS. Not that we may be satisfied that God is just in what He does. But that understanding what the reason of His dispensation is, we may ask ourselves, have, then, those dispensations wrought in us the result designed? But how is he to ascertain it? I apprehend that we shall generally be guided to it when depending on the Holy Spirit for direction; we simply look at the nature of the trial, and the state of our own hearts. (*J. Harding.*)

Vers. 20-25. **O foolish people, and without understanding.**—*God's judgment of self-will*.—The text is part of a message which was to be declared in the house of Jacob, and published in Israel. It shows that three results were produced by self-assertion against the rule of God; will the same cause produce the same effect? Let us see the results of self-will as shown in the text, and compare them with the testimony of our own experience. I. SELF-WILL IN RELATION TO THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT DESTROYS THE NATURAL CAPACITIES AND FACULTIES OF MAN. "Foolish people, without understanding," &c. How different this description to the original portraiture of man! Foolish, blind, deaf—such is man when he has turned his back upon God, and taken life into his own hands. It would seem as if all the faculties of our nature were dependent for continuance upon their religious use; moral paralysis is equivalent to intellectual stagnation; not to pray is to die. Is it not much the same as if a flower should be shut out from the light and dew? The soul is, so to speak, withdrawn from the source of its being—cut off from the fountain of life, and allowed to exhaust its little resources, to languish in loneliness, and to die of hunger. If, then, we leave God, how soon does our poverty come as an armed man, and our want as one that travaileth! We shall most clearly see how the natural faculties of man are impaired, and indeed destroyed, by irreligion, by considering that the same truth holds good in the ordinary business of life,—separation from God means folly, blindness, and general incapacity, even in earthly things. Take the case of our daily bread, and see how the doctrine is sustained. Let any man set aside God's plan of obtaining daily bread, and call upon his own genius to supply it; let the earth remain uncultivated; let the seed remain unsown: can it be doubted that the insane man would soon be taught by famine what he would not learn from reason or infer from revelation? There is no violence in transferring the argument from the body to the soul: on the contrary, such transference would seem to be a logical necessity; for if God is essential to the inferior, is He not essential to the superior? If man cannot do the less, how can he do the greater? A man who would not eat bread because he could not make his own will dominant through every detail of the process of germination would be pitied or despised; yet men who cannot by their own will or power make one grain of corn for the support of the body are often found resenting God's offers of enlightenment and guidance of the soul! What wonder that God should call upon the heavens to be astonished and the earth to be horribly afraid! And what wonder, repelled and dishonoured as He is, that He should say: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land," &c. Think of God sending a famine upon the soul,—of minds pining and dying because Divine messages have been withdrawn! We know what the effect would be if God were to withhold the dew, or to trouble the air with a plague, or to avert the beams of the sun: the garden would be a desert, the fruitful field a sandy plain, the wind a bearer of death, summer a stormy night, and life itself a cruel variation of death,—so penetrating, so boundless is the influence of God in nature. Is it conceivable that the withdrawal of God's influence would be less disastrous upon the spirit of man? Out of God there is no true being; the spasm, the convulsion, which is mistaken for existence is an impious sarcasm upon life. II. SELF-WILL IN RELATION TO THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT PLUNGES THE SOUL INTO IRREVERENCE. Tho' "fear" spoken of (ver. 22) may be taken as expressive of homage, veneration, and, in fact, everything that enters into a complete idea of worship. The destruction of veneration may be regarded as the final triumph of self-will. There is a very simple philosophy of spiritual retrogression. It turns upon man's self-magnifying power, and his consequent ambition for self-government. He says: "If there be a God, He is at all events unseen; I am the highest power that comes within the cognisance of my own senses; other beings, such as demons and angels, have been spoken of; but they are fictions of genius, dreams of ill-regulated minds; I am king, I am god." This is the natural creed of Sight, and it has many virtual subscribers. Now, it is to the senses themselves that God addresses the appeal of the text. He would appoint

the ocean as umpire in the great controversy. Look, He says in effect, at the sea: it is bounded by the sand; its great fury cannot prevail against the limit which I have appointed: can you enlarge the decree which determinates the movement of the deep? Can you beat back the waves, or silence the roar of the billows? Stand by the seashore, then, and learn that there is a will higher than your own, a power which could crush your puny arm; listen, and let your soul hear a voice mightier than man's; incline your ear, and let the spirit hear the going of God upon the quiet or troubled waves; reflect, wonder, bow down, and worship.

III. SELF-WILL DISSOCIATES THE GIFTS OF NATURE FROM THE GIVER (ver. 24). Revolted man will accept the rain because he cannot live without it, but the Giver will not be so much as named; the corn will be gathered, but those who bear the sheaves will have no harvest-hymn for God. How rapid, tumultuous, fatal is the course of moral revolt! The purpose of God was evidently to have His Name identified with the common mercies of life, that our very bread and water might remind us constantly of His gentle and liberal care. He was not to be confided to purely spiritual contemplation, to be the subject of the soul's dream when lost in high reverie, or to be thought of as a Being far off, enclosed within the circle of the planets, or throned in the unapproachable palaces of an undiscovered universe: He desires to be seen spreading our table in the wilderness, causing the earth to bring forth and bud for our benefit, turning our weary feet towards the water-springs, and nourishing us in the time of weakness. Men may eat unblest bread, and be bodily the stronger for it, but it is a sore and lasting reproach to the soul. The course of moral revolt ends in this, ends in the deposition of God and in the worship of self. Man ploughs, sows, reaps, and considers all the influences which co-operate in the production of results as mere features of inanimate nature existing and working apart altogether from intelligent or moral will. The universe becomes a stupendous machine; they who get good crops have used the machine skilfully, and they whose fields are fruitless have misunderstood or misapplied the machine. The universe was designed to be the temple, the very coveying, of God; but the worship of self has wrought a bad transfiguration upon it, and now the thief, the unclean beast, and the lying prophet prevail on every hand. The demoralisation of man may have a mischievous effect upon nature itself. We sometimes speak of a bad harvest: what if behind it there has been a bad life? When the heart is right towards God, God will not withhold His blessing from the earth: "Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee: then shall the earth yield her increase." Physical blessing will follow spiritual worship; no good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly. In the light of these statements we have a double view of the unity of the moral and material systems of government. One view is from the human side: when man sins, commits a trespass in the spiritual region, he finds the result of his sin in the physical department; the reflection of his spiritual misrule is seen in dried fountains and fruitless fields, in devastating storms and fatal plagues; the universe takes up arms in defence of law. Another view is from the Divine side. God shows favour upon the earth for reasons derived from the spiritual character of the people, and demonstrates the superiority of the soul over the body by making its condition the measure of His material benefactions. How terrific, how hopeless, then, is the condition of the sinner! (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Indifference.—I. WHAT GOD HAS DONE TO PRODUCE PIOUS CONSIDERATION. 1. He has given powers of mind adapted to it. Eyes—to see, discern, read, &c. Ears—to hearken, messengers of truth. Understanding—to know, weigh, reflect, &c. 2. He has given us the means to answer to those powers. His Word, His servants, His providence, &c. 3. He has given us His Holy Spirit—to strive, convince, &c.

II. THE INDIFFERENCE MEN OFTEN EXHIBIT. 1. The indifference of some is total, without any concern. Live stocks and stones. 2. Others are considerate only of the externals of religion. 3. The consideration of some is only to the intellectual parts of the truth. A mental study; philosophical attention; such as they give to literature. 4. The consideration of others is occasional. Under very arousing discourses, providences, sickness, bereavements, &c.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS INDIFFERENCE. 1. It is extremely foolish. Moral insanity. 2. Detrimental to the soul. Makes it blind, deaf; robs it of spiritual food and enjoyment; degrades it. 3. Specially offensive to God. Rebellion. Ingratitude. 4. Must end in the soul's ruin. No moral fitness without devout consideration. Application—1. Examine and test yourselves. 2. Seek the quickening influences of the Divine Spirit. 3. Be resolved and wise now, lest perish.

(*J. Burns, D.D.*) **Fear ye not Me? saith the Lord.—Solemn reasons for fearing the Lord:—**I. ARGUMENT FROM GOD'S GOVERNMENT OF THE SEA. 1. Suited to impress man with an idea of—(1) Infinite power, (2) Consummate wisdom, (3) Special goodness. Twofold—(a) Negatively, in checking the threatening invasion of the sea; (b) Affirmatively, in giving rain, &c. 2. Man's revolting tendencies. (1) God has prescribed the bounds of man's actions and thoughts by befitting laws. As the sea has bounds, so there are limits to every finite being. (2) To overstep these limits is rebellion against the Great Lawgiver. (3) Man has revolted, differing in this from the sea. (4) Man can do what the sea cannot. (a) Man has a heart, the sea has not; a will power. (b) This power in man has been prostituted to evil. II. ARGUMENT FROM GOD'S BESTOWMENT OF THE HARVEST. 1. Until the Gospel was communicated to the world, attentive observance of the dispensation of providence was the principal means whereby God's Spirit drew the Gentiles to Himself, and led them to piety and obedience. (1) It was the religion of nature (*Acts xiv. 15-17; Rom. i. 19, 20*). (2) From God's works alone, His being, power, mercy, may be fully and satisfactorily proved, without the advantages of revelation. 2. Although we enjoy the full light of the glorious Gospel, we can never too closely keep in mind the fact that all things we see and enjoy are ordained by God. (1) We have less need than the heathen to learn about God from His outward and visible works. (2) Yet we are beholden to His providence for all essential natural blessings. (3) Nothing in nature could reach maturity but for the fatherly care of God. 3. From the natural events around us we may—(1) Learn diligence in our spiritual concerns, that the Word of Life may ripen in our hearts. (2) Pray that the heavenly Sower will not pass us by in barrenness. (3) When observing the tender blade, reflect on the weakness of our advance in piety, and entreat Him who tempers all the elements to "work all things together for our good." (4) When the harvest hour is nigh, let us think how short our time is, and pray that we may not be found blasted or unfruitful. (*Bp. Heber.*) **Persuasives to the fear of God:—**I. HE COMPLAINS OF THE SHAMEFUL STUPIDITY OF THIS PEOPLE. 1. Their understandings were darkened. Possessing intellectual faculties and capacities, they did not employ and improve them. 2. Their wills were stubborn: not submit to rules of Divine law. II. HE ASCRIBES THIS TO THE WANT OF THE FEAR OF GOD. 1. If you keep up awe of God you will be observant of what He says. 2. Because we neglect to stir up our wills to holy awe of God we are so apt to rebel. III. HE SUGGESTS SOME THINGS PROPER TO POSSESS US WITH A HOLY FEAR OF GOD. 1. We must fear the Lord and His greatness. He keeps and manages the sea. (1) By this we see His universal sovereignty; therefore to be had in reverence. (2) This shows how easily He could drown the world again by withdrawing His "decree"; therefore we lie continually at His mercy, and should fear to make Him our enemy. (3) Even the unruly waves obey Him,—neither revolt nor rebel; why, then, should our hearts? 2. We must fear the Lord, and His goodness. (1) Because He is always doing us good. (2) Because these blessings are consequent upon His promise. (3) Because we have such a necessary dependence upon Him. (*M. Henry, D.D.*) **Which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea.—Adoration of God in nature:—**1. The more blessings they enjoyed, the more thankful they should have been. 2. Having rejected God spiritually, He yet continued to manifest Himself to them in nature. 3. Gratitude to God for the fruits of the seasons is a common ground on which to argue effectually even with the darkest heathen. 4. The heathen are denied excuse for their ignorance and idolatry, because of the marks of God's love and power in the world around them. 5. Yet the heathen, in outward forms at least, surpassed Jews and Christians. 6. There was, then, great sin on the part of Israel when, even as natural men, they ignored the mercies of God's ordinary providence, and were not softened and converted by His unmerited goodness. 7. A bounteous season ought to awaken love and thankfulness to God. 8. God is exceedingly jealous of the honour due unto His name. 9. The eye is blind to God in natural wonders, and the ear deaf amid His works, because the heart has not embraced Him in the Gospel of His Son. (*J. Garbett, M.A.*) **God's government of the sea, and man's revolting tendencies:—**1. God is the Author and Governor of the sea. 2. God binds the sea within certain limits by law. 3. God's laws are permanent till He wills a change "by a perpetual decree." 4. God is ever present in His laws and contrivances. 5. God's presence in the laws of the sea, as well as in every other law, should have a restrain-

ing and reverencing influence upon men. I. GOD'S GOVERNMENT OF THE SEA. Suited to impress man with an idea of—1. Infinite power. 2. Consummate wisdom. 3. Special goodness. II. MAN'S REVOLTING TENDENCIES. 1. God has prescribed the bounds of man's actions and thoughts by befitting laws. Love to God and man. 2. To overstep these limits is rebellion against the great Lawgiver. When thoughts are unholy and imagination irreverent, the soul has overstepped its proper limits, and is in rebellion against its Creator. 3. Man has overstepped his proper limits, and therefore rebelled. "They are revolted and gone." Differing in this from the sea. 4. Man can do what the sea can not, namely, overstep his proper limits and transgress the laws of his being. (1) Man has a heart. The sea has not. Man has a will-power—a power to act to a great extent as he likes. (2) This power in man has been prostituted to evil. Man, morally, has lost his equilibrium, his heart has become rebellious; and heart rebellion is the source of all rebellions—of hand and head rebellions. Conclusion—1. God must govern heart and will by heart and will influences. 2. It is easier for God to rule suns and systems and oceans than one man, because he has a heart, and a rebellious one. 3. Man, as a rebel, contrasts unfavourably with the material creation—the earth and sea, &c. God notices this with a painful emotion. "Fear ye not Me," &c. (*Homilist*.) *The sand barrier*:—Take a handful of sand up, and how easily it filters through the fingers. This slippery sand is part of God's wall against the sea. By agglomeration it is strong. The restraining of the waters has made the earth habitable. Every coast-line, however indented, flat, or rocky, has been traced by that Hand which "gave to the sea its decree." I. There are NATURAL LAWS which are, like the boundaries of the sea, not to be passed. We all know what would be the result if the force of gravitation did not hold us in our place on the earth's surface, or if we determined to ignore the law by leaping from a precipice. There are also laws of health which restrain us. We can easily damage our physical frame by neglect. Pains we must then endure, compelling to obedience. II. In SOCIETY we have limits, bounds and restraints which are of greatest value. The opinions of our fellows are restraints. Laws are the bounds within which the moral would secure the immoral. The good man fears them not, because he has no wish to break them. He values them, because they protect him from the lawless. III. There are in KNOWLEDGE certain limits and bounds which are of great value. Those who think deeply are the most conscious of this. Let us be thankful for such bounds. Let us remember what ennui and pride would follow if we could know all. Further, where would be the need for faith—that noblest act of the soul? Let us be humble. What is all we know, compared with what God has to reveal to us? Let us seek to become more fitted to pass beyond the limitations of the present, and to appreciate more the widening of our sphere of knowledge in the future world. IV. As the sea has its bounds, so has LIFE its limits. Decay and death must come sooner or later. Hearts can beat only a determined number of times, even as a watch, when once wound up, can go only a certain time. Every tick brings it nearer to the last beat. When the spring runs down, another beat cannot be got out of it. What are man's years to immortality? (*Job xiv. 5*). There is wisdom in this decree. If men were to live beyond a certain point they would be hindrances; and if there were no death, men would be altogether forgetful of God their Judge. V. We may apply the text to the TRIALS to which man is subjected. God sets bounds to them. He will not allow us to be crushed or swamped. He knows what we can bear, and how much is good for us. Murmur not. Trust in Him. He can deliver, check, remove the restraints, hindrances, and trials, and even bring blessing out of them. (*Homiletic Magazine*.) *God the ruler of the waves*:—God rules the waves, not Britannia. (*John Newton*.) *Sea and soil*; *Divine providence*:—By the mouth of His prophet, Jeremiah, God upbraids His people for their impiety; but it is worthy of notice that He reproaches them not for their forgetfulness of His miraculous deliverances, but for their heedlessness of His regular kindness to them. It is not that they are neglecting Him who saved them from the wrath of the Egyptians by the marvels of the Red Sea passage; it is that they are failing to honour Him who has always been keeping the sea in its bed. I. GOD'S CONSTANT KINDNESS TO US. 1. In keeping in check the destructive forces upon the earth (*ver. 22*). The sea at rest, kept within its bounds, is an object of surpassing beauty; its surface is the great highway of the nations. But when it breaks its bounds, it causes terrible destruction. As with the sea,

so with the air. The pure air we breathe is life itself; the soft breeze is refreshment and invigoration; the wind aids us in our industries and carries our ships across the water. But the cyclone, the hurricane, is danger, destruction, death. The occasional storm reminds us of the continuance from week to week of that balance in the atmospheric forces which the wisdom and the power of God sustain, and which makes possible and practicable our pleasant lives. This also holds with the interior of the earth. Beneath a thin crust of rock are stored and hidden great central fires. What if they were loosened! The earthquake and the volcano are the reminders that there are forces beneath our feet and of which we have no control whatever; but a mightier hand than ours has shut them in, and keeps us in safety and in peace. 2. In putting into exercise productive powers (ver. 24). God has been fulfilling His promise, and neither seed-time nor harvest has failed from the earth. There have come droughts and storms: our trust and our patience have been tried; our intellectual resources have been developed, and our character has been disciplined thereby; adverse material conditions have been strengthening and quickening our manhood; the culture of the field has been the culture of the race; the method of God's giving has greatly enhanced the value of His gift. Divine wisdom has accompanied Divine bounty at every step. II. OUR HUMAN RESPONSE. Too often it has been—1. That which is our reproach. Men have taken everything from the God of their life, and they have—(1) Denied His existence; or (2) Questioned His interest in His children's well-being; or (3) Practically disregarded the operation of His hand, and rendered Him no thanks; or (4) Contented themselves with bare formalities from which all genuine feeling has been left out. But prophet and psalmist and apostle invite us to a response—2. Which is becoming and acceptable. (1) Reverence. "Fear ye not Me?" Have we no adoration for this Lord of all power and wisdom, who keeps the sea in its place and who covers the barren soil with a golden harvest? (2) Gratitude. Shall we not "bless the Lord," who "filleteth our mouth with good things"? (3) Service. He who gives us the bread which nourishes our body has placed us under a far greater obligation in that He has given us the Bread of Life. Eating of the one, we live a lower life for "a few more years"; but partaking of the other, we live the larger and higher life for evermore (John vi. 58). (C. Clarkson, B.A.) *God's barriers against man's sin*.—The majesty of God, as displayed in creation and providence, ought to stir up our hearts in adoring wonder and melt them down in willing obedience to His commands. The almighty power of Jehovah, so clearly manifest in the works of His hands, should constrain us, His creatures, to fear His name and prostrate ourselves in humble reverence before His throne. The contemplation of the marvellous works which He doth upon "the great and wide sea," where He tosseth the waves to and fro, and yet keepeth them in their ordained courses, should draw forth our devoutest emotions, and I could almost say, inspire us with homage. Have these great things of God, these wondrous works of His, no lesson to teach us? Do they not while declaring His glory reveal our duty? Our poets, both the sacred and the uninspired, have feigned consciousness to those inanimate agents that they might the more truthfully represent their honourable service. But if because we are intelligent beings, we withhold our allegiance from our rightful Sovereign, then our privileges are a curse, and our glory is a shame. We might learn, even without the written oracles of Scripture, that we ought to obey God, if our foolish hearts were not so darkened; thus unbelief of the Almighty Creator is a crime of the first magnitude. If it were a petty sovereign against whom ye rebelled, it might be pardonable; if He were a man like yourselves, ye might expect that your faults would easily find forgiveness; but since He is the God who reigns alone where clouds and darkness are round about Him, the God to whom all nature is obedient, and whose high behests are obeyed both in heaven and in hell, it becomes a crime, the terrible character of which words cannot portray, that you should ever sin against a God so marvellously great. The greatness of God enhances the greatness of our sin. I believe this is one lesson which the prophet intended to teach us by the text. But while it is a lesson, I do not think it is the lesson of the text. There is something else which we are to learn from it. God here contrasts the obedience of the strong, the mighty, the untamed sea, with the rebellious character of His own people. The doctrine of the text seems to be this—that without supernatural means God can make all creatures obedient save man; but man is so disobedient in his heart, that

only some supernatural agency can make him obedient to God, while the simple agency of sand can restrain the sea, without any stupendous effort of Divine power more than He ordinarily puts out in nature : He cannot thus make man obedient to His will. Now, look back into history, and see if it has not been so. What has been a greater problem, if we may so speak concerning the Divine mind, than that of restraining men from sin ? How many restraints God has put upon man ! " But what of this fact ? "—you say—" we know it is true ; we do not doubt it." Stay awhile ; I am now coming to deal with your hearts and consciences. I. First of all, ye SAINTS. I want you to look at this as a doctrine not more evident in the history of mankind at large, than abundantly verified in your own case. Come, now, I want to ask of you, whether it cannot be said of you truly, " The sea is bound by sand ; but I am one of those people who are bent on revolting from God, neither can any of His restraints keep me from sin." Let us review the various restraints which God has put upon His people to keep them from sins which, nevertheless, are altogether ineffectual, without the accompanying power of grace. 1. Then, remember there is a restraint of gratitude which, to the lowly regenerated heart, must necessarily form a very strong motive to obedience. I ask thee, O saint, viewing thy sins as sins against love and mercy, against covenant promises, covenant oaths, covenant engagements, ay, and covenant fulfilments, is not thy sin a desperate thing, and art not thou thyself a rebellious and revolting being, seeing that thou canst not be restrained by such a barrier of adamant as thy soul acknowledges ? Next notice, that the saint has not only this barrier against sin, but many others. 2. He has the whole of God's Word given him by way of warning ; its pages he is accustomed to read ; he reads there, that if he break the statutes and keep not the commandments of the Lord, his Father will visit his transgressions with a rod, and his iniquity with stripes. And yet, O Christian, against all warning and against all precept, thou darest to sin. Oh ! art thou not a rebellious creature, and mayest thou not humble thyself at the thought of the greatness of thine iniquity ? 3. Again, the saint sins against his own experience. When he looks back upon his past life he finds that sin has always been a loss to him ; he has never found any profit, but has always lost by it. Will you put the poisoned goblet to your lips again ? Yes, you will ; but because you do so in the teeth of your experience, it ought to make you weep, that you should be such desperate rebels against such a loving God, who has put not merely a barrier of sand, but a barrier of tried steel to keep in your lusts, and yet they will break forth ; verily, ye are a rebellious and revolting people. 4. Then again, God guards all His children with providence, in order to keep them from sin. Ah ! strange things happen to some of us. It was only a providence which on some solemn occasion, to which you never look back without regret, saved you from sin which would have been a scab on your character. Bless God for that ! But remember, notwithstanding the girdlings of His providence, how many times you have offended ; and let the frequency of your sin remind you that you must indeed be a rebellious creature. 5. Yet, once more let me remind you, that the ordinances of God's house are all intended to be checks to sin. Bow down your heads with shame while ye consider your ways, and then lift up your hearts, Christians, in adoring love, that He has kept you when your feet were making haste to hell, where you would have gone, but for His preserving grace. Will you not pray, that God should not cast you away, nor take His Holy Spirit from you, though you are a rebellious creature, and though you have revolted against Him ? II. Apply it to SINNERS. Come, then, sinner ; in the first place, I bid thee consider thy guilt. The mighty ocean is kept in obedience by God, and restrained within its channel by simple sand ; and thou, a pitiful worm, the creature of a day, the ephemera of an hour, thou art a rebel against God. The sea obeys Him ; thou dost not. Consider how many restraints God has put on thee : He has not checked thy lusts with sand but with beetling cliffs ; and yet thou hast burst through every bound in the violence of thy transgressions. Perhaps He has checked thy soul by the remembrance of thy guilt. Thou hast felt thyself a despiser of God ; or if not a despiser, thou art a mere hearer, and hast no part nor lot in this matter. Dost thou not remember thy sins in the face of thy mother's counsels and thy father's strong admonitions ? Thou knowest the threatenings of God ; it is no new tale to thee, when I warn thee that sinners must be condemned. Consider, then, how great is thy guilt ; thou hast sinned against light and knowledge ; thou art not the Hottentot sinner,

who sins in darkness; thou hast not sinned ignorantly, thou hast done it when thou knewest better. Some of you have had other things. Don't you remember, some little time ago, when sickness was rife, you were stretched on your bed? Methinks I see you; you turned your face to the wall, and you cried, "O God, if Thou wilt save my life, I will give myself to Thee!" Perhaps it was an accident; thou didst fear that death was very near; the terrors of death laid hold of thee, and thou didst cry, "O God, let me but reach home in safety, and my bended knees and my tears pouring in torrents, shall prove that I am sincere in the vow I make!" But didst thou perform that vow? Nay, thou hast sinned against God; thy broken vows have gone before thee to judgment. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 23, 24. But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.—*Israel's apostasy*.—Our state of heart and mind toward God is shown, not by those emotions which are kindled in us on receiving any extraordinary mercy, nor by what we do under the influence of those emotions, but by the habitual condition of our hearts and minds toward God as concerned in His everyday gifts and our everyday doings. I. THE ACCUSATION MADE. 1. God complains of revolt and rebellion against Him. The only rightful ruler over all: whose power is absolute and independent, whose wisdom is unerring, whose justice perfect, and whose goodness infinite: whose "statutes are" all "right," rejoicing the right-hearted, whose commandment is all pure, enlightening the eye that is single. 2. And what thought was it in their hearts, which God construed as rebellion against Him? It took in Israel's heart the simple and familiar form of mere unthankfulness to God for "common mercies." II. THE PROOF OF THEIR REBELLION AND REVOLT. 1. They did not in the gift of a good harvest discern God at all. 2. If, as I feel too much afraid it is, this part of the proof of a rebellious heart be in us, of necessity the other part will not be wanting: and as God saith in the text of His people of old, "Neither say they in their hearts, Let us now fear the Lord our God," so neither shall we say the same. The goodness of God is meant to lead men to repentance. (*F. C. Clark, B.A.*) *Sin is revolt and rebellion against Christ—our King*.—One day, over in Australia, at Maryboro', an unusually fine-looking man came in and said, "I want to talk with you. I don't know about your preaching. I am a moral, upright man, and nobody can deny it. I should like you to tell me what you have got against me." I said, "Are you a Christian?" "No, sir." "Well, then, I charge you with high treason against your King. God made Him so, and I charge you"—and I looked him right in the eye—"with the crime of high treason against your King." An awful cloud came over the man's face. He got up and walked out of the room. Months passed away. We had been over to Tasmania, and got back to Australia, and were preaching at Ballarat, about forty miles, I think, from Maryboro'. At the close of one of my meetings, a fine-looking man came and said, "Do you remember me?" I replied, "I have seen you somewhere, but I cannot trace you." "Do you remember charging a man with high treason?" I said, "I have charged many a man with high treason." He said, "Do you remember charging a specific man?" and he narrated the circumstances. "Yes," I said, "I do." He replied, "I am the man. You will never charge me with it again." He held out his hand, and I held out mine. He took me in his mighty grip, and dropped on his knees, and I on mine. He looked up and said, "Lord Jesus, I hand in my allegiance; I give up my treason, and take Thee as my King." You men ought to do it to-night. (*A. Torrey.*)

Ver. 24. Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: He reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.—*The former and the latter rain*.—Such are the climate and soil of Palestine, that all agricultural operations are most manifestly dependent upon the periodical rainfall. Hence the people speak of the weather and the crops with a more immediate reference to God than is usual with us. It is said that the common expressions of the peasantry are such as quite strike travellers with their apparently devout recognition of the Almighty agency. Certainly we may account for a very large number of what may be called the agricultural promises of the Old Testament, from the fact that little of the food of the people was gained by manufacture or commerce, and the whole population depended

upon the field, and the field upon the rain. Although our climate does not so immediately remind us of our dependence upon God, yet it would be well if we remembered whence all our blessings come, and looked up to the hand from which our daily bread is distributed. When He giveth seasons propitious for the harvest, let us thank Him for it; and if at any time He restraineth the blessings of the elements, and loadeth the air with blight and mildew, let us fear and tremble before Him, and humble ourselves before His chastening hand. Gratitude for providential mercies is not, however, the subject of this discourse. I intend to use the text rather in a spiritual sense. As it is in the outward world, so is it in the inward; as it is in the physical, so is it in the spiritual: man is a microcosm, a little world, and all weather and seasons find their image in him. The earth is dependent upon the rain from heaven, so are the souls of men, and so are their holy works, dependent upon the grace shower which cometh from the great Father of Light, the giver of every good and perfect gift. I. THE WORK OF GOD AS IT IS CARRIED ON WITHOUT. It is needful, whenever any holy enterprise is commenced, that it should be early watered by the helpful Spirit of God. Nothing beginneth well unless it beginneth in God. It cannot take root, it cannot spring up in hopefulness, except the Holy Spirit shall descend upon it; it will wither like the grass upon the housetops if the celestial dew of the morning fall not early upon it. The like grace is equally needful after years of growth; there is urgent need of the latter rain, the shower of revival, in which the old work shall be freshened, and the first verdure shall be restored; for without this latter rain, the period of harvest, which is the end aimed at, will be disappointing. II. Apply the text to OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE WITHIN US. 1. Here note that usually the spiritual life, as soon as it is commenced, experiences a former rain, or a delightful visitation of grace. So blessed was our first conversion to some of us, that those first days are as green and fragrant in our memories as if they were but yesterday; they are as fresh and fair as if they had but just budded in the garden of time. To hear any one talk of a precious Christ and of pardon bought with blood, and of full and free salvation, was heaven to us. If, in those days, we had to suffer anything for Jesus, we only regretted we could not suffer more. That was the early rain. The seed had just been sown, and the Master to make it take deeper root and spring up faster into the green blade, gave us the sacred shower of His loving presence. There was much tender wisdom in this gentleness, for the newborn soul is very weak then. Besides, our Master at that time gave us the early rain, as it were, to give our young plant a start in commencing our heavenly growth—a growth to which we might look back in after years. How often have we been refreshed since then in our times of sorrow, by recollecting the months past, when the candle of the Lord shone round about our head! Beloved Christian, if thou art now this day in the dark, pluck a torch from the altars of yesterday, with which to kindle the lights of to-day. The faithful Promiser was with thee then; thou hadst His love to cheer thee then: go to Him yet once more, and thou shalt receive the latter rain of renewed grace from Him who giveth grace upon grace. 2. It is very usual in the life of grace, for the soul to receive in after years, a second very remarkable visitation of the Holy Spirit, which may be compared to the latter rain. Believe me, the life of grace is no dead level, it is not a fen country, a vast flat. There are mountains, and there are valleys. There are tribes of Christians who live in the valleys, like the poor Swiss of the Valais, who live in the midst of the miasma, where fever has its lair, and the frame is languid and enfeebled. Such dwellers in the lowlands of unbelief are for ever doubting, fearing, troubled about their interest in Christ, and tossed to and fro; but there are other believers, who, by God's grace, have climbed the mountain of full assurance and near communion. Their place is with the eagle in his eyrie, high aloft. They are like the strong mountaineer, who has trodden the virgin snow, who has breathed the fresh, free air of the Alpine regions, and therefore his sinews are braced, and limbs are vigorous; these are they who do great exploits, being mighty men, men of renown. The saints who dwell on high in the clear atmosphere of faith, are rejoicing Christians, holy and devout men, doing service for the Master all over the world, and everywhere conquerors through Him that loved them. And I desire, oh, how earnestly I desire you to be such men! 3. The text speaks of a third thing. There is the former rain, and the latter rain, and then he says, "He has reserved for us the appointed weeks of harvest." Yes, if we shall get this latter rain—and may we have it!—it will then be time to be looking forward to our harvest. Consider well that the harvest begins in

the field, though it ends in the garner. Going to heaven begins upon earth; and as the text tells us of weeks, so may I add that going to glory is often a long work. We are like a balloon while it is tied to the earth, it cannot mount; even so our ascent to heaven is delayed by a thousand detaining cords and bands, and the process of setting us free is cutting the ropes one by one. The wheat may well rejoice for the sharp cuts of the sickle, because it is the sign of going home to the garner. After the wheat is cut it stands in shocks, shocks of corn fully ripe, not growing out of the earth, but merely standing on it. The shock is quite disconnected from the soil. How happy is the state of a Christian when he is in the world but is not linked to it! His ripeness drops here and there a grain into the soil, for he is still ready to do good, but he has no longer any vital connection with aught below, he is waiting to be in heaven. Here comes the wain. The corn is put into it, and with shoutings it is carried home. Soon will our Heavenly Father send His chariot, and we who have been ripened by the latter rain, and separated from earth by His Spirit's sickle, shall be borne in the chariot of triumph, amidst the shoutings of the angels, and the songs of thrice blessed spirits, up to the eternal garner. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The God of harvest:*—

I. SOME OF THE ASPECTS OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE GOD OF HARVEST. The artist will not be called a painting, or the poet an ode, although it is his production; neither will God allow creation to stand for Himself. But the artist's painting, and the poet's ode, reveal perception, and genius, and feeling, and inspiration, which lead us to the threshold of their personality. So creation is brimful of the power, wisdom, and goodness of its Maker, and providence teems with evidences of care, beneficence, and tenderness on the part of its Author. 1. The God of harvest is the God of life. Take upon the palm of your hand one grain of corn, and examine it. We are told that it is one leaf folded up tightly. Whether it is strictly so or not, there is an outer garment to ward off the severity of the weather, and there is a finer inner garment, with underclothing. But where is life? Is it between the folds, or is there some small particle of matter in the centre which is its secret cell? What is the action which takes place when life springs forth? What are light, and heat, and moisture in relation to life? How does life appropriate to itself substances that have in them no life? And lastly we ask, How does life rise up a hundredfold from the ashes of its own death? These are questions which we cannot answer. To answer them would destroy their very design, for they are there to conduct an inquiry which ends not in themselves but in God. 2. The God of harvest is the God of progress and beauty. There is a process which appears to us to be death, and not any step towards the expansion of life. When the grain has been in the earth some time there is a dissolving of its compactness, as if it could not hold its own against contending forces. It bursts also, as if its girdles were broken. The next step which might be expected to follow is its reduction to the consistency of the clod in which it is lodged. But we are not correct in our estimate of that process. Life has found in the earth what she delights to find at all times—a secret spot to unfold her powers. Silently and unobserved she unfolds the leaf, and sends it forth into the blade and the ear. The process we have alluded to is one of repulsion, without a single comely feature to relieve it. But the fact is, nature is there in her laboratory preparing to send forth life dressed in magnificent beauty. The cornfield, with its golden crop, is one of the loveliest sights in nature. Progressive steps develop the hidden beauties of life. If we further continue our observation, that which we consider to be the termination of all life is its real commencement. The present is the time of ploughing and sowing, the reaping will come by and by. 3. The God of harvest is the God of final and beneficent issues. God works in cycles, but providence is not without intermissions in the turn of the wheel. Periods of action are sharply marked off. Summer and winter may be said to reverse each other, although their revolutions accomplish but one end. These changes prove the existence of a guiding hand, as much as the tacks which the ship makes prove that the man is at the wheel. The thought that all these changes, with a direct and a reversible action, bring about ends transcending in goodness and beauty everything of the kind in the actions themselves, ought to influence us not to seek in labour the joy of harvest. The husbandman does not grind and bake all his corn, but is as careful to keep the best of it for seed, as he is anxious the other part should be wholesome food for his family. So we cannot hope for future joy if no present seed is sown. Good seed cast into good ground—the Word of God sown in the heart—will be watered by His Spirit.

Words spoken from the heart, and actions prompted by love, sown in the breasts of others, will grow into a plenteous harvest. The Lord has reserved a period of rejoicing for Christian workers. II. REVERENCE AND GRATITUDE ARE DUE TO THE GOD OF HARVEST. 1. A due regard for His honour. Reverence is a state of feeling produced by a sense of the majesty of God, and is the principal element in true worship. This holy passion is better felt than described. It is not a passion wholly created by a sense of sinfulness, which would be simply a dread of His displeasure, but an intense regard for God's glory. His name is never pronounced except with a feeling of awe, and His works with a sense of reverence. His Word is holy, and His presence sought in the deepest humility. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." 2. A deep sense of gratitude. Reverence for God does not crush the love of the soul. It has no frowns, but a smile. We worship and look up. We read the heart of the Giver in the gifts. All His servants are loaded with gifts for us. "The earth has He given to the children of men." Its magnificence, its attractions, its beauties, its riches, its harvests, are all ours. More than the earth, yea, and more than the heavens, hath He given unto us, "Who gave His only begotten Son." 3. An earnest desire for service. The hungry must be fed, and the naked clothed. The widow needs a friend and the orphan a father. Have we nothing to lend to the Lord by giving to the poor? Is there not a holy ambition in our souls to emulate Him who went about doing good? (*T. Davies, M.A.*) *Voices of God in the harvest*.—I. THERE ARE VOICES OF GOD IN THE YEARLY HARVEST. God has mercifully set our lot in an age when the perils of famine and of desolating wars are very seldom known, and in very limited degrees. In past ages the yearly harvest was much more hazardous than it is now that countries are more settled and agricultural science so much farther advanced. Yet in those days God did not withhold His promised harvests from the world, only from parts of it. Not one single year of the world's history has passed by without a gathered harvest somewhere; only the imperfect communication between distant countries did not then permit the surplus of one land to supply the deficiencies of another. Can any true soul look upon the "valleys covered over with corn," and fail to hear them "shouting for joy and also singing" of the goodness of God? What merciful care of His creatures is thus displayed! How surely a moment's failing interest on the part of God would leave our harvest only "a heap in a day of sadness and of desperate sorrow"! There are many who can discern something of the goodness of the God of providence, who yet try to persuade themselves that it is another kind of God who deals with men as sinners—another God, and this God only a God of stern demands, severities, and vengeance. It is not so. The God of redemption is the very God of bounteous nature. His yearly mercy is designed to carry home to our hearts the very call made by Christ, and by the Word—the call to repentance and trust. In the salvation by Jesus Christ we ought to see in sublime glory that very goodness that spreads our fields with waving corn. In the yearly harvest there is also a voice speaking out God's faithfulness. Every year He is only doing what He promised our forefather He would do for him and for his descendants; He is only keeping His word. God's faithfulness to His promise is painted in splendid colours right across the sky in every sunglinted shower. God's faithfulness to His promise is sung out by every cloud-flecked, waving cornfield, every gathered sheaf, and every loaded barn. II. THE SPECIAL VOICES OF GOD IN THIS YEAR'S HARVEST. III. THE VOICES OF GOD IN THE SCRIPTURE USE OF THE HARVEST. 1. In Scripture, and by the Lord Jesus Christ, the harvest is used as an illustration, and employed to impress Christian duty, especially the duty of working diligently and earnestly in Christ's work, the ingathering of sinners to His love, salvation, Church, and heaven. 2. Harvest is also used in Scripture to point a call to us to prepare for the judgment day, and the eternal world. (*R. Tuck, B.A.*) *Harvest thoughts*:—The harvest, with its long train of preparatory works—ploughing and seed-time, spring and autumn rains, the rest of winter and the heat of summer—is not only the great support of our life in this world—the great business of the year, as far as bodily health and strength are concerned; but it is throughout an instance of our Heavenly Father's teaching us, without book, many of the truths which it most concerns us to know. 1. He meant us to take notice, first, of His continual presence and power in bringing forward the fruits of the earth. We are not so stupid as to imagine that corn will spring up of itself in our fields, whether it be sown at all or no. When we see a piece of land well stored with it and free

from weeds, we do not ascribe it to chance, but we acknowledge that the hand of man has been busy in that place. But consider how much more skilful the work is, to form out of a dry seed, by mixture with a little earth and water, the several parts of an entire plant—the root, the stalk, the blade, the flower, the grain—and be ashamed to recollect how seldom you have thought of that infinite skill and wisdom, in comparison with the notice you have taken of man's part, so very far inferior, in the work of bringing food out of the earth. Man does his portion of labour and goes away, and sets about something else: but the work of God is for ever going on, and therefore we may be sure the workman is for ever present. 2. It is the more shameful not to take notice of this; because the growth of corn is, from beginning to end, a work of God's mercy as well as of His power. It is a sort of token, to our very outward senses, that He has not left us nor forsaken us, for all we have done to provoke Him; and who is there, that has a just sense of his own sin and unworthiness, who will not thankfully receive every thing, both in nature and in Scripture, which encourages him to meditate on so cheering a truth as this? 3. Then, the manner in which the harvest is made available for the supply of our wants may offer abundance of useful instruction. Although He does so much for us, in forming, watching over, nourishing, and ripening the plant, yet it is not His will we should enjoy the benefit of it without exertion on our own part. "In the sweat of our face we must eat bread": we must put it in the ground in the first instance: we must fence, manure, weed, and reap, or all God's mercy in giving us the fruits of the earth, will at last be thrown away upon us. It is no otherwise in what concerns our spiritual happiness and eternal salvation. We must do our part by faith and prayer and sincere obedience, or we cannot expect God to do His. We must employ so much common sense, as to look forward to another world, and not to mind trifles any more than we can help, while eternal things are open before us. The cultivation of the earth, like the other employments of this life, is not blessed alike to all; and it very often may happen, that God sends prosperity on a bad man's harvest, while the crop of the righteous fails. This, to unbelieving dispositions, is another excuse for irreligious thoughts and practices; as if God had not warned us beforehand, "that He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." God does not think so much of the good things of this world, as to account them a sufficient reward for His faithful servants; by them, or by the want of them, He is trying us in this world, to fit us for our real reward in the next: and to murmur because good harvests, or any other worldly goods, are not bestowed on men according to their behaviour, is as if a man on a journey should be angry and discontented, because he does not find all the comforts of repose and home whilst he is moving along the road. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to "Tracts for the Times."*) *The God of nature*.—I. THE DOCTRINE ASSERTED. "The Lord our God giveth," &c. He is the immediate bestower of what we call natural benefits. 1. The Giver of rain. (1) He provides it in mercy to mankind. (2) He withholds it in judgment upon nations. 2. The Appointer of harvest. "He reserveth," &c. Important and interesting season. God has appointed it—(1) As an immutable ordinance (Gen. viii. 22). (2) As a time of rejoicing. (3) As a means of instruction. II. THE DUTY INFERRED. 1. Cultivate continual acknowledgment of God. 2. Exercise entire dependence upon God. 3. Render perpetual thanksgiving to God. 4. Devote ourselves to the faithful service of God. (*II. Parr.*) *Harvest voices*.—Is there not a modern tendency to exclude God from the harvest field, to put an atheistic trust in secondary causes—subsoil ploughing, artificial manures, the rotation of crops and the like? Nature to the seeing eye and listening ear is sacramental. "Earth is crammed with heaven," and the air is redolent with a celestial music. 1. The prophet would have us cherish that filial, reverent and thankful fear towards the great Giver of all which will save us from perverting His gifts. Without a due recognition of God our temporal prosperity becomes a curse. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. An engraving by Retsch illustrating a great poem gives us the angels dropping roses from the skies on the heads of denizens in Inferno. Reaching them these fragrant gifts turn to molten lead but to seorch and burn. Is it not thus when the blessings of a kindly providence fall on selfish and ungrateful hearts? The intended boon becomes a bane and the perverted gift a corrosion and a blight. Such is the characteristic sign of worldliness. It is a profanation of life's gifts to basest uses, and a missing of the higher good. But the bounteousness of each glad harvest time should remind

us that we are pensioners on the lavish goodness of our Heavenly Father in order that we may use it as He alone wills, for we are beneficiaries every one, and, as such, trustees of heaven's manifold mercies and gifts. 2. The thought of "life out of death" is conveyed to the spiritual mind. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." 3. Another suggestion from the harvest is that of co-operation with God. Take a field of corn; it has not come of itself. Geologists never find amid the fossilised remains of primeval vegetation a trace of corn. It is specifically a human product. Wild wheat is unknown. Corn is the product of civilised man. It implies tillage, and this in a sense not true of many other products that minister to man's need. So also is it in the development of Christian character. We are "workers together with God." We do not attain to eminence by accident, or, as it were, automatically. It is true that "salvation is of God"; we are "saved by grace through faith; and that not of ourselves: it is the gift of God." But there is a sense in which salvation is a process, a diligent culture, a strenuous warfare, a glad but real obedience. We must work out what God works in if we are to come to a real possession of truth and of Christian excellence. The graces of Christian life are not like pictures thrown on a screen by a magic lantern, they are rather like the strands woven in a costly fabric by the weaver at his loom. To change the figure, finished husbandry of soul involves sedulous and patient culture, prayerful self-examination, and a mastery of that inner realm of our being where desire, motive, volition play their determining part in human character. Truth is real, something trowed, when it has become a working and victorious principle in the life. Other than this, it is like so much unused capital locked up in a bank, or so much unworked land on a farm. The Chinese, it is said, discovered the magnetic needle centuries before it was known in the western world. But it was a mere toy. They did not use it for new voyages of discovery or for enterprise in commerce. Its practical utility was nil. May not we commit a similar futility in Christianity? 4. Again, "Everything in its season," the harvest seems to say, "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." So each period in human life has its appropriate work. We cannot postpone duty and expect the reward of honest diligence. A pious, well-instructed youthhood should go before the active responsibilities and burdens of mid life, as both of these must precede and determine the mellow ripeness of advanced age. No one period in life can do the work of another period. Each has its own function and opportunity. Religion is a sublime forecast to be made use of in life's early season, and not an afterthought darkened only with unavailing regrets when the summer has ended and the harvest we had wished is for ever beyond our reaping. "Know thy opportunity" was written on the temple of Delphos. It is written deep on the face of time. 5. Let us remember that as the grain of one harvest is the seed of the next, so our life is reproductive, and its influence far-reaching and beyond our power to compute. Moreover, there is a wondrously cumulative power in Christian work and influence; the reaping is larger than the sowing. A self-multiplying process is ever going forward, and the results lie beyond our reckoning. We think of the beginning of things, the initial stages of great reform movements, the so-called forlorn hopes of the past, and with grateful wonder we greet to-day their fruitful, immeasurable issues. It is difficult for even the most sceptical and slow of belief to resist the lesson of history, that moral and spiritual forces rule and shape the destiny of this world, and that humanity and Christianity are meant the one for the other. (*Aldersgate Magazine.*) *Lessons from the harvest*.—I. IN REFERENCE TO GOD. 1. Admiration. (1) We may admire the wisdom of God, in all the means that He uses to ripen our corn, and in bringing each field of the same kind to perfection nearly at the same time, so that all, or at least a considerable part of it, may be cut down together, and yet all be fit for use. (2) The wisdom of God, our preserver, is evident again in bringing the different species of corn to perfection at different times, so that one is not ready till after another is cut down. (3) The same wisdom is also seen in making the harvest at somewhat different times in different parts of the country, so that those who have reaped it in an early part may procure a few weeks' longer work by repairing to a later district,—an arrangement of Divine Providence productive of greater convenience to the farmer, and longer employment to the labourer. 2. Dependence. We can only lay the seed down in the ground and cover it with the soil. God does all the rest. 3. Gratitude. Remember how many difficulties are in the way of every harvest, and how nicely He must adjust the balance of

all the influences required to produce it. Too much rain or too little ; too powerful and constant sunshine, or too unfrequent ; too violent winds, or too dull and general calm, would render our autumn unfruitful. Consider, also, how many harvests there are which we have seen, and of whose fruits we have partaken.

4. Confidence. The sun may fail to ripen the corn, the seed may lose its germinating power, the rain may spoil it, or the wind may shake it ; but God has said we shall have harvest, and we always have it. But nothing can by any possibility deprive the blood of Christ of its purifying and saving efficacy : how much more, then, may we expect that promise to be accomplished which says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" ? II. IN REFERENCE TO OURSELVES.

1. Activity. Although the corn may be ripe in the fields, it will be useless unless gathered into the barn. So is it with God's blessings through Christ. Our Saviour has died ; but what will this avail unless we use the means by which we may obtain the benefits He has purchased ? 2. Death. 3. Judgment. (*W. Dickson.*) *Reflections on harvest* :—I. THE REGULAR RETURN OF HARVEST

IS AN OBVIOUS PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE AND PROVIDENCE OF GOD. The fruits of the earth, so necessary to the support of animal life, depend on causes beyond the reach of human power. The whole management of the natural world is in hands superior to ours, in the hands of an invisible, almighty Being. II. THE TIME OF HARVEST NATURALLY CALLS US TO PIOUS MEDITATIONS AND REFLECTIONS.

1. The seasons are so ordered, as to remind us of the shortness of human foresight. From past experience we expect a harvest in its appointed weeks, and rarely is our expectation frustrated. But the event is not always adjusted to the measure of our hopes. It often falls short, and often exceeds them. The management of the seasons, however, is in unerring hands. Rational beings, in the care of infinite wisdom and goodness are always safe, while they proceed in the line of their duty, and never ought they to indulge anxiety. With Him who governs futurity, they may calmly trust all events. 2. Our dependence is apparent, as in many other things, so especially in the return of harvest. If God sends His blessing, none can revoke it. If He withhold His smiles, our toil is fruitless. 3. Scripture speaks of harvest as a season of gratitude and joy.

4. Harvest teaches diligence and frugality. (1) God supplies our wants, not by an immediate providence, but by succeeding our prudent labours. (2) Those precious fruits of the earth which are dealt out only at certain seasons, and which by no art or industry of man can at other seasons be obtained, should be applied to honest and virtuous purposes ; not wastefully consumed in criminal indulgences.

5. Harvest inculcates benevolence. Religion consists in an imitation of God's moral character, especially of His diffusive and disinterested goodness. 6. Harvest reminds us of the shortness of life, and calls us to the diligent improvement of our time. Food and raiment are needful for the body ; seek them you may ; but rather seek the kingdom of God, and these things will be added. 7. Harvest should be a season of self-examination. We are God's husbandry. Much has He done for us. What could He have done more ? Have we answered His cost ? The field, which bringeth forth herbs, meet for Him by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briars, is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. 8. Harvest reminds us of our obligation to faith and patience. We have a kind of natural faith, which, standing on the ground of past experience, looks forward with expectation of a future harvest. Let Christians, enlightened by revelation, look beyond this world to things unseen ; and, relying on the promise, truth, and grace of God, anticipate the blessings of the heavenly state. (*J. Lathrop, D.D.*) *Lessons from the harvest* :—

I. THE BLESSINGS. Fruitful showers, and brilliant suns, and azure skies, and earth covered with its bright green clothing, are, indeed, in themselves, blessings ; but this character is much more emphatically applied to them when we remember that they are not only beautiful spectacles to delight our eyes and to minister to our senses of enjoyment, but that they yield that sustenance, without which, the globe would soon be thinned of the tribes which inhabit it, and there would be no human eye to rejoice in its beauties. Yes, the great blessing is, that human life is to be sustained by the produce which the fruitful seasons have thus secured to us. What blessings, then, are "the former and the latter rain," and "the appointed weeks of the harvest," which supply this food. But it is chiefly on account of our never-dying souls that the fruitful seasons are a blessing. There is this and that person who now, perhaps, are but cumberers of the ground, but who are upheld in life one year longer, that the seed of eternal life may be now

sown in their hearts—that they may, at length, be made fruitful unto God, and become heirs of a glorious immortality. II. THE SOURCE OF THESE BLESSINGS. 1. Man, when he would account for any event, in his ungodliness, frequently ascribes it to chance or good luck. But there is no such word in a Christian man's vocabulary. We must carefully distinguish between the agency of "the Lord our God" and second causes. There is a sad tendency in man to put the instruments which God makes use of to bring to pass all His will in the place of God Himself. III. THE RETURN WHICH GOD REQUIRES. 1. As individuals, let the undeserved goodness of the Lord lead you to fear Him. Ask the gift of the Holy Ghost, to impress your heart with a deep and abiding sense of God's goodness, at the present time—to humble you under a sense of your own ingratitude; to lead you to Jesus Christ for pardon, peace, and acceptance with God. 2. As heads of families, "let us fear the Lord our God." "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." 3. As subjects of our beloved Sovereign—as members of the commonwealth—"let us fear the Lord our God." The national character is made up of the aggregate of individual character. (*H. Caddell, M.A.*)

Vers. 26-31. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.—*Wicked professors the bane of the Church*.—I. GOD HAS A PEOPLE ON EARTH. 1. His creation. 2. Called by Him from darkness to light. 3. Privileged, pardoned, regenerated, adopted. II. IN THE CHURCH THERE IS AN UNHAPPY ADMIXTURE OF WICKED MEN. This applies to—1. Those religious establishments whose constitution and discipline offer no restraints to the admission of such characters. 2. Mere hearers of the Gospel. 3. Those who have entered the Church without real conversion. (1) Some professors are secretly wicked. (2) Some professors are deceivers. 4. Those wilfully inactive in the Church. 5. Those who interrupt the peace and harmony of the Church. III. THIS MIXTURE OF THE WICKED WITH THE GODLY IS A FACT. "Are found"—by whom? 1. Frequently by themselves (1 John ii. 19). 2. Persecution has, and so has temptation. 3. By Christians, to whom their unholy course is a grief. 4. By God (Rev. iii. 18, 23). Odious to Him. 5. Some will not be found till the day of judgment (Matt. iii. 12, xiii. 28-30). IV. THE INJURIOUS INFLUENCE OF THE CONDUCT OF SUCH PROFESSORS. 1. They bring reproach upon religion (Rom. ii. 24). 2. The hearts of the godly are grieved and their hands weakened (Josh. vii. 12, 25; 1 John ii. 7; Phil. iii. 18). 3. The Church is in danger of being injured by them (Hos. v. 3). 4. It frequently prevents accessions to the Church. 5. The guilt of such persons is highly aggravated, and their punishment will be awful. (*Helps for the Pulpit.*) *Wickedness rampant in the city*.—We have, in this chapter, a most melancholy set of pictures of untruthful men, which are drawn to the life with a grimly graphic touch which strongly reminds one of the series of Hogarth's sketches known as the "Rake's Progress." They hold the mirror up not only to the life, but to the heart of the men of the times. Jerusalem was rotten at the core: the nation was deceitful through and through. "As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit." They had schemes without number, plots without end, and tricks without limit, moving about in their minds like birds herded together in a little cage. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *My people love to have it so.—God's people love to have it so*.—Earnest people like to believe that the world is growing better all the time. They look upon the bright side of things; they behold the spread of the spirit of Christianity more and more in the affairs of nations; wars are discouraged; a higher standard of personal obligation obtains; the wrongs of the wretched and oppressed are being championed, and in many very important particulars redressed; man everywhere in civilised lands seems possessed of an enthusiasm to make the best of himself. 1. All of this sort of thing had its counterpart in the story of Israel in the olden time. We have gone beyond the ancient people of God in all sorts of ways; nevertheless, human nature is strangely akin still to what it was in those days. (1) We have a host of prophets in these days. They begin by enlarging, as they call it, the notion of inspiration, so that it may include every one who fancies he has a bit of wisdom all his own to give to the world. Any bright author, or preacher, or poet may be a prophet, and if he is really bright, as men count brightness, his inspiration will not be gainsaid by many. We all love prophets, men of ideas, or great original thoughts. And they have many pleasant gospels to proclaim. For example, There is good in everything, every system, every creed, every earnest deed. It is a great mistake to suppose there

is any absolute good, and that such things as do not square with its declarations are evil. There are many prophets of the good-in-everything doctrine. Another message to the world is that God is all mercy. It is a beautiful doctrine, is it not? It is certainly one most acceptable in these days, that there is no hell. Yet another of the prophecies which we love to hear is that the essence of all true religion is doing good to our fellow-men. Charity and philanthropy are going to save souls. We are even told as if it were of direct revelation from out of heaven that God will not ask what a man believed, but only how he lived, when he appears for judgment. And the prophets who proclaim this truth are popular indeed. Still further, we have the gospel of making the most of one's self, the gospel of progress, development. Man has in himself all the possibilities of perfection, and if he will but develop himself on sound lines, the future has no limitations for him. All sacraments and supernatural helps of any kind are child's play, mythical superstitions, unworthy of thought on the part of strong-minded men. (2) And as it was in Jeremiah's time, so also is it true to-day, that the priests bear rule by the means of these modern prophets. Think of the topics with which our modern pulpits generally deal. The unreality and absurdity of the doctrines of the Christian creed; the falsity of the notion of sin as something to be seriously treated, a moral iniquity, and one to be condignly punished; the nobility of man as a splendid, unfallen creature, called upon to make the most of himself, and so to rise to God-like proportions. What is the explanation of this universal enlargement of the scope of sermon utterance? We are told that preaching of this sort reaches people. Your venerable Gospel, such as the Fathers loved, does not pay in these days; wherever you find it preached you will find dearth of money, dearth of works of mercy. So the pulpit must keep abreast of the times, and the priests can only hope to bear rule, lead their flocks and maintain their influence and position, by heartily accepting the revelations of the new prophets and basing their gospel upon them. (3) Jeremiah added of the men of his time, that God's people loved to have it so. No doubt this is the real explanation of the success of the prophets and the priests; they have hit upon the things which appeal to the popular heart. Once in a while the heart of the God-serving community is fired with a revival of earnestness and breaks away from the degrading embrace of the world, and then the popular voice of the believing community demands a high spiritual tone of the clergy. As a rule, however, the unbelieving world is too strong for the professors of religion, and gradually lowers their moral tone towards its own cynical, utilitarian standards. Then the believers refuse to hearken to a gospel of strictness from their preachers, and demand an easier doctrine at the penalty of refusing to listen at all. This threat almost always brings the priests to terms, and they weakly salve their consciences by the thought that it is most important to keep some hold upon the people, and that half the Gospel is better than none. 2. It is a very common temptation to rail at the degeneracy of our own time, at the shortcomings of our own Church. We are all of us apt to fancy ourselves prophets of the Lord when we know that we are in earnest, and the reason we fancy ourselves so strong in that role is because one cannot easily see all sides of a question at one time. Most earnest people are very one-sided, often very unfair in their judgments. So I would not have you fancy for a moment that I wish to pose as a Jeremiah denouncing and endeavouring to reform the abuses of the Church of his time. We have an impersonal Jeremiah to utter the solemn warnings of the Lord in our ears. It is the voice of the Church herself. Well, we are very much concerned with the rest of the verse, "My people love to have it so." Is that true? (1) Are we quite powerless to prevent things from being so bad as they are? One need not rush into every controversial fray, and yet one may often speak his mind fairly and clearly and so free his soul from the guilt of silence. One can speak in the company of his fellows and say, "I do not believe there is good in everything, for all systems of religion and philosophy which do not emanate from God must be wrong. There can only be one true doctrine about unearthly things, and whatever opposes itself to that which God has revealed is false and bad." There are abundant opportunities in most of our lives for bearing our witness against the fashionable delusion that works of mercy on behalf of our neighbours are the sure passport to heaven, and that nothing else is needed. We can say strongly and firmly, "Nay, that is but the second commandment, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The first and greatest of all is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. And no one will get to heaven on account of his benevolence to his fellows who neglects to worship and serve his

Maker." (2) It is not to be forgotten, however, that there is more than bearing witness in speech. There is the living of the life. (*Arthur Ritchie.*) And what will ye do in the end thereof?—*What will ye do in the end?*—I. THERE IS AN END. Every step is getting nearer to the termination. II. IT WOULD SEEM TO BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE AT THE END, WHAT HAS BEEN THE CHARACTER OF THE COURSE. It is not so much a question with God how the man died, as what the man was when he came to die. III. IT IS THE PART OF A THOUGHTFUL AND WISE MAN, OFTEN TO CONSIDER THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PRESENT AND THE ANTICIPATED RESULT. Every one admits this in matters of worldly experience. IV. THIS QUESTION SHOULD BE FREQUENTLY AND EARNESTLY ENTERTAINED BY YOUNG MEN. It is most important how you begin, so that as you go on habit may be on your side and become your friend. (*T. Binney, D.D.*) *A question for the beginning*:—A large part of the wise conduct of life depends on grave consideration of consequences. It is a sharp-pointed question, that pricks many a bubble, and brings much wisdom down into the category of folly. I. A QUESTION WHICH EVERY WISE MAN WILL ASK HIMSELF. The consideration of consequences is not the highest guide, or always a sufficient one; or, by any means, in every case, an easily applied one. Do right! and face any results therefrom. He who is always forecasting possible issues will be so afraid of results that he will not dare to move; and his creeping prudence will often turn out the truest imprudence. But whilst many deductions must be made from the principle laid down, that the consideration of circumstances is a good guide in life, yet there are regions in which the question comes home with illuminating force. I believe that, in the long run, condition is the result of character and of conduct, and, for the most part, men are the architects of their own condition, and that they make the houses that they dwell in to fit the convolutions of the body that dwells within them. That being so, there can be nothing more ridiculous than that a man should refrain from marking the issue of his conduct, and saying to himself, "What am I to do in the end?" If you would only do that in regard of hosts of things in your daily life you could not be the men and women that you are. If the lazy student would only bring clearly before his mind the examination room, and the unanswerable paper, and the bitter mortification when the pass-list comes out and his name is not there, he would not trifle as he does, but bind himself to his desk and his task. If the young man that begins to tamper with purity could see, as the older of us have seen, men with their bones full of the iniquity of their youth, do you think the temptations of the streets and low places of amusement would not be stripped of their fascination? "What will you do in the end?" Use that question as the Ithuriel spear which will touch the squatting tempter at your ear, and there will start up, in its own shape, the fiend. But the main application that I would ask you to make of the text is in reference to the final end, the passing from life. Death, the end, is likewise death, the beginning. Surely every wise man will take that into consideration. Surely, if it be true that we all of us are silently drifting to that one little gateway through which we have to pass one by one, and then find ourselves in a region all full of consequences of the present, he has a good claim to be counted a prince of fools who "jumps the life to come," and, in all his calculations of consequences, which he applies wisely and prudently to the trifles of the present, forgets to ask himself, "And, after all that is done, what shall I do then?" II. A QUESTION WHICH A GREAT MANY OF US NEVER THINK ABOUT. "What will you do in the end?" Why! half of us put away that question with the thought in our minds, if not expressed, at least most operative, "There is not going to be any end; and it is always going to be just like what it is to-day." Did you ever think that there is no good ground for being sure that the sun will rise to-morrow; that it rose for the first time once; that there will come a day when it will rise for the last time? The uniformity of nature may be a postulate, but you cannot find any logical basis for it. Or, to come down from heights of that sort, have you ever laid to heart, that the only unchangeable thing in this world is change, and the only thing certain, that there is no continuance of anything; and that, therefore, you and I are bound, if we are wise, to look that fact in the face, and not to allow ourselves to be befooled by the difficulty of imagining that things will ever be different from what they are? Another reason why so many of us shirk this question is the lamentable want of the habit of living by principle and reflection. They tell us that in nature there is such a thing as protective mimicry, as it is called—animals having the power—some of them to a much larger extent than others—of changing

their hues in order to match the gravel of the stream in which they swim or the leaves of the trees on which they feed. It is like what a great many of us do. Put us into a place where certain forms of frivolity or vice are common, and we go in for them. Take us away from these, and we change our hue to something a little whiter. But all through we never know what it is to put forth a good solid force of resistance, and to say, "No! I will not!" or, what is sometimes quite as hard to say, "Yes! though"—as Luther said in his strong way—"there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops, I will!" If people would live more by reflection and by the power of a resisting will, this question of my text would come oftener to them. And there is another cause that I must touch on for one moment, why so many people neglect this question, and that is because they know they durst not face it. What would you think of a man that never took stock because he knew he was insolvent, and yet did not want to know it? And what do you think of yourselves if, knowing that the thought of passing into that solemn eternity is anything but a cheering one, and that you have to pass into it, you never turn your head to look at it? III. A QUESTION ESPECIALLY DIRECTED TO YOU YOUNG FOLK. It is so because with your buoyancy, with your necessarily limited experience, with the small accumulation of results that you have already in your possession, and with the tendencies of your age to live rather by impulse than by reflection, you are specially tempted to forget the solemn significance of this interrogation. And it is a question especially for you, because you have special advantages in the matter of putting it. We older people are all fixed and fossils, as you are very fond of telling us. The iron has cooled and gone into rigid shapes with us. It is all fluent with you. You may be pretty nearly what you like. You have not yet acquired habits—that awful thing that may be our worst foe or our best friend—you have not yet acquired habits that almost smother the power of reform and change. You have perhaps years before you in which you may practise the lessons of wisdom, the self-restraint which this question fairly fronted would bring. IV. A QUESTION WHICH JESUS CHRIST ALONE ENABLES A MAN TO ANSWER WITH CALM CONFIDENCE. As I have said, the end is a beginning; the passage from life is the entrance on a progressive and eternal state of retribution. And Jesus Christ tells us two other things. He tells us that that state has two parts: that in one there is union with Him, life, blessedness for ever; and that in the other there is darkness, separation from Him, death, and misery. These are the facts as revealed by the incarnate Word of God on which answers to this question must be shaped. "What will you do in the end?" If I am trusting to Him; if I have brought my poor, weak nature and sinful soul to Him, and cast them upon His merciful sacrifice and mighty intercession and life-giving Spirit, then I can say: "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *What will ye do in the end thereof?*—This is the message of God to sinful men in all times; and its characteristics are the same now as they were when it was first uttered. I. AN UNWELCOME QUESTION. As the bankrupt does not dare investigate his affairs, and the man who is contracting intemperate habits or tampering with his employer's property does not dare think of the ruin and disgrace to which he is hastening, so the man whose conscience is not easy, who suspects there is something wrong, dreads to look into the future, and counts that man his enemy who ventures to insist on his doing so. The whisper of this question sometimes comes into the heart of the procrastinator—the worldling—the trifler—the backslider; and, with one horrified glance forward, he too often shrinks back and tries to forget all about it. II. AN UNANSWERABLE QUESTION. The moment a man stands in thought in the midst of the degradation, ruin, and misery he has brought on himself, all his excuses fly; like the man without the wedding garment, he is "speechless." How mad to persevere in a course that has such an end! III. AN IMPERATIVE QUESTION. 1. Because no forgetfulness of consequences will prevent them coming. A man may put to sea in a leaky vessel and refuse to consider the remonstrances of friends—he may even be ignorant of the facts; but that will not prevent his foundering in the storm. 2. Because it furnishes the direct antidote to the seductions of sin. The burnt child dreads the fire. The sailor avoids the sunken rock. 3. Because the end may be avoided. "Now is the accepted time." (*J. Ogle.*) *Think about the end*:—Lange translates as follows: "What will they do when the end of the song comes?"—I wonder if you are like some people whom I know: do you ever turn to the end of the book in order that you may see how it finishes? It is not a good method of reading, but this is what the prophet wished the Jews

to do : he desired them to think about the end of life. So many people forget all about the end until it actually comes upon them. The farmer does not do so, for while he sows he thinks about the harvest that will end his toil ; it is good for us all to consider often what the future will be. In the East there are men who have most wonderful power over serpents. They play music and the snakes remain quite still and obedient all the time that the song lasts ; but what when the song is done ? While people are well and prosperous in doing evil they do not think much about God, but what will they do when the song is all over ? Then they will find that they have been deceived. There were some wicked men who once induced a large number of people to come together. These people paid their money to the men and they came into the hall ; but the men ran away with the money. The people found then that they had been deceived. Some people do worse, for they deceive themselves ; they hope that they are all right with God, they hope that they shall reach heaven at last, and do no more. Others are deceived by the opinions or books of those who seek to harm them. All sinners, we know, will one day find that they have been deceived, unless they repent at once and believe on Jesus. And then they will also learn that they are unhealed. What a dreadful thing it will be, if, when we die, we find that our hearts are evil still ! When people are in very great pain the doctors sometimes give to them medicines that make the sick people sleep. They are not cured because they sleep, but they do not feel the pain quite so much. So business and other things deaden the feelings, but they do not cure the soul, for only Jesus can do that. There is a fable that illustrates what I mean. A piper once played such sweet music that all the children enjoyed it very much. While the piper played upon his pipe the children were delighted. They followed him from their homes until they were enticed into a cavern, and thus the song ended. This is what Satan does : he entices us by his promises, but when the song is done we shall find out that he has led us away from happiness and into suffering and pain. Think about the end when you are tempted, and think also about the end when it appears to be hard to do good. Ask yourselves, what will come after the end ? (*J. J. Ellis.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1-9. Arise, and let us go up at noon.—*Christian effort* :—That spirit-stirring call of the text, so needful to arouse the Chaldeans on their march to the ancient, is as needful for us on our pilgrimage to the new, Jerusalem. 1. In other passages, the early years of childhood and youth are pointed out as the special time for God's service. While the heart is warm and pliant. Ere the hardening influence of a selfish world, having closed it to the Saviour's call, has swept and garnished it for tenantry of evil. 2. "Arise, and let us go up at noon." It is midday with you, to whom the text is speaking. It is the period for active endeavour. Now the calls of the world are dinned most loudly into your ears. In the earlier hours, and at the close of your passing day, you were and will be alike incapable of prolonged toil. Now the requirement is made of you, and to what behests does it bid you attend ? Make the most of your time. Are you poor ? Strive for independence. Are you rich ? Strive for place and power. Are you intellectual ? Seek a sphere for display, a stage for self-glorification. Thus speaks the world, and were some of its directions pursued in moderation, pursued subordinate to higher and nobler motive, there might be wisdom in our chastened regards. But, alas ! how many go to extreme in these observances, and become the slaves of time and sense. Apply those misdirected energies to a nobler cause. The rewards of time are not worth such care as this. In themselves, they are of scarce more value than the withered leaves which crowned the victor in the ancient games. Arise, and go up at noon to seek the incorruptible crown. Ye are soldiers engaged in warfare. The sword is drawn. The banner is spread. Its emblem is the Cross. Your weapons are not carnal. The din of military music shall not spur you to the dangerous assault ; but strains of sweetest melody shall speak to you of peace, peace on earth, goodwill to men ; peace which the world can neither give nor take away. 3. But have you passed that period of activity, and in your retrospect of its busy hours do you feel how prodigally your

energies have been wasted? Have ungodly habits become so confirmed, that now at your journey's end, being dead to the enticements of the present, you are not alive to the requirements of the future? Shall an appeal, which might impress a heart yet warm and flexible, fall coldly on the worn and weary conscience of the aged? The gracious and long-suffering Master has still this call to summon you, "Arise, and let us go by night." Ye have heard and disregarded the call throughout the day, and therefore may not be as those who, having never been hired earlier, received every man a penny, but whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. Go by prayer and penitence, by sought and found spiritual guidance, or soon the light of life will be extinguished in outer darkness. 4. But ye have been watchful and faithful. Ye arose, and went up at noon. It is not woeful to you that the day goeth away. It is no cause of regret that the shadows of evening are stretched out. "Behold! I come quickly," the Saviour says to you; and joyfully ready is your reply, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." All things are yours: love and reverence from all without, peace unspeakable from all within. Ye shall arise and go. The shadows stretched before you shall be dispelled for ever, and the brightness of that noon which shall fade no more shall rest upon you. (*F. Jackson.*)

Ver. 4. *Woe unto us! for the day goeth away.*—"Woe unto us!"—The Babylonians are represented by the prophet as coming to plunder the Holy City, like flocks being led to their feeding-ground. They hurry to the work of destruction, yet they are not speedy enough, for work takes time, and time flees fast away. "Prepare ye war against her: arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! for the day goeth away," &c. "Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces." We have no city to destroy, and it is morning; yet, standing, as we do, almost on the threshold of another year, these words are worthy of consideration. The day of opportunity that this year contained is going away, the shadows of the evening are stretched out. And with the departure of the day and the deepening of the shadows of the night, some among the bravest hearts may well exclaim, "Woe unto us!" For all who are Christ's servants, as they grow in grace, more clearly come to see the great issues of life, the vast importance of the days and months and years which God has given them to spend to His glory. With this clearer sight comes the consciousness of the awful waste of time for which men are answerable, a waste which can never be repaired. True, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; but only if there be true repentance. As you really understand the cleansing and accept it, so you will grow most earnest in guarding the gift of time. 1. Save time in your work. Surely it is "woe unto us" that we have been so half-hearted often in our time of work; so ready to lay down the task that is difficult, or so ready to do it lazily and badly. The great characters in history are mostly the indefatigable, who, while they worked, worked hard. 2. Save time in your leisure. Do not spend it all in amusement, which excites, but does not profit. If you have your evenings free, use some to the glory of God, by helping children, by showing acts of kindness, by improving your own knowledge. 3. Again, save time on Sundays. How can men's religion be real and true if they spend Sunday mornings in bed? (*W. R. Hutton, M.A.*) *Opportunities for self-rescue*:—I. Heaven granted these men of Judah an opportunity FOR ESCAPING A GREAT EVIL; so it has to all unconverted men. The evil to which the Jews were exposed was very great: it was captivity, slavery, utter destruction of the country. But this was only a shadow of the moral dangers to which every unconverted man is exposed. He is in danger of losing his soul. To lose a soul is to lose all true liberty, pure sympathies, harmonious affections, real friendships, self-approving conscience, true hopes, and means of improvement. And when these are gone, the worth of existence is gone, for it becomes an intolerable curse. II. The opportunity which these men of Judah had for escaping their danger was NOW DRAWING TO A CLOSE; so is the opportunity of all unconverted men. The whole day of life scarcely opens before it begins to close. 1. This opportunity is constantly departing to return no more. 2. This opportunity is constantly departing though the work be not done. III. The closing of the opportunity of these men of Judah was FRAUGHT WITH TERRIBLE CALAMITY; so it will be with all unconverted men. "Woe unto us," exclaims the doomed Jew in bitter anguish. "Woe unto us"; we have not only lost our country and become the slaves of a heathen despot, but we have shamefully neglected the merciful opportunities with which providence

has favoured us. These words remind us of the language of Christ (Luke xix. 41-44). Conclusion—"Now is the accepted time." To-day is "the day of salvation." (*Homilist.*) *The old and the new year*:—The old year is dying, the new year is about to commence. And whether the past has been wasted, or redeemed and used for God; whether the work of the past has been done or left undone, still there is a work for all of us. Each day and each year brings its own proper duties, and our conscience needs to be awakened and stirred to the right performance of them. The day goeth away. And you feel that there is something solemn about this passing from one year to another. 1. Some of you are anxious about your spiritual condition. Take the past year as a whole, and perhaps you may be able to hope that some progress has been made. But it has not been all progress. The picture has its dark side. You have had your temptations, you have had your troubles and annoyances; and you have been forced to see how weak your strength is, how poor your best resolutions, how much you have fallen short of what you had intended a year ago. The day goeth away. But if the past has not been what you wished, must you therefore give up in despair? Nay, you may be thankful if you have advanced at all. You could have made no way whatever but for the grace of God. Believe that He who has been with you hitherto will enable you to live more and more to your Master's glory. 2. Again, the close of the year may suggest its thoughts to those who, as our fellow-labourers in the schools, or among the sick and destitute, are trying to do the Lord's work, and to be a blessing to their neighbours in their generation. You look back over the year that is gone, and there are abundant reasons for regret. Opportunities for good have been lost which never will come back again. Some one was lying ill, and you knew of the illness, but you delayed your visit. You would go to-morrow: you had other things to do to-day. And to-morrow you went, but it was too late. Death had come before you. Or again, you might have taken a bolder and firmer course, had your zeal for God been stronger. You saw some evil done, and you did not protest against it. You heard ill-natured words, and you did not try to check them. You might have spoken for God, and you cowardly held your peace. Yet all has not been failure. Feel as painfully as we may our weakness and want of faith, still we may see and thankfully acknowledge the evident signs of God's presence with His people here. (*Canon Nevill.*) *A New Year's sermon*:—I. THE FACT HERE INDICATED. The day glides imperceptibly away, from morning to noon, from noon to eve. Does not this strikingly typify our life in this world? Do not our years glide on like the minutes and hours of the natural day? And, ere ever we are aware, do we not perceive that the shadows are lengthening? Are we not reminded of the flight of time by many things which we see around us? The old men, with whose slow step we were familiar, are disappearing from the scene; those whom we knew in their prime now bear the marks of age. But does not this suggest to us one particular in which the analogy between the natural day and our human life signally fails? We know the very hour, we can ascertain the very minute, when the sun will set. But how different is it with the life of man! Who can tell when, in any individual case, that life shall end? Who but He who knows the end from the beginning, and who is the God of our lives and the length of our days? But whether the period of our sojourn upon earth be brief or protracted, it is quickly passing away. Whether we are to be cut down when the shadows have stretched out far, or while they are yet comparatively short, in the case of every one of us they are lengthening; and in the case of not a few, it approaches eventide, and their sun declines to its setting. But surely there arises here another question. When the day declines and nightfall comes, what then? "After death the judgment." Death does not reduce us to nothingness, but detaches us from time to land us in eternity. It places us before the tribunal of the Most High to receive the sentence which is to fix unchangingly our final doom. "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." II. WHAT EFFECT THE CONSIDERATION OF THIS FACT SHOULD HAVE UPON US. 1. It should have this effect, to impress us with the solemn and abiding conviction that it is a fact. We are ever prone to take it for granted that though the end of life is no doubt approaching, it is still distant from us; that though the duration of life is very uncertain to men generally, and to our friends and neighbours around us, we are much less likely to be suddenly removed, and may reassuredly count upon a protracted span being afforded to us. This is a strange and subtle delusion of the human heart, and sedulously fostered by the enemy of souls, the father of lies. How needful to learn and lay to heart the lesson

here taught; how needful to be thoroughly persuaded that it is a solemn fact that our life is a vapour which appears for a little time and then vanishes away; that not with respect to our fellow-men merely, but with respect to ourselves also, the days of earth are drawing to a close, and that to any one of us the end may come very soon and very suddenly! 2. But, further, it is of the last importance that we not only really believe this fact, but that we give practical effect to the belief. What are your resolutions for the future? Will you be stirred up to greater diligence and devotedness ere your sun go down? And if you, if any of you, are still far from God, living in carelessness and unbelief, will you not take warning by the lengthening shadows to make your peace with God ere it be too late? (*P. Hope, B.D.*) *Difficulties of old age*.—I. THE APPOINTED PERIOD OF GRACE IS COMING RAPIDLY TO A CONCLUSION. "The day goeth away." It has been enjoyed in the fulness of its privileges. It has been for some, far protracted. But while unimproved, it has tended only to increase the guilt and danger of the soul. For fifty years the Redeemer has called upon some now aged sinner to turn to Him and live. How difficult is it to arouse him to a consciousness, or belief, of the privileges which are yet remaining, and of the duty which yet rests upon him! The recollection of wasted opportunities drives him to despair. II. THE SHORT PERIOD OF GRACE NOW REMAINING. He set out early in the morning to go astray from God. Through the whole day, he has been pressing forward in his course, with unabating rapidity. And now, when the shadows of the evening are stretched out, and exhausted nature is asking for repose; alas, is this an hour in which to commence the journey of a day? Death now stands at the door. The line which separates him from eternity, has dwindled to a hair. And he is tempted to yield to total despair of escaping at all from the ruin which is so close upon him. The difficulty which his own heart presents as thus arising from his shortened remaining period of probation, Satan employs as a temptation to him, to be quiet and careless under his conscious load of sin. III. THE INCREASED HARDNESS OF HIS OWN HEART. When young, conviction of sin impressed his mind. His eyes could weep under the preaching of the Gospel. He then often felt strongly excited towards a life of holiness and piety. But now he has no such feelings. The rain which descends to refresh others, seems rather to hasten his decay. The summer and the harvest have passed without advantage, and every succeeding day of autumn seems only to dry, and harden, and seal up the earth against the arrival of a frost-bound and cheerless winter. IV. THE PRIDE OF CHARACTER WHICH IS ALWAYS AN ATTENDANT UPON ADVANCED PERIODS OF LIFE. The heart may be often moved, the conscience awakened, and the emotions aroused, in the bosom of an aged transgressor, and a strong desire be felt, to lay down his burden, and find peace in believing in Jesus. But an assumed dignity and coolness of manner are drawn over a broken, bleeding spirit, because an acknowledgment of these awakened feelings will be so humiliating to the age and station of the individual concerned. But there remains no other course of safety. To this humbling ground, sinful man must be brought, or he will assuredly perish. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Opportunities lost*.—The opportunity for success was lost; the day of action had been misspent, and the result was, captivity and slavery. The day of action was going away; the shadows of the evening which was to cover them with its darkness and sorrow, were already stretched out. Just so it is with multitudes now in reference to the work of their salvation. The Gospel of the Son of God has been preached in their ears, until it has become stale and powerless. They listen to it, but take no heed to its requirements. 1. Look at the opportunities which the Church affords to all attendants on her service, not only of learning their duty, but also of practising it to the glory of God. 2. Then, again, look at the opportunities for repentance and faith which God has given you in the daily providence of life. You have been rich, perhaps, and He has made you poor—Why? That He may give you spiritual riches, which moth and rust can not corrupt. You have been poor and He has made you rich—Why? That you might "remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth." You have been well, and He has laid you on a bed of sickness—Why? That you might consider your latter end. You have been sick and He has made you well—Why? That you should love your Divine Healer, and seek for your spiritual healing. Your life is full of the echoes of God's voice speaking to you in His daily providence, as well as in the inspired Word and through the ministry of His Church. Yet hour after hour has glided away, and you have hesitated, procrastinated, put off to a more convenient season,

Shall life's sun go wholly down, shall the night of death wrap you in its starless mantle, without one honest effort on your part to secure your soul's salvation? (*Bp. Stevens*). *An inch of time* :—"Millions of money for an inch of time," cried Elizabeth—the gifted but ambitious Queen of England, upon her dying bed. Unhappy woman! reclining upon a couch—with ten thousand dresses in her wardrobe—a kingdom on which the sun never sets, at her feet—all now are valueless, and she shrieks in anguish, and she shrieks in vain, for a single "inch of time." She had enjoyed threescore and ten years. Like too many among us, she had devoted them to wealth, to pleasure, to pride, and ambition, so that her whole preparation for eternity was crowded into a few moments! and hence she, who had wasted more than half a century, would barter millions for an inch of time. **The shadows of the evening are stretched out.**—*The setting sun* :—"There is something at once grand and solemn in a setting sun. It is the sinking to rest of the great king of day; the withdrawing from the busy world the light that has called out its activity, and the covering up with the veil of darkness the scenes that glistened with the radiance of noon. There is, however, in the setting of the sun of life, that which is equally grand, still more solemn, and surpassingly sublime. 1. The sun, when it sets, has run a whole day's circuit; his pathway has apparently traversed an entire arc of the heavens, and slowly, patiently, but surely, it has done its allotted work. And so the aged Christian, when he dies, is described as having "run his race," as having "finished his course." He has toiled a whole day of life, and has come to his grave in a "good old age," having "finished the work which was given him to do"; and though all his labours have been imperfectly done, though he himself feels more deeply than he can express his unprofitableness before God, yet he looks for acceptance, not to any merit of his own, but only for Christ Jesus' sake, who of God and by faith is made unto him "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." We can contemplate with satisfaction, then, the aged disciple, having "borne the burden and heat of the day," patiently waiting for the stretching out of the evening shadows and the hour of his own sunset. 2. Another point to be considered is, the fact that the setting of the sun is not always like the day which it closes. The morning may have been bright, and the evening hour dark with tempests; or the rising may have been obscured by clouds and mists, which gradually faded away and left a clear sky at sunset. So the sunset hour of Christian life does not always correspond to his previous day. We have seen the last hours of the believer shrouded in impenetrable gloom, and we have seen them gilded with hope and radiant with the forecast glories of the upper world. The way in which a Christian dies is not always an index of his spiritual condition. He is to be judged by his life, not by his death. Self-denial, the mortification of our passions, the resisting of earthly temptations, the putting into active exercise, and amidst opposing difficulties, the whole class of Christian affections which flow out from the simple principle of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and the manifestation of that life of faith, of prayer, of holiness, of zeal, which necessarily results from the constraining love of Christ in the heart; all these qualities and tests of character scarcely find a place on a dying bed, so that persons thus situated have few opportunities to develop the true evidences of the work of grace. The varieties of Christian experience are literally innumerable; but whatever their nature, we must not judge of the validity of one's hope, or the genuineness of one's conversion, by his dying hour. Yet, when that dying hour accords with a long life of piety, or a true profession maintained in health and strength; when it is but a concentrating within itself of the glories which have been more or less visible in the whole track of his experience, then is it eloquent in its revelations of the riches, and peace, and joy which God generally gives to those who are faithful unto death: and though we cannot order when or how our lives shall close upon earth, yet it should be our aim so to live as to secure, if God pleases, a serene, if not a triumphant exit, that our setting sun may, like the sun in the firmament, grow larger and more resplendent as it declines, until passing away it shall leave behind a trail of glory spread all over the place of our departure. 3. Another interesting thought connected with this subject is, that the sun is not lost or extinguished when it sets. This may seem a very trite remark concerning the natural sun, but it is not so trite when we speak of the soul-set in death. For are we not apt to grieve over the going down of our friends to the grave, as if they were to be for ever hidden in its dark chamber—as if the bright spark of their immortality had been suddenly quenched? 4. And this leads us to make one final observation, namely, that when we see the sun set,

we know that it will rise again ; and so when we see the body of our friends borne to the voiceless dwelling of the tomb, we know that they also shall rise again. (*Bp. Stevens.*)

Ver. 8. Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest My soul depart from thee.—*The way to prevent the ruin of a sinful people.*—I. THE INFINITE GOODNESS AND PATIENCE OF GOD TOWARDS A SINFUL PEOPLE, AND HIS GREAT UNWILLINGNESS TO BRING RUIN AND DESTRUCTION UPON THEM. Howloath is He that things should come to this extremity ? II. THE ONLY PROPER AND EFFECTUAL MEANS TO PREVENT THE MISERY AND RUIN OF A SINFUL PEOPLE. If they will be instructed, and take warning by the threatenings of God, and will become wiser and better, then His soul will not depart from them, He will not bring upon them the desolation which He hath threatened. III. THE MISERABLE CASE AND CONDITION OF A PEOPLE, WHEN GOD TAKES OFF HIS AFFECTION FROM THEM, AND GIVES OVER ALL FURTHER CARE AND CONCERNMENT FOR THEM. Woe unto them, when His soul departs from them ! For when God once leaves them, then all sorts of evil and calamities will break in upon them. (*Archbishop Tillotson.*) *A warning to the nation.*—I. THE CAUTION. 1. Whereby are we to be instructed ? By the state of affairs, and by the reason of things, or the right of cases. (1) God is a being of all perfection, of infinitely vast comprehension and understanding and power : and therefore He is able to attain those effects, and to teach men by all things that fall under His government. (2) Things managed by Divine wisdom are intensely expressive of notions, because they do partake of the excellency and sufficiency of their cause. (3) God doth nothing in vain, nor to fewer or lesser purposes than the things are capable to promote, or be subservient unto. (4) Because the affairs of mankind are the choice piece of the administration of providence : And God doth in a special manner charge Himself with teaching the mind of man knowledge. 2. Wherein are we to be instructed ? (1) In matters of God's offence. For we are highly concerned in God's favour or displeasure. (2) In instances of our own duty : if we have departed from it, to return to it ; if we have done the contrary, to revoke it with self-condemnation and humble deprecation. 3. What is it to be instructed ? (1) To search and examine. (2) To weigh and consider. (3) To understand and discern. (4) To do and perform. II. THE ENFORCEMENT. 1. An argument of love and goodwill, "lest My soul depart from thee." 2. An argument from fear, "lest I make thee desolate." A double argument is as a double testimony, by which every word is established (2 Cor. xiii. 1). 3. This double argument shows us two things. (1) The stupidity and senselessness of those, who are made to the perfection of reason and understanding, and yet act contrary to it. (2) The impiety and unrighteousness of sinners, who are a real offence to God, cause His displeasure, and bring upon persons and places, ruin and destruction. Sin is a variation from the law and rule of God's creation : it is contrary to the order of reason : and when I say this, I say as bad as can be spoken. In sin there is open and manifest neglect of God, to whom all reverence and regard is most due. By sin there is a disturbance in God's family ; it is an interruption of that intercourse and communication there ought to be amongst creatures ; for every sinner destroys much good. By the practice of iniquity we mar our spirits, spoil our tempers, and acquire unnatural principles and dispositions. (*B. Whichcote, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. They have no delight in it.—*The impediments to the right celebration of religious ordinances.*—You will readily admit, that the feeling of delight accompanying the performance of anything is, for the most part, a sign and measure of its profitable accomplishment ; that that is usually well done which is done cheerfully and with the heart ; and that nothing, on the contrary, is more commonly deteriorated in the performance of it, than what is entered on with the apprehension of its being a piece of drudgery, and gone through as a mere task. How true does this remark hold in the department of religion ! If we approach the exercises of religion, whether reading or hearing the Word, or the sacraments, or prayer, as formalists come to them—if we take no lively interest in them—if we are actuated merely by the force of custom, the power of example and other motives of expediency, how can they ever profit us ? Are we not changing the sources of heaven's blessings into empty and broken cisterns ? I. In attending to the circumstances that operate to take away from us delight in Christian ordinances, we observe, that an unfavourable change in the frame of mind, as persons are engaged in religious exercises, often occurs, at

least at times OCCURS, UNAVOIDABLY, however our desires and endeavours may be set against it. At one time we will be attending with deep earnestness, at another time listening with cold indifference. There is now a great acuteness in receiving instruction, at another time almost a deadness that blunts the edge of the best directed observations. Now, all such changes as these are still, in so far as they are traceable to constitutional temperament, to be ranked among the class of what the Bible calls our infirmities, and when they are met by meditation on the Word of God, and by prayer, in order that we may be cured, they are not charged as criminalities against us. At the same time, take good heed lest you ascribe to those things over which you think you have no control, what all the while springs from sinful negligence.

II. First, the state of mind I have described, shows THAT THERE HAS NOT BEEN WITH US DUE CONSIDERATION BEFORE WE HAVE COME TO THE PUBLIC ORDINANCES OF RELIGION. We do not consider that the services of the sanctuary relate to God in our adoring, or praising, or supplicating Him whom the universe celebrates as its Maker, whom angels, principalities and powers reverently worship—we do not consider that the services of the sanctuary are the appointed means through which the soul is called to discourse with its own original, with Him who is the source of bliss. We do not consider that the services of the sanctuary present the sublimest objects for the exercise of the understanding, the most splendid for attracting the imagination, the most engaging for affecting the heart. Accordingly we do not in our petitions implore that fixedness of heart which is required in the true and spiritual worshipper; we do not enter the sanctuary cherishing the serious thought that we come hither to seek the blessings which the mercy of the Saviour gives to every one who feels his need of them, and asks them. On the contrary, we come to the sanctuary altogether unconcerned; we sit down without offering in our minds one preparatory petition; we possess a frame of mind that is akin to levity; we are chargeable at least with indifference, which can only be excusable in our waiting on an empty ceremonial. Even allowing that the individual still possesses some desire to receive the benefits of religious ordinances in the sanctuary, they are rendered quite impracticable to him, except where the devotional exercises of every day are preparatory to those of the Sabbath. The want of serious consideration before we come to engage in religious ordinances, leads directly to want of due reflection when engaged in the performance of them; for such trains of thought as we have been cherishing, are not easily broken down, and, in fact, we cannot authoritatively dismiss them—they have fastened themselves by innumerable links to the mind, and though many of these links may from time to time be detached by us, still numbers are left which are quite sufficient to rivet the objects of our affectionate concern to our memories and our hearts. Such objects, through long usage, become great favourites with the mind, and hence, it not only attends to them in the season of disengagement from other things, but strives to get back to them, even when occupied in the ordinances of religion. Then when we think how base and degraded our natural dispositions are, surely it is a most unreasonable expectation that we are prepared for the spiritual exercises of the Sabbath, if we have had no preparatory devotional exercises for such a day.

III. MOST SERIOUS AND GRIEVOUS IS THE EVIL OF WHICH I AM NOW SPEAKING. Whatever degree of it adheres to us its tendency is to destroy utterly the capacity of religious feeling, and to increase that scaredness of conscience which is the forerunner of open profligacy. Let us then be roused to consideration. Let us come to religious ordinances with serious thoughts on their nature, their reasonableness, their awful sanctions, and their inestimable utility; and, having especially in view the example of the serious worshipper who prays for the spirit of prayer, and who is a suppliant in private for the grace of supplication which is to be employed by him in public, let us endeavour when we join in religious ordinances to preserve seriousness of mind. Let us for this purpose devoutly consider the object we have in view, whether engaged in the Word, in sacrament, or in prayer. Let us not give a single moment's encouragement to thoughts upon other subjects. Let us withstand the inroads of such thoughts—let us cast them out as of Satan, when they enter, and let us try to prevent them entering at all. Let there be prayer, consideration and serious concern; and thus entering into the great truths, into the sweetness of religion, there will be no longer felt the weariness with which we set out. The satisfaction and delight, so conducive to our improvement, will then take the place of the fatigue and irksomeness of the mere bodily worshipper. The Sabbath will be the most acceptable of all refreshments, the Psalms of the sanctuary will be the sentiments of gratitude and joy, the prayers offered will be as the flame

which first ascended in holy ardour to its origin, and the Word will be the principal vehicle of calling into action every good resolution. Religion will then become that very privilege it is intended to be; the elements, set upon the table, will appear as the memorials of all that is dear and precious to our souls; the sentiments of holy love will be awakened in commemorating the blessed Friend who gave His soul for us sinners; and thus the sanctuary and its services will become the pledge to us of the noblest benefits, the scene of the most glorious hopes, and an incitement to devoted obedience. (*W. Muir, D.D.*) *The Gospel unappreciated:*—Alphonse Kerr heard a gardener ask his master's permission to sleep for the future in the stable. "For," said he, "there is no possibility of sleeping in the chamber behind the greenhouse, sir; there are nightingales there which do nothing but guggle and keep up a noise all the night." The sweetest sounds are but an annoyance to those who have no musical ear; doubtless the music of heaven would have no charm to carnal minds, certainly the joyful sound of the Gospel is unappreciated so long as men's ears remain uncircumcised.

Ver. 14. They have healed also the hurt . . . slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.—*Healing our wounds slightly*.—I. WHAT NEED WE ALL HAVE OF HEALING. 1. Asserted in Scripture. 2. Confirmed by experience. II. WHO THEY ARE THAT HEAL THEIR WOUNDS SLIGHTLY. 1. They who rely on the uncovenanted mercy of God, fatally deceive their souls by expecting mercy contrary to Gospel. 2. They who take refuge in a round of duties; no attainments can stand in place of Christ. 3. They who rest in a faith that is unproductive of good works; but the faith that apprehends Christ will "work by love," "purify the heart," "overcome the world." III. HOW WE MAY HAVE THEM HEALED EFFECTUALLY. 1. The Lord Jesus has provided a remedy for sin (*Isa. liii. 5*). 2. That remedy applied by faith shall be effectual for all who trust in it. Address—1. Those who feel not their need of healing. 2. Those who, after having derived some benefits from Christ, have relapsed into sin. 3. Those who are enjoying health in their souls. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) *False teachers*:—How mischievous is that false kindness which is afraid of telling you honestly the state of the case, if it happen to be dangerous or desperate! Now, in regard of their eternal concerns, men have a willingness to be deceived, though in regard of their temporal concerns, they are keenly alive to attempts at imposition, and eager to resent them. They commonly prefer the moral physician who will make light of their vices, and not startle them by faithfully exposing their danger, though, were they similarly beguiled by one whom they consulted on a bodily malady, they would denounce him as guilty of the most hateful perfidy. And it may be for your profit, if we look into some of the more ordinary cases. First, we would remind you that, if there be truth in the statements of Scripture, there is a distinction the very strongest between the people of the world and the people of God. Yet, here is the respect in which, perhaps, the danger is the greatest of the moral hurt being only slightly healed, and peace prophesied when there is no peace. The worldly are well pleased to have the differences between themselves and the religious made as few and unimportant as possible, inasmuch as they are thus soothed into a persuasion that after all they are in no great danger of the wrath of the Almighty. On the other hand, those who profess a concern for the soul are often still so much inclined to the pursuits and the pleasures of earth, that they have a ready ear for any doctrine which seems to offer them the joys of the next life, without requiring continued self-denial in this life. Thus it is an unpopular thing, opposed to the inclinations of the majority of hearers, to insist upon the breadth of separation between the worldly and the religious, to represent, without qualification or disguise, that the attempting to serve two masters is the certain serving of only one, and that the master whose wages is death. But if we would be faithful in the ministry, this is what we must do. To do otherwise, would be to play with your souls—to lead you into delusion, which, if continued, must leave you shipwrecked for eternity. Take another case, the case of those in whom has been produced a conviction of sin, whose consciences after a long slumber have been aroused to do their office and have done it with great energy. It is no uncommon thing for conviction of sin not to be followed by conversion. Hundreds who have been stirred for a time to a sense of guilt and danger, in place of advancing to genuine penitence have lapsed back into former indifference. Ah, this is amongst the most alarming of moral phenomena. The signs and earnest, as we thought of life, give a melancholy

and mysterious interest to death. Let the ministers of religion take heed that they be not accessory to so disappointing an occurrence, and they easily may be. The spiritual physician may be too hasty in applying to the wounded conscience the balm of the Gospel; and thus he may arrest that process of godly contrition which seemed so hopefully begun. It is no time to speak of free forgiveness till the man exclaims in the agony of alarm and almost of despair, "What must I do to be saved?" Then display the Cross. Then expatiate on the glorious truth, that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Then point to the unsearchable riches of Christ, and meet every doubt, oppose every objection, and combat every fear by exhibiting the mighty fact of an atonement for sin. But the case suggested by our text is that of a too hasty appropriation of the consolations of Christianity, and this case we cannot doubt is of frequent occurrence. Not, indeed, that whenever conviction of sin is not followed by conversion, the cause is to be found in the premature use of the mercies of the Gospel. We know too well that in many instances the conscience which had been mysteriously aroused is as mysteriously quieted; so that, without a solitary reason, men who had manifested anxiety as to their souls, and apparently been earnest in seeking salvation, are soon again found amongst the careless and indifferent, as busy as ever with chasing shadows, as pleased as ever with things that perish in the using. For a moment they have seemed conscious of their immortality and have risen to the dignity of deathless beings, and then the pulse has ceased to beat, and they have again been creatures of a day in place of heirs of eternity. Still, if there be many instances in which we may not fairly ascribe to a too hasty appropriation of the mercies of the Gospel, the failure of what seemed hopefully commenced, we may justly say that such an exhibition is likely to produce so disappointing a result, and that the probability is that it frequently does. We have further to remark, that the peculiar doctrines of Christianity are strongly offensive to the great body of men, and that on this account chiefly it is that there is so much reluctance to the bringing them forward, and so much readiness to explain them away. You cannot fail to be aware that the offence of the Cross has not ceased, you must be sufficiently aware that these are not days when men are called to join the noble army of martyrs, yet there is an opposition to the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, an opposition which gives as much cause now as there was in earlier days for the Saviour to exclaim, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." So that here is a precise case in which the known feelings of the generality of men place the teacher under a temptation to keep back truth, or of stating it so equivocally that its full force shall not be felt. He cannot be ignorant that if he set forth without reserve, or disguise the corruption and helplessness of man, insist on the perfect gratuitousness of salvation, and refer to God's mercy and distinguishing grace as first exciting the desire for deliverance, and then enabling us to lay hold upon the provided succours, he will have to encounter the antipathies of perhaps a majority of his hearers; and he is consequently and naturally moved to the concealing much, and the softening down more; and if he yield to the temptation, then we have that mixed and diluted theology which does not, indeed, exclude Christ, but assigns much to man, which without denying the meritorious obedience and sufferings of the Mediator soothes our pride with an assurance that by our good works we contribute something towards the attainment of everlasting happiness. By encouraging the opinion that men are not very far gone from original righteousness, that notwithstanding the fall, they retain a moral power of doing what shall be acceptable to God, and that their salvation is to result from the combination of their own efforts and the merits of Christ, we maintain that by encouraging such opinions as these, the teacher flatters his hearers with the most pernicious of all flattery, hiding from them their actual condition, and instructing them, how to miss, at the same time that they think they are securing deliverance. Probably enough has been advanced to certify you not only of the possible occurrence but of the grievous peril which must lie in the substituting in religion what is superficial for what ought to be radical. It is on this that we are most anxious to fix your attention. We want to have you satisfied that there can be no falseness than that which should hide from men their real condition, and that it is the very extreme of danger when those who are tottering believe themselves secure. It needs no small courage—we ought rather to say, it needs no small grace—to be willing to know the worst; not to be afraid of finding out how bad we are, how corrupt, how capable of the worst actions, if left to ourselves. This is a great

point gained in spiritual things, it is a great point gained to be able to pray with David, "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me." We call it a great point gained to be willing to know the worst; for so long as we stop short of this, we shall always be trying half measures, healing the hurt slightly, and therefore never reaching the root of the disease. We counsel you then to be honest with yourselves, honest in observing the symptoms of spiritual sickness, honest in applying the remedies prescribed by the Bible. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

False peace :—1. A FALSE PEACE, WHAT IS IT? We do not mean, in describing a false peace, to depict the state of those who are utterly indifferent to religious claims and obligations. We are speaking of another class, in whose minds there has been at some time an anxiety concerning their state in the sight of God. They have felt that sin is within them, that sin is working out terrible results, and, unless some remedy be applied, must work their ultimate ruin. This anxiety has increased upon them; and at length they have found the anxiety soothed; its pressure has been alleviated, and at length it has departed. But it has been soothed by unsuitable means. To be in a state of false peace is to be in a state of composure—not of indifference, but of composure and satisfaction, in a belief that all is well when all is not well. And this may arise from various causes. 1. It may be that some are lulled into this false peace from the fact of never having had clear and scriptural notions of the true nature of sin. They have had their attention perhaps drawn rather more to sins and to sinning than to sin; and in their cases it may have happened that the course of sinning has not been a very atrocious course—that the habitude has never manifested itself in any very formidable way. Now, so long as our attention is fixed upon sins, and so long as our minds are drawing distinctions between the greater and the lesser amount of actual transgressions against God, we overlook the scriptural view of sin, as that fatal principle in the nature of man which taints every faculty, and which renders it utterly impossible that man should live in the light of God's countenance. 2. But suppose men do entertain scriptural views of sin, as a deadly principle within them, still they may have very inadequate views of the justice of God and of His perfect holiness. Many minds are very apt to measure God, as it were, by a human standard, as if God's mode of procedure would be governed on the same principles on which man's mode of procedure is usually governed; and the consequence is, that they invest God with a kind of mercy which is altogether unscriptural. If the sinner views God merely as a God of goodness and tenderness and mercy, and thinks His justice is not to have its full and unrestricted exercise, then we ask, what are we to do with those passages of God's Word which exhibit all His attributes in their just proportions, and their relations one to another? 3. False peace may also be produced by having obscure notions of the Gospel. If we could sum up the whole Gospel message, the whole of the rich provision of God's mercy and justice in Christ Jesus, in one sentence, we should say, it is a remedy for sin; but multitudes hear the Gospel, in all its simplicity and fulness, and yet come to the conclusion that the Gospel system only calls us into a greater familiarity of relation to God, that it sets before us a more spiritual walk than the people who lived under the law were accustomed to, that it calls upon us for a higher moral bearing, and that if we do in the main adhere to that, as if it were a second form of law exhibited to us, then all shall be well; but they overlook the fact that there is in the Gospel a remedy for sin—that it contains a provision for the healing, the true healing of the wound which sin has made. 4. This false peace may arise, moreover, out of an imperfect reception of the true Gospel. The doctrines may be received; the matters of fact upon which the doctrines are based may be received; the economy of the Gospel may be received, as far as the intellect goes; but there may be no surrender of the soul to the Gospel—there may be no yielding up of all the perversity of the natural man to the sweet and precious operations of the Spirit of God, seeking to establish His truth in the heart as a remedy for sin. Now we believe, that wherever these four, or any one of these four causes exist, the result is a false peace. And let it be borne in mind, that most men are very much disposed to be satisfied with a false peace. When the testimony of conscience has been stirring, when the burden of sin has been felt to be a heavy burden, there is a disposition to embrace the first offer of peace that presents itself. And why is it so? Because the burden is heavy to be borne, and the anxiety it occasions is a distressing anxiety, which is to be got rid of in any way. Anything, therefore, that can silence conscience, or that can lessen

the severity of its testimony, will be resorted to, and will be regarded as peace.

II. **THE REAL NATURE OF THAT ONLY PEACE WHICH CAN BE RELIED UPON.** Let it be remembered, that true peace has relation both to God and to man; that is, it must be a peace on both sides—on the side of a just and holy God, and on the side of man with his "carnal mind" which is "enmity against God." There must be peace on both sides; and the peace on God's side must be a peace that shall be in the highest degree honourable to Himself; and in order to be strictly honourable to Him, it must be a peace that shall have magnified His justice, as well as given Him a just occasion for the exercise of mercy. It is plain, therefore, that man himself cannot make and establish such a peace, either by sacrifice or by service. Then the truth is, that God has taken the whole matter into His own hands. He regards man as altogether helpless in this respect; and God undertakes for the establishing a peace that shall be in the highest degree honourable to Himself, and in the utmost degree suitable to man. In graciously revealing Himself, then, in Christ, God has come forth from the light and glory in which He has dwelt from all eternity, and in the person of Jesus, the Eternal Word, has manifested Himself in an attitude of peace—is at peace. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." In that declaration we see the attitude of peace. God comes not forth, in the Gospel of His dear Son, as an avenger, but He comes honourably forth as a peacemaker. He comes forth, manifesting the strength and severity of His justice, and magnifying the perfection of His justice. "He spared not His own Son."

III. **THE DANGER OF A FALSE PEACE.** There is present danger, and there is future danger. So long as a false peace is soothing our anxieties in regard to our state as sinners before God, this helps to deaden conscience; it does not always satisfy, but it subdues the activity of conscience, and opens a way for the subtle workings of Satan. Moreover, this false peace disinclines the mind of the deluded one for the definiteness of the Christian state and the Christian character—makes all the peculiarity that marks the Christian and the Christian's walk distasteful—makes it regarded as too exact, as too minute, as going too far in its restraints upon the natural freedom of man; and the consequence is, that it is said, as it is sometimes said of some ministers of the Gospel, that their views are a great deal too high, that they expect a great deal more of people than they ought, that they are always raising a standard which makes religion appear so impracticable. Lastly, there is the danger of indisposing us to study the depths of the written Word, and to listen to those depths when they are brought out in the public ministry of the Word. So long as the imagination is pleasantly exercised, and the ministry of the preacher is like the song of "one who hath a pleasant voice, and playeth well upon an instrument," there is contentedness; but when the depths of God's truth are brought forth, then it is regarded as a dry matter—a matter in which they have but little concern; and whilst this state of mind exists, the false peace makes the sinner to lie in a perilous abode, like a man whose roof is on fire, and who is pressed down by the weight of slumber. But the danger is also future. If we die in a false peace, then in the day of resurrection and in the judgment we meet God as an avenger, and an avenger during all eternity. (*G. Fisk, LL.B.*)

Foundations of peace:—There is a very true sentence of Lord Macaulay's, in which he says, "It is difficult to conceive any situation more painful than that of a great man condemned to watch the lingering agony of an exhausted country, to tend it during the alternate fits of stupefaction and raving which precede its dissolution, and to see the symptoms of vitality disappear, one by one, till nothing is left but coldness, darkness, and corruption." It was just such a situation that the prophet Jeremiah was at this time condemned to fill. We feel that there is real agony in the sentence of doom he is compelled to utter. What aggravated his own personal grief was that he saw the remedy that alone could save them, the thorough, searching, radical treatment of their case that contained their only hope, and they refused it, and with the very grip of death upon them they turned for comfort to those who had the mildest treatment to prescribe, and who cried, "Peace, peace, when there was no peace."

f. The prophet here lays his finger on the essential error—**THE FORMALIST HAS NO ADEQUATE IDEA OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SIN.** To suppose you have healed the corruption of a man's nature by the sacrifice of a turtle dove is the merest folly. To suppose that you remove the enmity of a man's heart against God by crying "Peace, peace" is an incredible mockery. Peace with God is the will, and the heart, and the conscience at one with Him. II. This

ignorance of the priests as to the very nature of the sin they professed to cure reminds us of the truth of Lord Bacon's saying, that **THAT IS A FALSE PEACE WHICH IS GROUNDED UPON AN IMPLICIT IGNORANCE**, just as all colours agree in the dark. You may cherish the ignominious ambition to have peace at any price. You may escape the problems of thought by declining to think. You may avoid the responsibility of freedom by voluntary slavery; you may escape the pain of repentance by ignoring the reality of sin; yes, you may refuse to acknowledge the obligations of the light by dwelling ever in the darkness; you may prefer to be the victim of error and superstition to being their victor; you may prefer the cowardly acquiescence of surrender to the glad triumph of conquest; but you will surely not delude yourselves into the belief that you have settled anything, healed any hurt, or that the peace you enjoy is a worthy one, with any elements of desirability at all. For let us be quite sure that true peace—moral or mental—is based upon an honest facing of the truth. It was old Matthew Paris, the last of the old monastic historians, who complained somewhat pathetically that the case of historians was hard, because if they told the truth they provoked men, while if they wrote what was false they offended God. The historian's art, it appears, must have in it something of the photographer's, whose bounden duty is well known to be to make men better looking than they are. It has been urged, that if you can persuade a man that he is better than he really is, he will try to live up to the new revelation. Overlook his faults, and explain his errors away, and he will take heart and grow better. The question comes back to an old one that has been asked and discussed again and again, "Can there ever be any moral uses in a lie?" Do we believe in that religious homœopathy that proposes to cure one immorality by another, conceal corruption by falsehood, and cover sinfulness by lying? Can any possible good come out of such a practice? Can there ever be any moral uses in a lie? I think you will agree with me, that even if it were possible to obtain a satisfactory peace by the suppression of conviction on the one hand, or a misrepresentation of fact on the other, we are not at liberty to take it on such terms. To obtain a worthy peace we must face the facts.

(C. S. Horne, M.A.) *A blast of the trumpet against false peace.*—It is no uncommon thing to meet with people who say, "Well, I am happy enough. My conscience never troubles me. I believe if I were to die I should go to heaven as well as anybody else." I know that these men are living in the commission of glaring acts of sin, and I am sure they could not prove their innocence even before the bar of man; yet will these men look you in the face and tell you that they are not at all disturbed at the prospect of dying. Well, I will take you at your word, though I don't believe you. I will suppose you have this peace, and I will endeavour to account for it on certain grounds which may render it somewhat more difficult for you to remain in it. 1. The first person I shall deal with is the man who has peace because he spends his life in a ceaseless round of gaiety and frivolity. You have scarcely come from one place of amusement before you enter another. You know that you are never happy except you are in what you call gay society, where the frivolous conversation will prevent you from hearing the voice of your conscience. In the morning you will be asleep while God's sun is shining, but at night you will be spending precious time in some place of foolish, if not lascivious, mirth. If the harp should fail you, then you call for Nabal's feast. There shall be a sheep shearing, and you shall be drunken with wine, until your souls become as stolid as a stone. And then you wonder that you have peace. What wonder! Surely any man would have peace when his heart has become as hard as a stone. What weathers shall it feel? What tempests shall move the stubborn bowels of a granite rock? You sear your consciences, and then marvel that they feel not. Oh that you would begin to live! What a price you are paying for your mirth—eternal torment for an hour of jollity—separation from God for a brief day or two of sin! 2. I turn to another class of men. Finding that amusement at last has lost all its zest, having drained the cup of worldly pleasure till they find first satiety, and then disgust lying at the bottom, they want some stronger stimulus, and Satan, who has drugged them once, has stronger opiates than mere merriment for the man who chooses to use them. If the frivolity of this world will not suffice to rock a soul to sleep, he hath a yet more hellish cradle for the soul. He will take you up to his own breast, and bid you suck therefrom his own Satanic nature, that you may then be still and calm. I mean that he will lead you to imbibe infidel notions, and when this is fully accomplished, you can have "Peace, peace, when there is no peace."

3. I shall come now to a third class of men. These are people not particularly addicted to gaiety, nor especially given to infidel notions; but they are a sort of folk who are careless, and determined to let well alone. Their motto is, "Let to-morrow take care for the things of itself; let us live while we live; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." If their conscience cries out at all, they bid it lie still. When the minister disturbs them, instead of listening to what he says, and so being brought into a state of real peace, they cry, "Hush! be quiet! there is time enough yet; I will not disturb myself with these childish fears: be still, sir, and lie down." Oh! up ye sleepers, ye gaggers of conscience, what mean you? Why are you sleeping when death is hastening on, when eternity is near, when the great white throne is even now coming on the clouds of heaven, when the trumpet of the resurrection is now being set to the mouth of the archangel? 4. A fourth set of men have a kind of peace that is the result of resolutions which they have made, but which they will never carry into effect. "Oh," saith one, "I am quite easy enough in my mind, for when I have got a little more money I shall retire from business, and then I shall begin to think about eternal things." Ah, but I would remind you that when you were an apprentice, you said you would reform when you became a journeyman; and when you were a journeyman, you used to say you would give good heed when you became a master. But hitherto these bills have never been paid when they became due. They have every one of them been dishonoured as yet; and take my word for it, this new accommodation bill will be dishonoured too. 5. Now I turn to another class of men, in order that I may miss none who are saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." I do not doubt but that many of the people of London enjoy peace in their hearts, because they are ignorant of the things of God. If you have a peace that is grounded on ignorance, get rid of it; ignorance is a thing, remember, that you are accountable for. You are not accountable for the exercise of your judgment to man, but you are accountable for it to God. 6. I now pass to another and more dangerous form of this false peace. I may have missed some of you; probably I shall come closer home to you now. Alas, alas, let us weep and weep again, for there is a plague among us. It is the part of candour to admit that with all the exercise of judgment, and the most rigorous discipline, we cannot keep our churches free from hypocrisy. Oh! I do not know of a more thoroughly damnable delusion than for a man to get a conceit into his head, that he is a child of God, and yet live in sin—to talk to you about sovereign grace, while he is living in sovereign lust—to stand up and make himself the arbiter of what is truth, while he himself condemns the precept of God, and tramples the commandment under foot. 7. There remains yet another class of beings who surpass all these in their utter indifference to everything that might arouse them. They are men that are given up by God, justly given up. They have passed the boundary of His long-suffering. He has said, "My Spirit shall no more strive with them"; "Ephraim is given unto idols, let him alone." As a judicial punishment for their impenitence, God has given them up to pride and hardness of heart. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *False security*.—I. HOW IS IT PERSONS REACH THIS STATE OF EASY CONFIDENCE? 1. There is a disposition to acknowledge in a general way that they are sinners, though also to palliate the enormity of sin, and to gloss it over with the gentle epithet of an infirmity. 2. Then, to make all right, secure, and comfortable, the sentiment is cherished that God is merciful and will overlook our infirmities. But this mercy, so vaguely trusted in, is not the mercy which has been made the subject of an actual offer from God to man. He has stepped forth to relieve us from the debt of sin. II. THE EVILS OF SUCH A FALSE CONFIDENCE. 1. It casts an aspersion on the character of God. 2. It is hostile to the cause of practical righteousness, since it tends to obliterate all restraints, on the specious plea of all-availing mercy, and leaves every man to sin just as much as he likes. (*T. Chalmers, D.D.*) *Peace, when there is no peace*.—The value of these Old Testament prophecies for us is that they hold up the mirror to nature. Under different guises we see men grappling with the same problems, encountering the same fears, wrestling with the same difficulties, meeting the same joys and the same disappointments. History is ever repeating itself. 1. The same oppression, the same sin, the same corruptions which are causing so much anguish in our midst, were at work there, and from many a heart there went up the cry, "How long, O Lord, how long?" The means they adopted were not sufficient for the end, and that is just the point at which these Israelites join hands with many reformers in our days. There are fashions in

these things as in everything else. With the crowd and with the priests in these far-off days it was sacrifice and burnt-offering. With us the favourite nostrums are somewhat different. Let us look at some of them. (1) There is what has been called the doctrine of culture. "Educate, educate, educate," some cry, and that will put all right. The exponents of this school are enthusiastic, and talk of great things to be accomplished when the refinement and culture which is fostered in the "upper ten" has filtered down through university extension schemes and settlements to the working classes. (2) Others, of a more practical turn of mind, think that the world can be set right by legislative means. "Better laws and greater freedom are what is wanted," they say, "to elevate the people." Life to them consists in the abundance of things which men possess. They laugh at the notion of a happiness which has not plenty, and ridicule the very idea of comfort or contentment in a one-roomed house. (3) Another set think that if we could make the people sober all would be well. They tell us that almost nine-tenths of the crime and mischief in the country comes from drunkenness. 2. There is much truth in a great deal of what has been said by the advocates of each of these different systems, and within certain limits they are right. That they will ever reach the root of the matter is another thing. They are no new doctrines. Long have men tried them. And what has been the result where they have had freest play? A perfect cure? An approach to an ideal State? Alas, no. In some cases one or other of them, or all of them together, may have contributed to render life easier, or more comfortable to individuals here and there; but none of them, nor all of them together, have been able to heal the hurt of humanity. They are but the purple patches with which men seek to hide the festering sores. The trouble is in the heart, in the blood, in the innermost centre of our being, and till it is expelled from that citadel, there can be no hope for us, or the world. They who cherish the supposition that man at bottom is a lover of truth and light, of purity and goodness, fondle a vain conceit. Is there no cruelty, is there no lust in upper circles of society? Is there no impurity, no degradation, no oppression among the learned? Is there no misery, no broken hearts in the homes of the wealthy? Are there no tears, no sighs, no wrinkled brows where intemperance is unknown? (*R. Leggat.*) *Useless doctoring*:—In China they have some queer ways of doctoring sick people, and in Pekin, it is said, they have a brass mule for a doctor! This mule stands in one of their temples, and sick people flock there by the thousands to be cured. How can a brass mule cure anybody? do you ask. Sure enough, how can he? and yet these poor ignorant people believe it. If you lived there, instead of in this country, it is likely that when you had a toothache your father would take you—to a dentist? Oh no! That is what they do in this country. In Pekin you would probably be taken to the temple where the brass mule stands, and be lifted up so that you could rub his teeth, then rub your own, and then think the pain ought to go away. If you fell down and hurt your knee, you would go and rub the mule's knee, and then your own, to make it well. They say so many have rubbed the mule that they have rubbed the brass off in many places, so that new patches had to be put on, and his eyes have been rubbed out altogether. But a brand new mule stands waiting to take the place of the old one when that finally falls to pieces. It seems a very simple way to cure pains and aches, but, I fear, the pain is not very much better after the visit to the mule; and I am sure all boys and girls who read of the "brass doctor" will be glad they live in this land, even if dentists do sometimes pull out teeth that ache, and doctors often give medicine that is not pleasant to take. *False peace*:—Your peace, sinner, is that terribly prophetic calm which the traveller occasionally perceives upon the higher Alps. Everything is still. The birds suspend their notes, fly low, and cower down with fear. The hum of bees among the flowers is hushed. A horrible stillness rules the hour, as if death had silenced all things by stretching over them his awful sceptre. Perceive ye not what is surely at hand? The tempest is preparing, the lightning will soon cast abroad its flames of fire. Earth will rock with thunder-blasts; granite peaks will be dissolved; all nature will tremble beneath the fury of the storm. Yours is that solemn calm to-day, sinner. Rejoice not in it, for the hurricane of wrath is coming, the whirlwind and the tribulation which shall sweep you away and utterly destroy you. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 15. **They were not at all ashamed.**—*Shamelessness in sin, the certain forerunner of destruction*:—He who has thus sinned himself past feeling,

may be justly supposed to have sinned himself past grace. 1. Extraordinary guilt. "Committed abomination." 2. Deportment under guilt. "Not at all ashamed," &c. 3. God's high resentment of their monstrous shamelessness. "Were they ashamed?" 4. The consequent judgment. "Therefore shall they fall," &c.

I. WHAT SHAME IS, AND WHAT INFLUENCE IT HAS UPON THE GOVERNMENT OF MEN'S MANNERS.

1. Shame is a grief of mind springing from the apprehension of some disgrace brought upon a man. And disgrace consists properly in men's knowledge or opinion of some defect, natural or moral, belonging to them. So that when a man is sensible that anything defective or amiss, either in his person, manners, or the circumstances of his condition, is known, or taken notice of, by others; from this sense or apprehension of his, there naturally results upon his mind a certain grief or displeasure, which grief properly constitutes the passion of shame. 2. From this, that shame is grounded upon the dread man naturally has of the ill opinion of others, and that chiefly with reference to the turpitude or immorality of his actions, it is manifest that it is that great and powerful instrument in the soul of man whereby Providence both preserves society and supports government, forasmuch as it is the most effectual restraint upon him from the doing of such things as more immediately tend to disturb the one and destroy the other. 3. He whom shame has done its work upon, is, *ipso facto*, stripped of all the common comforts of life. The light is to him the shadow of death; he has no heart nor appetite for business; his very food is nauseous to him. In which wretched condition having passed some years, first the vigour of his intellectuals begins to flag and dwindle away, and then his health follows; the hectic of the soul produces one in the body, the man from an inward falls into an outward consumption, and death at length gives the finishing stroke, and closes all with a sad catastrophe. II. By WHAT WAYS MEN COME TO CAST OFF SHAME, AND GROW IMPUDENT IN SIN. 1. By the commission of great sins. For these waste the conscience, and destroy at once. They are, as it were, a course of wickedness abridged into one act, and a custom of sinning by equivalence. They steel the forehead, and harden the heart, and break those bars asunder which modesty had originally fenced and enclosed it with. 2. Custom in sinning never fails in the issue to take away the sense and shame of sin, were a person never so virtuous before. First, he begins to shake off the natural horror and dread which he had of breaking any of God's commands, and so not to fear sin; next, finding his sinful appetites gratified by such breaches of the Divine law, he comes to like his sin and be pleased with what he has done; and then, from ordinary complacencies, heightened and improved by custom, he comes passionately to delight in such ways. Finally, having resolved to continue and persist in them, he frames himself to a resolute contempt of what is thought or said of him. 3. The examples of great persons take away the shame of anything which they are observed to practise, though never so foul and shameful in itself. Nothing is more contagious than an ill action set off with a great example; for it is natural for men to imitate those above them, and to endeavour to resemble, at least, that which they cannot be. 4. The observation of the general and common practice of anything takes away the shame of that practice. A *vice à la mode* will look virtue itself out of countenance, and it is well if it does not look it out of heart too. Men love not to be found singular, especially where the singularity lies in the rugged and severe paths of virtue. 5. To have been once greatly and irrecoverably ashamed renders men shameless. For shame is never of any force but where there is some stock of credit to be preserved. When a man finds that to be lost, he is like an undone gamester, who plays on safety, knowing he can lose no more. III. THE SEVERAL DEGREES OF SHAMELESSNESS IN SIN. 1. A showing of the greatest respect, and making the most obsequious applications and addresses to lewd and infamous persons; and that without any pretence of duty requiring it, which yet alone can justify and excuse men in it. 2. To extenuate or excuse a sin is bad enough, but to defend it is intolerable. Such are properly the devil's advocates. 3. Glorifying in sin. Higher than this the corruption of man's nature cannot possibly go. This is publicly to set up a standard on behalf of vice, to wear its colours, and avowedly to assert and espouse the cause of it, in defiance of all that is sacred or civil, moral or religious. IV. WHY IT BRINGS DOWN JUDGMENT AND DESTRUCTION UPON THE SINNER. 1. Because shamelessness in sin always presupposes those actions and courses which God rarely suffers to go unpunished. 2. Because of the destructive influence which it has upon the

government of the world. It is manifest that the integrity of men's manners cannot be secured, where there is not preserved upon men's minds a true estimate of vice and virtue, that is, where vice is not looked upon as shameful and opprobrious, and virtue valued as worthy and honourable. But now, where vice walks with a daring front, and no shame attends the practice or the practisers of it, there is an utter confusion of the first dividing and distinguishing properties of men's actions; morality falls to the ground, and government must quickly follow. And whenever it comes to fare thus with any civil State, virtue and common honesty seem to make their appeal to the supreme Governor of all things, to take the matter into His own hands, and to correct those clamorous enormities which are grown too big and strong for law or shame, or any human coercion. V. WHAT THOSE JUDGMENTS ARE. 1. A sudden and disastrous death; and, indeed, suddenness in this can hardly be without disaster. 2. War and desolation. 3. Captivity. (*R. South, D.D.*) *The shamelessness of sinners* :—

The legend says that, a sinner being at confession, the devil appeared, saying, that he came to make restitution. Being asked what he would restore, he said, "Shame; for it is shame that I have stolen from this sinner to make him shameless in sinning; and now I have come to restore it to him, to make him ashamed to confess his sins." Neither could they blush.—*Blushing* (with Ezra ix. 6):—"Just fancy," said Tom, who had been doing a bit of word-study by the aid of his newly-acquired *Skeat*, "to blush is, in its origin, the same word as to blaze, or to blast, and a blush in Danish means a torch." "And a very good origin too," said his sister, who got red in the face and hot all over on the slightest provocation. Yes, youth is the blushing time of life. Said Diogenes to a youth whom he saw blushing: "Courage, my boy, that is the complexion of virtue." I. THERE IS THE BLUSH OF GUILT. Who broke the window? All were silent; but one boy looked uneasy. His blush was the blast of his red-hot conscience, condemning the dumb tongue. II. THERE IS THE BLUSH OF SHAME. It was such a mean thing to tell that lie to one's own father. It was a shabby trick I played my elum. And that nasty word I spoke yesterday to a girl, too, it makes me sick-ashamed of myself to think of it. Yes; you ought to think shame. But "the man that blushes is not quite a brute."

III. THERE IS THE BLUSH OF MODESTY. Tom said nothing about his splendid score at the match, until his sister read aloud at breakfast next morning the flattering report given in the newspaper, at which Tom blushed like a girl. He had his revenge, however, when more than one letter came to Shena from Dr. Barnardo, and Tom protested that he knew now why she had no money to spend on sweets, and poor Shena got very red in the face, and went out of the room. IV. THERE IS THE BLUSH OF HONEST INDIGNATION at the meanness of the cheat, the cruelty of the bully, the greed of the glutton, and the indifference of selfish souls. This blush of virtuous anger must have come into the meek face of Christ, when He rebuked the disciples for keeping the mothers from bringing their children to Him. V. Just twice, I think, do we read of BLUSHING IN THE BIBLE, and the solemn thing is that the blush in both cases is not before men, but under the eye of God. 1. One of the most remarkable prayers in the Bible is the prayer of Ezra, the scribe—the brave, good, holy man who led a company of his Israelite brethren from Babylon to Jerusalem. It rises hot and passionate out of his very heart; for, like all priestly souls, he makes all the sins of the people his own. "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God." He loved his people so dearly that their faults seemed to be his own, and he blushed before the Holy God for shame of them. 2. Quite at the opposite pole of feeling is the other place in the Bible where blushing is spoken of. For Jeremiah, the broken-hearted prophet of the Lord, uses it when he has to describe the utter callousness of the people, in spite of all their sins and sorrows. "They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush." That is surely the most hopeless state of all, when one has lost the very power to feel shame and sorrow before God. The Florentines used to point to Dante in the street, whispering, "There's the man who has been in hell." But hell has come into the heart of the man who cannot blush. Oh, it is better, as Mahomet said in his old age, to blush in this world than in the next. St. John of the eagle eye and loving heart tells us that in the great day of judgment we shall either have the boldness or liberty and confidence of children, or we shall shrink away with shame "like a guilty thing surprised." (*A. N. Mackray, M.A.*)

Ver. 16. **Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.**—*The good old way*:—Were you called together to listen to the present preacher only, courtesy might demand at your hands an attentive hearing for him; but if an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ were the preacher, he would have far higher claims; and if one of the ancient prophets were the speaker, or at anyrate, could an angel or an archangel be permitted now to address you, we think you would all admit that to be inattentive to his words would be highly unbecoming: how much more so to be inattentive if the God of the whole earth were addressing you! And is He not? “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see,” &c. I. **TO THE WAY RECOMMENDED IN THE TEXT.** “Ask for the old paths, where is the good way.” The words of the text are metaphorical, and represent true religion under the aspect of a pilgrimage or a journey. If, then, you ask me, “What is the way to heaven?” I refer to the words of the Lord Jesus when speaking to Thomas. “I,” said He, “am the way.” “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” Christ is the way. He is the way from sin to holiness,—from darkness to light,—from bondage to liberty,—from misery to happiness,—from the gates of hell to the throne of heaven. But how is He the way? By His example: for “leaving us an example, we should follow His steps.” By His doctrine: for “we know that He is true, and teaches the way of God in truth.” By His sacrificial death: for “we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.” By His Spirit: when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all the truth. How, then, are we to walk in the way? By “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Except ye repent ye shall all perish.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” “He that believeth shall not perish.” But what are the epithets by which the way is described in our text? The way is not “the broad way” that leadeth to destruction; nor “the hard way,” pursued by transgressors; nor the way that only seemeth right to a man, while the end thereof is death; but it is the good way, and the old path. 1. It is an old way. True, there are persons who more than insinuate that the way, as just described to you, is a new thing. They say the way to heaven is not now what it formerly was, if our definition is correct. But what have we said? Have we not affirmed that salvation is by Christ, and through Him only? Have we not said that repentance and faith are the conditions of obtaining it from Him? And is this new doctrine? Why, this doctrine is as old as the days of Wesley and Whitfield, for they proclaimed it in England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and America. But go a step further back. What were the leading doctrines of the illustrious Reformers? For what were they traduced, slandered, excommunicated, and martyred, but for this? They asserted that penance was a human prescription—that works of supererogation were a delusion—that images, beads, holy water, crucifixes, and relics were but “sanctified nonsense”—that Christ was the only mediator between God and man. But we go further still. What did our Lord and the apostles themselves teach? They preached “repent and believe!” Nor do we stop here. What did the prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Malachi, and the rest—who flourished from seven hundred to a thousand years anterior to the Christian era teach? Did not they speak of the promised seed, the Messiah, the Redeemer, in whom men should believe, and by whom they should be saved? Go to that splendid treasury of ecclesiastical biography—the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and look at the fourth verse: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead, yet speaketh.” Well, then, some three thousand years elapsed between the time of Abel’s believing and that of Jeremiah’s preaching, and the way had been tried during the whole of that long period, and was therefore properly called by the prophet “the old path.” Oh no; we bring no new doctrine to your ears, no new way before your eyes. We grant you that some of the circumstantialities of religion have been changed since the days of Abel; but the essentials have remained the same. A Saviour, a mediator, a sacrifice, an atonement; repentance, faith, prayer, and holy living—these all abide ever. The way is called new by the apostle, in reference to that fuller and clearer development of it furnished by the life and death of the Lord Jesus; and even when contrasting it with those ritualistic observances on which the Jews had long laid more than sufficient stress: but in all ages Christ has been the Saviour of men, and faith in Him the prime condition

of salvation. 2. The text speaks of this way as a good one. "Where is the good way?" It is not only a good way, but the good way—good emphatically; the only good way, therefore, par excellence, the good way. God is the author of it, and He is good. He is the good Being: His name God implies this, as it is a contraction of the adjective "good." Christ is the way, and He is good. Pilate's question, "What evil hath He done?" remains still unanswered. The Holy Spirit recommends this way; and He would not recommend anything evil. The Bible is a good book—all insinuations by scoffers to the contrary notwithstanding,—and it strongly urges us to pursue this way. There have been—and, thank God! still are—some good men in the world, bad as it is; and they have travelled, or are travelling in this way. However vile they may have been ere entering this way, they became virtuous and happy when they began to travel on this path. Men have said the way of salvation by faith in the merits of another is not good, for it will lead to licentiousness—to latitudinarianism. But such men speak without experience. The faith that saves us is not a nominal thing—not merely speculative, but practical, evangelical faith. "Show me thy faith without thy works," O objector, "and I will show thee my faith by my works." Ah, there it is. This faith of ours works, and has works; "it works by love, and purifies the heart." While we repose on the merits of the Saviour, we copy the example of the Saviour; while we believe He died for us, we exhibit the genuineness of our belief by a holy life. II. THE DUTY THE TEXT ENJOINS. "Stand ye in the ways," &c. 1. "Stand in the ways, and see." These words seem to refer to the position of a traveller on foot, who, in prosecuting his pilgrimage, has reached a point where there is a junction of several roads; and who is perplexed by this circumstance, and at a loss which way to pursue. What can he do in this case? The text says, "Stand," halt, ere you go astray, and try to ascertain the proper direction, or you may lose time in losing your way, and perchance may have to retrace your steps, amid the jeers of witnesses, and under the self-inflicted penalty of regretful reproach. He takes from his pocket a book and a map, from which he learns that the road to the right goes to one place, that to the left to another, but the one straight on to the place of his destination. He then, after due examination, prosecutes his pilgrimage with pleasurable satisfaction; having no tormenting doubts as to his course, but a strong assurance of reaching, by and by, the desired end. Now, the traveller to eternity—the man in search of "the path of life"—has been graciously provided with an "itinerary"; that is, God's own road-book, the Bible. Hence, says the Saviour, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." Go, then, fellow-traveller, to the ever-blessed book; pore over its lessons; study its precepts; imitate its examples; and realise its promises. 2. "Ask for the way." See that man with his map and book; he is still perplexed somewhat; he wants counsel; he needs a guide; let him ask advice of those who know by experience what he has yet to learn. Ah! up comes a person who knows the road intimately, who has travelled along it these many years, and who loves to give his best practical advice to all inquirers. Well, ask him. He is a Gospel minister, or some old weather-beaten pilgrim, who has borne the heat of many a summer, and the stormy blasts of many a winter; he will be right glad to tell thee the way thou shouldst go. And, if he fail, there is a Guide who never will; for, "when the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all the truth." 3. "Walk therein." Yes, it avails not what we read, how much information we acquire, with whomsoever we converse, or even how often we pray, unless we "walk in the way." John Bunyan tells us of a Mr. Talkative, who was very ready and fluent in religious discussions and conversations; but who left the practical part of religion to others. Alas! that the descendants of that personage are not extinct. Remember that no man can get to heaven by looking at maps of the road, or conversing with those who are journeying thitherward; we must all "walk in the way." III. TO THE BLESSING PROMISED. "Ye shall find rest for your souls." The word "rest" is one of the sweetest monosyllables in our language. Robert Hall said he could think of the word *tear* till he wept; I could think of the word *rest* till I smiled. After a paroxysm of pain, how delicious is ease and rest! after a hard day's toil, how delightful to retire to rest! And if rest of the body be sweet, sweeter still is rest for the soul. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Rest for the soul we all long to find; we cannot help it. We must be in quest of rest do what we may. Peace, happiness, mental quietude, rest, every man of all things desiderates. But where may it

be found? Secularists and quondam socialists say in gratifying our animal passions; the miser—significant name, literally miserable—hopes to find it among golden gains; the ambitious climbs up the rugged heights of power and fame, and hopes to desecrate it there; but the Christian is the only man who can exclaim with the exulting Greek, Eureka! Eureka! I have found it! (*W. Antliff, D.D.*)

The ancient paths :—Transition is easy from an outward physical path to a moral meaning: roads men walk with their feet suggest the road men's thoughts habitually walk in, the path in which their feelings are accustomed to move, the way in which their conduct naturally flows. In this secondary sense, use text to point out the necessity, in all who would go right, of keeping upon the old ways, the ascertained ways, which, in the experience of mankind, have been proved beneficial.

I. OUR BOAST OF NOVELTY, OUR GLORIFYING IN OUR NEWNESS, AS IF WE WERE IN ADVANCE OF EVERYBODY AND EVERYTHING ELSE, IS A FANCIFUL MISTAKE. Our thoughts, and all the channels of our thoughts, are the result of the thought and experience of thousands of years that are gone by. Political habits and customs, knowledge of right and equity, have been gradually unfolded from ages past. Combinations are new, elements are old.

II. THE PRESENT TIME IS NOTICEABLE FOR AN EXTRAORDINARY OUTBREAK OF ACTIVITY ALONG NEW LINES OF THOUGHT AND BELIEF. 1. Men are inclined to doubt generally the social and moral results of past experience, to repudiate long-accepted social maxims and customs. 2. General distrust is being thrown upon religious teachings: not positive unbelief, but uncertainty. And by having confidence in religion its real power is destroyed. Thus thousands are abandoning old paths—old thoughts, usages, customs, habits, convictions, virtues.

III. THERE ARE CERTAIN GREAT PERMANENCIES OF THOUGHT, CHARACTER, AND CUSTOM, ESPECIALLY NECESSARY IN OUR TIME. 1. Moral and social progress can never be so rapid as physical developments. Men cannot be changed in their principles, feelings, and inner life in the same ratio as external changes go on. 2. There is danger in giving up any belief or custom which has been entwined in our moral sense. Regard as sacred the first principles of truth. 3. In the transition from a lower to a higher form of belief there is peril. Hence, we are not to think it our duty in a headlong way to change men's beliefs simply because they are erroneous. As if changing from one mode of belief to another was going to change the conscience, reason, moral susceptibility, and character.

IV. THE RELINQUISHMENT OF TRUST OR OF PRACTICE SHOULD ALWAYS BE FROM WORSE TO BETTER. If you want a traveller to have a better road, make that better road, and then he will need no argument to persuade him to walk in it. If you are teaching that one intellectual system is better than another, and that one religious organisation, church, or creed, is better, prove it by presenting better fruit than the other, and men will need little argument beyond. If a Church breeds meekness, fortitude, love, courage, disinterestedness; if it makes noble men—uncrowned but undoubted princes,—then it is a Church, a living epistle which will convince men.

V. ALL NEW TRUTHS, LIKE NEW WINES, MUST HAVE A PERIOD OF FERMENTATION. 1. All truths are at first on probation; must be scrutinised, ransacked, vindicated. 2. Guard against wild and unseasonable urgency in throwing off traditional faiths and truths, for those you can discover for yourselves. Accept what other men construct for you. We are so related, by the laws of God, one to another, that no man can think out everything for himself.

VI. WE DO WELL TO LOOK CAUTIOUSLY AT NEW TRUTHS AND THOSE WHO ADVOCATE THEM. There is a conceit, a dogmatism, a bigotry of science, as really as there is of religion. Application—1. All the tendencies which narrow the moral sense and enlarge the liberty of the passions are dangerous. 2. All tendencies which increase self-conceit are to be suspected and disowned. 3. Those tendencies which extinguish in a man all spiritual elements, such as arise from faith in God, in our spirituality and immortality, must inevitably degrade our manhood. 4. All tendencies which take away your hope of and belief in another world, take away your motive for striving to reach a higher life. Without this hope men will have a weary pilgrimage in a world of unbelief. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

The old paths :—**I. THE OLD PATHS ARE TO BE DISTINGUISHED FROM THEOLOGICAL CREEDS AND DOGMAS.** Lifted upon the shoulders of many generations, with opportunities for interpreting the Bible in the light of a developing Christianity, it would be strange if our horizon had not increased. Think as those men thought—not necessarily what they thought.

II. A RETURN TO THE "OLD PATHS" DOES NOT CALL US AWAY FROM VIGOROUS LIFE. Wherever human thought, in obedience to its best nature, essays to go, wherever desire for higher and better things reaches out, there are

the paths of the Lord. They are as "the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Treading them, "every power finds sweet employ."

III. SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OLD PATHS. 1. They are plain. True, the fogs sometimes hang low upon them as upon worldly ways; but we can always, in the darkest hour, see one step before us, and that taken, we can see another. The engineer cannot see his track all the way from New York to Albany, but in the heaviest night he trusts his head-light and keeps on his way. So let the Christian do. 2. They are unchanging. God's paths, like Himself, are "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." 3. They are paths of righteousness (Psa. xxiii. 3). Old coins lose their royal stamp by much handling. So with some of our grandest words. Righteousness is one of them. It is not formalism, it is not morality. It is right living, with a pure heart as its source. 4. They are paths of mercy (Psa. xxv. 10). 5. They are paths of plenty (Psa. lxxv. 11). What a struggle men have for mere existence! They rise early and sit up late and eat the bread of affliction. They have left the paths of the Lord. They have chased phantoms. They must endure for the time the fruit of their doings. Yet, notwithstanding these seeming exceptions, the precious promise abides (Psa. xxxvii. 3). 6. They are paths of life (Prov. ii. 19). What a path that where Christ is the support of our steps, guide of our way, and the crown of our journey's end! 7. They are paths of peace (Prov. iii. 17; Isa. xxvi. 3). There is no peace but in the narrow way where God gives pardon and reconciliation. 8. They are His paths (Isa. ii. 3). It is not possible, in a spiritual sense, that God should give us anything and not give us Himself. Without Himself the graces of the Spirit are only names. IV. HOW TO FIND THESE PATHS. 1. By standing. How hard it is to stop and stand still and think and search! 2. By seeing. With open eyes we may see whether the path be an old path, whether it is macadamised with living truth, whether they who are upon it wear the livery of the Great King.

3. By asking. Men are ever ready to ask counsel in worldly things. Why not of God and His servants in regard to heavenly things? "Ask, and ye shall receive." 4. By walking. Having used sight and tongue and thoughts, we are then to act. God has united faith and works, prayer and activity. V. THE PROMISE TO THOSE WHO OBEY. "Rest." (*E. P. Ingersoll, D.D.*) *Novelty in religion exploded*:—Novelty is a term which, when applied to man, always involves a degree of previous ignorance. The astronomer finds out new stars, the botanist new plants, the linguist new tongues, the geometrician new modes of proof and illustration, the politician new laws, the geographer new islands, the navigator new creeks, anchorages and havens, the tradesman new articles of commerce, the artificer and mechanic new methods of accomplishing the work of their hands. Each successive generation, in a civilised country especially, makes advancement on the experiments of the former. In religious matters, however, it is different. We are to expect no new Bible, no new ordinances, no new Messiah, no new discoveries in the substance of truth and piety, any more than we look for a new sun, moon, and seasons, in the institutions of nature. We allow, indeed, that in ourselves, as we pass from a state of unregeneracy to that of renewal, "old things pass away, and all things become new"; that in the progress of sanctification, there is a succession of discoveries, as we grow in knowledge and grace; that in the pursuit of schemes of usefulness, new modes of operation may be struck out; but as to all the rest, it is established by the Great Head of the Church to be subjected to no alteration until the time of the restitution of all things, when there shall be a "new heaven and earth," &c. I. TRACE THE GOOD OLD WAY. 1. There is the way of theory. This will be found in its grand and essential elements in the Word of truth; for this is the chart or map in which the path is laid down in which the pious have walked from the beginning. 2. There is the way of experience, or the application of these truths to the mind by such an influence and in such a way as to render them living principles of activity and enjoyment. Repentance for sin, dependence, devotion, &c. 3. There is the way of practice; and this with regard to God and our fellow-creatures. II. SHOW WHAT IS YOUR DUTY WITH RESPECT TO THE PATH WHICH HAS BEEN DESCRIBED. 1. Primarily, to institute a serious, a deliberate and cautious inquiry, that you may ascertain whether you are in the right way. One grand reason why many who profess to make the inquiry "What is truth?" do not succeed, is, that they indulge in a light, trifling temper of mind, quite unsuited to the character of their avowed engagement, and highly offensive to God. 2. Steadily pursue the path you have ascertained to be right. Aim to be established, strengthened, settled on your most holy faith, and guard against that

versatility which will be an effective preventive to sanctification, comfort, and usefulness. With walking we always connect the idea, not of habit only, but of progress. Your knowledge, your sacred virtues, your practical obedience should be always on the advance. Conclusion—1. The lamentable consequences of a refusal to walk in this way. 2. The inestimable advantages of walking in the good old way. (*John Clayton.*) *The old paths*.—Perhaps the chief danger attending modern progress is the neglect of antiquity. This does not apply to literature and art, but to science and religion. A man who aspires to excellence in letters or art must go on pilgrimage to the old paths, and having found them must abide in them. Take the single example of sculpture. What has been gained for this art in the advancement of later times? Nothing has been gained, but much lost which can never be recovered. The most celebrated work of recent artists in stone is little more than an imitation of the masterpieces of Athens executed between two and three thousand years ago. The hope of the learner in this profession is to stand in the old paths. With some qualifications the same is true of literature. The Greek and Roman classics are still our teachers; and there is no prospect of the immediate declension of their authority. No liberal education is supposed to be possible without the languages of antiquity and the compositions that adorn them. Scientific culture has been repaid by abundant fruit in recent years: but the losses sustained by science through our ignorance of antiquity are inconceivable. Students in science will be the first to acknowledge and deplore this loss. But while literature cannot neglect the old paths, and science is devoutly engaged in retracing her lost ways, religion is in imminent danger of drifting from her ancient landmarks. The peril I desire to point out is not new in the history of the Christian faith. There is something in his nature which makes a human being feel after a God; and this act of search would be far more likely to touch the object sought when the race was young, when the impressions received were new, uncorrupted by speculation, unfettered by tradition, than at this time when the race is old and our impressions of the self within us, and of surrounding nature, are unconsciously weighted and often made false by hereditary influences, and by misleading ideas that swarm about us in childhood and are the spring of errors which it is the most difficult task of education to discover and correct. This invariable tendency to look for truth and wisdom and goodness, not to the possibilities of the present, not even to the lessons of the immediate past, but to the records and traditions of a remote age, is a striking confirmation of the biblical history of mankind. That wistful looking back on the part of the nations is a pathetic sign that something is missing which once was ours when heaven and truth were nearer to this earth than they are now. When I bring these problems to the ancient ways of God that, setting out from the creation of man and following the race, converge upon Christ, I discover the clue that leads to their interpretation. The old paths ran into Christ. His attitude towards the men who flourished before Him was neither hostile nor independent. He spoke of them with reverence; He quoted their teaching in support of His own claims; He proved that that teaching when divided from Himself was not only incomplete, but in some cases had no meaning; that He, in fact, was the complement of the older wisdom. He dwelt not only with contemporaries, but in the old paths as the Illuminating Presence of the past. "Before Abraham was, I am." He lighted up the parables of the sages; He harmonised prediction with history, and type with the fulfilling event or person. And as the old paths met in Christ—as He was the "Way" to which all other paths and ways led the traveller, not only thoroughfares defined and laid down in systems of law and belief, but irregular tracks made by earnest but wandering feet in search of the Highway; as He was the "Truth," in which all moral intimations, ideas, and aspirations found their fulfilment and satisfaction; as He was the "Life," in which all the nobler elements of the heart attained their highest purity and their perfect expression—so He is now the centre and resting-place of all doctrine, of all inquiry, and of all faith. What will be the result of the attempt to make the New Testament a modern publication? We smooth a hardness here, we read in a meaning there, we hide the significance of this doctrine behind the assumed importance of that, on the plea of keeping the Book in touch with a scientific age. There will be no end to this recasting until we end the Bible itself. We share the conquests of science, and partake the renown of scientific men; but theirs is the truth of research, ours is the truth of revelation. Their conclusions are necessarily subject to revision; many of them perish outright; but the Word of our God abideth, and shall stand

for ever. (*E. E. Jenkins, LL.D.*) *The old paths* :—I. EXCELLENT GENERAL ADVICE. "Stand, and see, and ask." I take these words to be a call to thought and consideration. Now, to set men thinking is one great object which every teacher of religion should always keep before him. Serious thought, in short, is one of the first steps towards heaven. There are but few, I suspect, who deliberately and calmly choose evil, refuse good, turn their back on God, and resolve to serve sin as sin. The most part are what they are because they began their present course without thought. They would not take the trouble to look forward and consider the consequences of their conduct. By thoughtless actions they created habits which have become second nature to them. They have got into a groove now, and nothing but a special miracle of grace will stop them. There are none, we must all be aware, who bring themselves into so much trouble by want of thinking as the young. Too often they choose in haste a wrong profession or business, and find after two or three years, that they have made an irretrievable mistake, and, if I may borrow a railway phrase, have got on the wrong line of rails. But the young are not the only persons who need the exhortation of the text in this day. It is pre-eminently advice for the times. Hurry is the characteristic of the age in which we live. On every side you see the many driving furiously, like Jehu, after business or politics. They seem unable to find time for calm, quiet, serious reflection about their souls and a world to come. Men and brethren, consider your ways. Beware of the infection of the times. II. A PARTICULAR DIRECTION. "Ask for the old paths." We want a return to the old paths of our reformers. I grant they were rough workmen, and made some mistakes. They worked under immense difficulties, and deserve tender judgment and fair consideration. But they revived out of the dust grand foundation truths which had been long buried and forgotten. By embalming those truths in our Articles and Liturgy, by incessantly pressing them on the attention of our forefathers, they changed the whole character of this nation, and raised a standard of true doctrine and practice, which, after three centuries, is a power in the land, and has an insensible influence on English character to this very day. Can we mend these old paths? Novelty is the idol of the day. But I have yet to learn that all new views of religion are necessarily better than the old. It is not so in the work of men's hands. I doubt if this nineteenth century could produce an architect who could design better buildings than the Parthenon or Coliseum, or a mason who could rear fabrics which will last so long. It certainly is not so in the work of men's minds. Thucydides is not superseded by Macaulay, nor Homer by Milton. Why, then, are we to suppose that old theology is necessarily inferior to new? I ask boldly, What extensive good has ever been done in the world, except by the theology of the "old paths"? and I confidently challenge a reply. There never has been any spread of the Gospel, any conversion of nations or countries, any successful evangelistic work, excepting by the old-fashioned distinct doctrines of the early Christians and the reformers. III. A PRECIOUS PROMISE. "Ye shall find rest to your souls." Let it never be forgotten that rest of conscience is the secret want of a vast portion of mankind. The labouring and heavy-laden are everywhere: they are a multitude that man can scarcely number; they are to be found in every climate and in every country under the sun. Everywhere you will find trouble, care, sorrow, anxiety, murmuring, discontent, and unrest. Did God create man at the beginning to be unhappy? Most certainly not. Are human governments to blame because men are not happy? At most to a very slight extent. The fault lies far too deep to be reached by human laws. Sin and departure from God are the true reasons why men are everywhere restless, labouring, and heavy-laden. Sin is the universal disease which infects the whole earth. The rest that Christ gives in the "old paths" is an inward thing. It is rest of heart, rest of conscience, rest of mind, rest of affection, rest of will. (*Bishop J. C. Ryle.*) *Standing in the old paths* :—I. THE DANGERS OF JUDGING OF RELIGION, WITHOUT LONG AND DILIGENT EXAMINATION. Happy would it be for the present age if men were distrustful of their own abilities. II. THE REASONABLENESS OF SEARCHING INTO ANTIQUITY, OR OF ASKING FOR THE OLD PATHS. With regard to the order and government of the primitive Church, we may doubtless follow their authority with perfect security; they could not possibly be ignorant of laws executed, and customs practised, by themselves; nor would they, even supposing them corrupt, serve any interests of their own, by handing down false accounts to posterity. Nor is this the only, though perhaps the chief use of these writers; for, in matters of faith, and points of doctrine, those, at least, who lived in the

ages nearest to the times of the apostles, undoubtedly deserve to be consulted. The oral doctrines, and occasional explications of the apostles, must have been treasured up in the memory of their audiences, and transmitted for some time from father to son. III. THE HAPPINESS WHICH ATTENDS A WELL-GROUNDED BELIEF AND STEADY PRACTICE OF RELIGION. Suspense and uncertainty distract the soul, disturb its motions, and retard its operations; while we doubt in what manner to worship God, there is great danger lest we should neglect to worship Him at all. There is a much closer connection between practice and speculation than is generally imagined. A man disquieted with scruples concerning any important article of religion, will, for the most part, find himself indifferent and cold, even to those duties which he practised before with the most active diligence and ardent satisfaction. Let him then ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and he shall find rest for his soul. (*S. Johnson, LL.D.*)

On the appeal to antiquity in matters of religion:—The appeal to antiquity is worth your closest observation, as one which may as well be made in our own days as in those of the prophet Jeremiah. The paths which are to be sought for are “the old paths,” and it is their age which seems represented as giving them safety. Now it were quite idle to assert that this is in all cases a sound view, or that it will necessarily hold good when applied to the businesses and sciences of life. If we attempted, for example, to introduce into natural philosophy, the principle that the old paths are the best, we should only be urging men to travel back to a broad waste of ignorance, and to settle themselves once more in the crudest and most erroneous of opinions. We are quite ready with the like admission, in matters of civil polity. We hold unreservedly that nothing human can come to its perfection at once; and that whilst there are certain fundamental principles which can never be swerved from with safety, the determination of the best form of government for a community demands many successive experiments; so that one generation is not to hand down its institutions to the next, as not to be violated because not to be improved. The legacy of the fathers should be their experience, and that experience should be carried by the children as a new element into their political competitions. But the principle which applies not to sciences or governments may be applicable, without reservation, to religion. Religious truth is matter of revelation, and not therefore left to be searched out and determined by successive experiments; whereas truth of any other description is only to be come at by painful investigation; and until that investigation has been carried to the farthest possible limit, we have no right to claim such a fixedness for our positions, that those who come after us must receive them as irreversible. Yet we would not have it thought, that even in matters of religion, we yield unqualified submission to the voice of antiquity. We hold that there is room for discovery, strictly and properly so called, in theology, as well as in astronomy or chemistry. We ourselves must necessarily be more advantageously circumstanced than any of our fathers, when the matter in question is the fulfilment of prophecy. Prophecy is of course nothing but anticipated history; and the further on, therefore, we live, in the march of those occurrences which are to make up the story of our globe and its tenants, the more power have we to find the foretold in the fulfilled, and thus to lessen the amount of unaccomplished prediction. Now when this exception has been made, we do not hesitate to apply our text to the disclosures of revelation, and to assert that in all disputes upon doctrines, and in all debates upon creeds, it is the part of wise men to appeal to antiquity. 1. When we speak of antiquity, we refer to Christianity in its young days, whilst the Church was still warm with her first love, and her teachers were but little removed from those who had held intercourse with Christ and His apostles. It is in this manner, for example, that we introduce the authority of antiquity into the question of infant baptism. Unless apostles baptised infants, and unless they taught that infants were to be received into the Church, it seems well-nigh incredible that those who lived near their times, and must have obtained instruction almost from their very lips, should have adopted the custom of infant baptism. We would advance another illustration of the worth of the witness of antiquity, and we fetch it from a fundamental matter of doctrine. We believe, undoubtedly, that the Bible is adapted to all ages of the world and all ranks of society; and that the Spirit which indited it, is as ready now, as in the early days of Christianity, to act as its interpreter and open up its truths. We are assured, therefore, that the sublime doctrine of the Trinity, if it, indeed, be contained in the Word of inspiration, will be made known to every prayerful and diligent student; and that there will need no acquaintance with the

creeds or the commentaries of primitive Christians, in order to the apprehending of this grand discovery of the nature of Godhead. But, at the same time, when all kinds of opinions are broached, diametrically at variance with the doctrine of the Trinity, and men labour to devise and support interpretations of Scripture which shall quite overthrow this foundation-stone of Christianity, we count it of no mean worth, that in writings which have come down to us from days just succeeding the apostolic, we can find the Trinity in unity as broadly asserted, and as clearly defined, as in any of the treatises which now professedly undertake its defence. Now you will understand, from these instances, the exact use of antiquity, in matters of religion; and the sense in which it may fairly be expected that the old paths are the right. "Where was your religion till Luther arose?" is the question broached in every dispute between the Romish Church and the Reformed. The Romish Church prides itself on being the old Church, and reproaches the Reformed with being the new. And we admit, in all frankness, that if the Romish Church made good its pretensions—if it could win for itself the praise of antiquity, and fix fairly on the Protestant newness, Popery would gain an almost unassailable position; for we are inclined to hold it as little less than an axiom in religion, that the oldest Christianity is the best. But we are quite ready to meet the Roman Catholic on the ground of antiquity; and to decide the goodness by deciding the oldness of our paths. We contend, that whatever is held in common by the two Churches may be proved from Scripture, and shown to have been maintained by the earliest Christians; but that everything received by the Romish and rejected by the Protestant, can neither be substantiated by the Bible, nor sanctioned by the practice of the primitive Church. 2. There is not one amongst you, who ought not to know something of this appeal to antiquity. We may make the like assertion in regard to the Christian Sabbath. If asked for our authority for keeping holy the first day of the week, in place of the seventh, you cannot produce a direct scriptural command; but we are in possession of such clear proof, that the apostles and their immediate successors made the first day their Sabbath, that we may claim to the observance all the force of Divine institution. This, however, we must all see, is employing the practice of antiquity where we have not a distinct precept of Scripture; in other words, we prove the right paths by proving the old paths. We are not, indeed, able to appeal to primitive Christians, and to show you this union of Church or State as being sanctioned by apostolical practice. Of course, until the rulers of the kingdom embraced the faith of Christ (and this was not of early occurrence), Christianity could not become established. But, as Milner observes, from the earliest ages of patriarchal government, when holy men were favoured with a Divine revelation, governors taught the true religion, and did not permit their subjects to propagate atheism, idolatry, or false religion. There was, as under the Jewish constitution, an unquestionable authority which the magistrates possessed in ecclesiastical regulations: so that union between Church and State, in place of being novel, can be traced up almost from the beginning of the world. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The old paths*:—

I. THE DENOMINATION. 1. "Old paths." Way of—(1) Obedience. (2) Worship. (3) Piety. 2. "Old," because—(1) Ordained from eternity. (2) Herein all the saints have walked. (3) Tried, and found pleasant and profitable. II. THE DESCRIPTION. "Good way." 1. A path may be "old," yet not "good"; this is both. 2. When may a path be called "good"? (1) When safe. (2) Direct. (3) Frequented. (4) Pleasant. (5) Firm and passable. III. THE DIRECTIONS. They who seek this path should be—1. Cautious in their observations. 2. Earnest in their inquiries. 3. Prompt in entering thereon. IV. THE DESTINATION. 1. In the journey many blessings of rest will be enjoyed, as contentment, satisfaction, cheerfulness, security. 2. Afterwards there will be fullness of rest: the path leads to eternal repose, happiness, glory. (*Sermon Framework.*) *The good old path*:—Men are travellers. No continuing city here; no rest. Days upon earth but a shadow; none abiding. Must go on—from earth, with its cares and sorrows and privileges and joys—either to heaven or hell. I. A SOLEMN EXHORTATION. 1. We should ascertain what path we are walking in. Men do not think enough about spiritual things. Many a poor misguided traveller would enter the right path and obtain eternal life if he gave heed to the things which make for his peace. (1) This examination of the path should be made immediately. Not a moment to be lost. Next step may plunge you in some deadly pit. (2) This examination should be made faithfully. Not superficially. Our being different from those around us is not enough, for we may still be wrong. Must

bring our conduct and habits of life to the standard of God's Word, and compare them with that. (3) This examination should be made prayerfully. It is useless for us to make it in our own strength or wisdom; but, influenced and guided by the Spirit of Christ, we cannot err. 2. We must not only ascertain if our way be wrong, but inquire for the right path. (1) It is here termed the old path. The way of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, good and holy of every clime and age. The everlasting Gospel has existed from eternity. (2) It is to be sought out. Eternity depends on the issue. 3. Having found the right path, we are to walk in it. Knowledge alone is not sufficient; there must be practical application of it. II. A GRACIOUS PROMISE. 1. The rest promised is of the highest kind. For the soul. The soul requires it. Burdened with sin; filled with feverish anxiety; like a ship tossed on a troubled sea. 2. This rest can be bestowed by God alone. It is the fruit of our union with Him, the result of our being His dear children. 3. In what does it consist? In our being forgiven; in our being conscious of the Divine favour; in our having the Spirit of Christ in our souls; in our dependence upon the promises. (*H. B. Ingram.*) *The good old way:—* I. THE NATURE OF THE OLD WAY FROM WHICH ADAM SO FATALLY SWERVED, AND ALL HIS DESCENDANTS WITH HIM. 1. The way of self-denial. As this principle involves resistance to temptation, control of temper and overthrow of natural inclinations and habits, it is necessarily an important ingredient of true religion; from the nature of the case, from the bare fact of its being amenable to the superior will of the Almighty, an indispensable requisite of finite perfection in all instances whatsoever. 2. The way of implicit dependence upon God. Until the foul spirit of restless discontent took possession of his breast Adam was sufficed to rest and rely for everything upon the wisdom, power, love and benignity of Him who created him; content to know no more than what He taught him, and to exercise his mental faculties and reasoning powers in entire subordination to his Superior's wish, questioning nothing, but taking everything as perfect that came from Him. The knowledge, service and worship of God were the objects of all he thought, saw, or did. Beyond them there was nothing he cared to desire or know. 3. The way of humility. "Knowledge," says St. Paul, "puffeth up, but charity edifieth." What knowledge? Not the chastened, subdued, heaven-taught and heaven-tempered wisdom which guided the soul and enlarged the understanding of Adam before he fell, but that meretricious counterfeit of it—that new delusive light, whose pride-awakening, man-flattering beams, brought first to bear on his foolish heart by the arch destroyer at the fall, allured him to his destruction. II. HOW WE MAY OBEY THE COMMAND OF THE TEXT IN RETURNING TO THIS WAY. Whoever in earnest desires to recover his lost innocence, and the forfeited favour of his Creator, and to return to that better land, that state of ineffable bliss and purity, which was the original birthright of us all, are taught in the Gospel of the grace of God that the first step in that direction is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners; which is nothing else than that filial trust or confidence we have already mentioned as displayed by Adam before he fell. III. THE NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGE, AS WELL AS DUTY, OF OBEYING THE ADVICE GIVEN IN THE TEXT. (*S. H. Simpson.*) *The respect due to antiquity:—* It has been well said by Lord Bacon, that the antiquity of past ages is the youth of the world—and therefore it is an inversion of the right order, to look for greater wisdom in some former generation than there should be in our present day. "The time in which we now live," says he, "is properly the ancient time, because now the world is ancient; and not that time which we call ancient, when we look in a retrograde direction, and by a computation backward from ourselves." There must be a delusion, then, in that homage which is given to the wisdom of antiquity, as if it bore the same superiority over the wisdom of the present times, which the wisdom of an old does over that of a young man. It is in vain to talk of Socrates, and Plato, and Aristotle. Only grant that there may still be as many good individual specimens of humanity as before; and a Socrates now, with all the additional lights which have sprung up in the course of intervening centuries to shine upon his understanding, would be a greatly wiser man than the Socrates of two thousand years ago. But however important thus to reduce the deference that is paid to antiquity; and with whatever grace and propriety it has been done by him who stands at the head of the greatest revolution in philosophy—we shall incur the danger of running into most licentious waywardness, if we receive not the principle, to which I have now adverted, with two modifications. Our first modification is, that though, in regard to all experimental truth, the world.

should be wiser now than it was centuries ago, this is the fruit not of our contempt or our heedlessness in regard to former ages, but the fruit of our most respectful attention to the lessons which their history affords. We do right in not submitting to the dictation of antiquity ; but that is no cause why we should refuse to be informed by her—for this were throwing us back again to the world's infancy, like the second childhood of him whom disease had bereft of all his recollections. And so, again, in the language of Bacon, "Antiquity deserveth that reverence, that men should make a stand thereupon, and discover what is the best way ; but when the discovery is well taken then to make progression." But there is a second modification, which, in the case of a single individual of the species, it is easy to understand, and which we shall presently apply to the whole species. We may conceive of a man, that, after many years of vicious indulgence, he is at once visited by the lights of conscience and memory ; and is enabled to contrast the dislike, and the dissatisfaction, and the dreariness of heart, which now prey on the decline of his earthly existence, with all the comparative innocence which gladdened its hopeful and happy morning. As he bethinks him of his early home, of the piety which flourished there, and that holy atmosphere in which he was taught to breathe with kindred aspirations, he cannot picture to himself the bliss and the beauty of such a scene, mellowed as it is by distance, and mingled with the dearest recollections of parents, and sisters, and other kindred now mouldering in the dust, he cannot recall for a moment this fond, though faded imagery, without sighing in the bitterness of his heart, after the good old way. Now, what applies to one individual may apply to the species. In a prolonged course of waywardness, they may have wandered very far from the truth of heaven. And after, perhaps, a whole dreary millennium of guilt and of darkness, may some gifted individual arise, who can look athwart the gloom, and descry the purer and the better age of Scripture light which lies beyond it. And as he compares all the errors and the mazes of that vast labyrinth into which so many generations had been led by the jugglery of deceivers, with that simple but shining path which conducts the believer unto glory, let us wonder not that the aspiration of his pious and patriotic heart should be for the good old way. We now see wherein it is that the modern might excel the ancient. In regard to experimental truth, he can be as much wiser than his predecessors, as the veteran and the observant sage is wiser than the unpractised stripling, to whom the world is new, and who has yet all to learn of its wonders and of its ways. The voice that is now emitted from the schools, whether of physical or of political science, is the voice of the world's antiquity. The voice emitted from the same schools, in former ages, was the voice of the world's childhood, which then gave forth in lisping utterance the conceits and the crudities of its young unchastened speculation. But in regard to things not experimental, in regard even to taste, or to imagination, or to moral principle, as well as to the stable and unchanging lessons of Divine truth, there is no such advancement. For the perfecting of these, we have not to wait the slow processes of observation and discovery, handed down from one generation to another. They address themselves more immediately to the spirit's eye ; and just as in the solar light of day, our forefathers saw the whole of visible creation as perfectly as we—so in the lights, whether of fancy, or of conscience, or of faith, they may have had as just and vivid a perception of nature's beauties ; or they may have had as ready a discrimination, and as religious a sense of all the proprieties of life ; or they may have had a veneration as solemn, and an acquaintance as profound, with the mysteries of revelation, as the men of our modern and enlightened day. And, accordingly, we have as sweet or sublime an eloquence, and as transcendent a poetry, and as much both of the exquisite and noble in all the fine arts, and a morality as delicate and dignified ; and, to crown the whole, as exalted and as informed a piety in the remoter periods of the world, as among ourselves, to whom the latter ends of the world have come. In respect of these, we are not on higher vantage-ground than many of the generations that have gone by. But neither are we on lower vantage-ground. We have access to the same objects. We are in possession of the same faculties. And, if between the age in which we live, and some bright and bygone era, there should have intervened the deep and the long-protracted haze of many centuries, whether of barbarism in taste, or of profligacy in morals, or of superstition in Christianity, it will only heighten, by comparison, to our eyes, the glories of all that is excellent ; and if again awakened to light and to liberty, it will only endear the more to our hearts the good old way. (*T. Chalmers, D.D.*) *Steadfastness in the old paths : In*

what respect should we follow old times? Now here there is this obvious maxim—what God has given us from heaven cannot be improved, what man discovers for himself does admit of improvement: we follow old times then so far as God has spoken in them; but in those respects in which God has not spoken in them, we are not bound to follow them. Now knowledge connected merely with this present world, we have been left to acquire for ourselves. How we may till our lands and increase our crops; how we may build our houses, and buy and sell and get gain; how we may cross the sea in ships; how we may make “fine linen for the merchant,” or, like Tubal-Cain, be artificers in brass and iron: as to these objects of this world, necessary indeed for the time, not lastingly important, God has given us no clear instruction. Here then we have no need to follow the old ways. Besides, in many of these arts and pursuits, there is really neither right nor wrong at all; but the good varies with times and places. Each country has its own way, which is best for itself, and bad for others. Again, God has given us no authority in questions of science. If we wish to boast about little matters, we know more about the motions of the heavenly bodies than Abraham, whose seed was in number as the stars; we can measure the earth, and fathom the sea, and weigh the air, more accurately than Moses, the inspired historian of the creation; and we can discuss the varied inhabitants of this earth better than Solomon. But let us turn to that knowledge which God has given, and which therefore does not admit of improvement by lapse of time; this is religious knowledge. God taught Adam how to please Him, and Noah, and Abraham, and Job. He has taught every nation all over the earth sufficiently for the moral training of every individual. In all these cases, the world’s part of the work has been to pervert the truth, not to disengage it from obscurity. The new ways are the crooked ones. The nearer we mount up to the time of Adam, or Noah, or Abraham, or Job, the purer light of truth we gain; as we recede from it we meet with superstitious, fanatical excesses, idolatries, and immoralities. So again in the case of the Jewish Church, since God expressly gave them a precise law, it is clear man could not improve upon it; he could but add the “traditions of men.” Lastly, in the Christian Church, we cannot add or take away, as regards the doctrines that are contained in the inspired volume, as regards the faith once delivered to the saints. Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. iii. 11). But it may be said that, though the Word of God is an infallible rule of faith, yet it requires interpreting, and why, as time goes on, should we not discover in it more than we at present know on the subject of religion and morals? But this is hardly a question of practical importance to us as individuals; for in truth a very little knowledge is enough for teaching a man his duty: and, since Scripture is intended to teach us our duty, surely it was never intended as a storehouse of mere knowledge. Little knowledge is required for religious obedience. The poor and rich, the learned and unlearned, are here on a level. We have all of us the means of doing our duty; we have not the will, and this no knowledge can give. We have need to subdue our own minds, and this no other person can do for us. Practical religious knowledge is a personal gift, and, further, a gift from God; and, therefore, as experience has hitherto shown, more likely to be obscured than advanced by the lapse of time. But further, we know of the existence of an evil principle in the world, corrupting and resisting the truth in its measure, according to the truth’s clearness and purity. Our Saviour, who was the truth itself, was the most spitefully entreated of all by the world. It has been the case with His followers too. The purer and more valuable the gift which God bestows, far from this being a security for the truth’s abiding and advancing, rather the more grievously has been the gift abused (1 John ii. 18; 2 Tim. iii. 13). Such is the case as regards the knowledge of our duty,—that kind of knowledge which alone is really worth earnest seeking. And there is an important reason why we should acquiesce in it;—because the conviction that things are so has no slight influence in forming our minds into that perfection of the religious character at which it is our duty ever to be aiming. While we think it possible to make some great and important improvements in the subject of religion, we shall be unsettled, restless, impatient; we shall be drawn from the consideration of improving ourselves, and from using the day while it is given us, by the visions of a deceitful hope, which promises to make rich but tendeth to penury. On the other hand, as we cease to be theorists we shall become practical men; we shall have less of self-confidence and arrogance, more of inward humility and diffidence; we shall be less likely to despise others, and think of our own.

intellectual powers with less complacency. It is one great peculiarity of the Christian's character to be dependent; to be willing to serve, and to rejoice in the permission; to be able to view himself in a subordinate place; to love to sit in the dust. To his ears the words of the text are as sweet music: "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths," &c. The history of the old dispensation affords us a remarkable confirmation of what has been argued; for in the time of the law there was an increase of religious knowledge by fresh revelations. From the time of Samuel especially to the time of Malachi, the Church was bid look forward for a growing illumination, which, though not necessary for religious obedience, subserved the establishment of religious comfort. Now, observe how careful the inspired prophets of Israel are to prevent any kind of disrespect being shown to the memory of former times, on account of that increase of religious knowledge with which the later ages were favoured; and if such reverence for the past were a duty among the Jews when the Saviour was still to come, much more is it the duty of Christians. Now, as to the reverence enjoined and taught the Jews towards persons and times past, we may notice first the commandment given them to honour and obey their parents and elders. This, indeed, is a natural law. But that very circumstance surely gives force to the express and repeated injunctions given them to observe it, sanctioned too (as it was) with a special promise. But, further, to bind them to the observance of this duty, the past was made the pledge of the future, hope was grounded upon memory; all prayer for favour sent them back to the old mercies of God. "The Lord hath been mindful of us, He will bless us"; this was the form of their humble expectation. Lastly, as Moses directed the eyes of his people towards the line of prophets which the Lord their God was to raise up from among them, ending in the Messiah, they in turn dutifully exalt Moses, whose system they were superseding. Samuel, David, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, each in succession, bear testimony to Moses. Oh, that we had duly drunk into this spirit of reverence and godly fear. Doubtless we are far above the Jews in our privileges; we are favoured with the news of redemption; we know doctrines, which righteous men of old time earnestly desired to be told, and were not. Yet our honours are our shame, when we contrast the glory given us with our love of the world, our fear of men, our lightness of mind, our sensuality, our gloomy tempers. What need have we to look with wonder and reverence at those saints of the old covenant, who with less advantages yet so far surpassed us; and still more at those of the Christian Church, who both had higher gifts of grace and profited by them! (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*)

Religion an ancient path, and a good way:—I. THE INSTRUCTIVE VIEW GIVEN OF RELIGION. 1. It is an ancient path. The Gospel is coeval with the Fall. All the Mosaic rites and ceremonies were typical of the blessings of the Gospel dispensation, and taught the faithful worshipper to look forward to the Saviour. 2. It is a good way. (1) This is the way which God Himself, of His infinite wisdom and goodness, hath marked out for us. (2) Those who walk in it may expect all necessary guidance and direction. (3) In wisdom's way we have the best of company. (4) It will afford the purest pleasure, as we advance in it, and will infallibly conduct us to perfect and endless happiness and glory.

II. THE DUTY ENJOINED. 1. We are to use every endeavour to become acquainted with the ways of religion. (1) If we are accountable beings, what shall we think of those who seem to have formed a resolution to banish serious reflection from their minds; who plunge themselves into vice, dissipate themselves in pleasure, in vanity, and in every trifle that strikes their imagination; and devote themselves to those things, body and soul, without ever stopping to consider what they are doing, whither they are going, and what the consequences must be of their madness and folly! (2) To self-reflection we add reflection on the Word of God. (a) The way therein marked out is a way of holiness and purity. (b) The superior excellence of the Scriptures, as a rule of life, will be still further evident if we consider their high authority. 2. Our knowledge must be reduced to practice; when we have found the good way, we must walk in it. (1) We should immediately enter upon a religious course, after due information concerning it. (2) We should proceed in a religious course with the greatest care and circumspection. (3) We should endeavour to make continual progress in a religious course. 3. It is our duty to persevere in a religious course. It will not answer a traveller's purpose, who has a necessary journey before him, to proceed a little way in it, and then give over, or take a different path that leads a contrary way. So, in the ways of religion,

he, and he only, who holds out to the end shall be saved. III. THE IMPORT OF THE GRACIOUS PROMISE, BY WHICH THE DUTY HERE ENJOINED IS RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED. The rest here promised consists—1. In our being delivered from those uneasy doubts and anxieties of mind which arise from an uncertainty as to the way in which we ought to go. 2. Those who walk in the good way of religion find rest to their souls, as they are thereby delivered from the great cause of inward uneasiness—the sense of unpardoned guilt; or, in other words, from the terrors of an accusing conscience. 3. They who walk in the ways of religion find rest to their souls, as they are thereby delivered from those sources of disquietude which spring from sinful and unruly passions. 4. This good way infallibly conducts those who walk in it to uninterrupted and everlasting happiness in the world to come. (*Jas. Ross, D.D.*) *Reverence for the old things*:—Jeremiah was the most unpopular of the prophets. First because he was somewhat of a pessimist, uttering predictions which the events proved true enough, but which were painted in too gloomy colours to suit the tastes of the people. Secondly, because he never flattered. And a third, and even greater, reason for the dislike, was that they regarded him as old-fashioned, out of date, an antiquated, obsolete old fogey, with his eyes behind. He was always harping on the old times when people lived simple lives and feared God. And the people sneered at him as a sort of fossil, as a man who had been born a century too late. The people had a disease upon them which might be called Egyptomania. They wanted to form a close alliance with Egypt, and to adopt all their modes of life, their dress, furniture, luxuries, self-indulgences, political ideas, military system, laws, morals, and religion. There was to be a clean sweep made of all that Israel had loved and believed in, and by taking heathen Egypt as a model they would speedily attain to Egypt's greatness and splendour. This was the craze against which the prophet set himself, and protested in vain. For there are times when a people are determined to destroy themselves. Are the old paths always Divine, and the new ways always as dangerous as this prophet thought them? The answer has to be qualified, and there are more answers than one. The Bible does not always speak in the same voice about it. If Jeremiah looked back with lingering affection, St. Paul, who had seen the higher truth in Christ, had his eyes in front, and advised us to forget the things which are behind. And a greater than Paul has told us that every wise man will bring out of his treasury things new and old. The man who sneers at everything which is old, and fancies that wisdom always wears a brand new face, has precious little of the latter article himself. The alphabet and the simple rules of arithmetic are as ancient as an Egyptian mummy, but they are not out of date yet. We still need some of the things which Noah and Abraham prized. On the other hand, the man who sets his face against everything new is shutting his eyes to the light. I. TO BIND OURSELVES TO THE OLD PATHS IS, FOR US AT LEAST, IN MANY THINGS IMPOSSIBLE. We live in the midst of rapid movement and change, and we are carried along by it in spite of ourselves. And if we could do it, it would be paralysing. It would be the end of all healthy life and action. It is the distinguishing feature of Christian nations to be for ever casting off the old and putting on the new. It is a dead religion which stands still and makes men stand still. The spirit of life in Christ Jesus urges the world on, away from a dead past nearer to the golden age which is to be. I hardly dare bring before you the things which are going on in China. And it all comes from a blind, brutal, obstinate clinging to the old paths. The world moves on, and the Chinese refuse to move. God in His mercy has brought us out of all that, and given us eyes to see that through the ages one unceasing purpose runs, and the minds of men are widened with the process of the suns. There are a hundred things in nearly every department of life which we do and know and understand better than our fathers. We should never dream of going back in science, machinery, politics, government, freedom of thought and speech, or in religion. II. TO FORSAKE ALL THE OLD PATHS IS A FOLLY QUITE AS BLIND AND SELF-DESTRUCTIVE AS TO CLING TO THEM ALL. Wisdom was not born in the present century. It dwelt with God before the foundation of the world, and He gave some of it to men who lived thousands of years before our time. We are cleverer than the ancients in some things, but not in all. The Greek thinkers were superior to the best thinkers of to-day. We could not now produce such books as Plato wrote, and the Hebrew prophets and psalmists put all our cleverest writers into the shade. We cannot build temples as the men of old built. We cannot paint pictures or carve statues or create things of beauty as they did, We have no

Homers and Virgils, Dantes, Miltons, Shakespeares, Bunyans. In moral and religious things many of those greatest men were far in advance of our best, and we can only reach some of their excellence by learning of them and treading in the old paths. In fact, in the greatest things of life the old ways are the everlasting ways, and the only ways of safety. They have stood the test of time. For the momentous questions of morality and righteousness, worship and reverence, sin and human need, God and immortality, spiritual mysteries and things unseen, we have still to sit like children at the feet of those giants of faith, those great souls from Moses to St. Paul, who walked with God and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. We cannot dispense with the Ten Commandments yet. And as for the Sermon on the Mount, its very perfection is our despair. If you want to find the highest types of manhood, you will stand rather in the old paths than the new; you will look back rather than around you. If we want to know what sin is, we must go to the Bible and the Cross of Jesus Christ, and not to the modern ideas, which often make light of sin and treat it as irresponsible disease. If we want to learn the depth of penitence we must go to the soul-stricken David or the weeping Peter. And if we would see light beyond the grave we must go all that way back and stand with the women and the disciples before an open sepulchre. Yes, and perhaps above all things, if we would learn how to live and love, to endure and to hope, to suffer and to die, it is only in the old Bible paths that we can get the lesson. The new lights will show us how to get money faster, and to make life smoother and more comfortable, but they will not help us to be brave in difficulties, patient in cross-bearing, and fearless in the hour of death. (*J. G. Greenhough, M.A.*) *The Jesus way* :—"You must not be discouraged," said a Kiowa Indian, "if we Indians come slow. It is a long road for us to leave our old Indian ways, and we have to think a great deal; but I am sure that all the Indian people will come into the Jesus road, for I see that these white Jesus people are here to help us, and I thank them for coming. Tell the Christian people to pray for us. We are ignorant, but we want to be led aright, that we may come into the Jesus road." The quaint Indian expressions are very suggestive. It is indeed a "long road" to leave our old ways; and when we feel that we are safe in the "Jesus road," we should take time to ask ourselves if we are sure we are treading it as we should, if we are sure we are not walking in some path that seems to run parallel with it, but which in reality is leading us farther and farther away. (*Christian Age*.) *Ye shall find rest for your souls.*—*Soul rest* :—It is the distinguishing mark of the "good" and "old" way that in it men find rest for their souls. You may judge between the true Gospel and the false, between that which is of God and that which is of man, by this one test. As "by their fruits ye shall know them," so by this one fruit among the rest: Does it bring rest into the soul? If not, it is not of God; but if it brings a clear, sure, true, honest rest into the soul, then it cometh of standing in the good way. Remember that rest was the promise of the Saviour. "Come unto Me"—not to anything else, but "unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I"—Myself personally—"will give you rest." But what next? "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest"—that is another rest, still deeper, which you find in service. Oh, what a blessed Saviour we follow, who everywhere giveth us rest! Rest is enjoyed by believers now. But you will never find it anywhere else; as in no other form of religion, so in no other form of pursuit. If you follow wealth you will not find rest there. I spoke some time ago with a gentleman whom I believed to own more than a million, and I ventured to say that I should think after a man had got a million, it would not be worth while to have any more, because he could not get through that lot. "Ah," he said, "I did not know"; and, truly, I did not know; but yet I knew enough to perceive that if a man had a million millions he would not be content. And if you go in for health and pursue that with all diligence, as you might readily do, yet even in the best health there is no rest. It is a noble gift; they who lose it know how precious it is; but there is no rest in that. And as in honour, or any earthly thing, of themselves they are the occasion of disquiet; they often are a seed-plot wherein thorns grow that pierce us. But there is rest in Jesus, there is rest in a solid, simple faith in Him, but there is no rest anywhere else. **I. IN THE GOOD WAY WE FIND REST, IF WE WALK THEREIN.** 1. There is the way of pardon by an atonement. What a rest that brings to the conscience! A crushed conscience is but an echo of a truth. There is that in the nature of God and in the necessity of things, of which the conscience is but

a faint echo, and when your conscience tells you sin must be punished, it tells you the truth; there is no escape from that necessity, and because Jesus suffered in our room and stead here is a glorious gate of salvation, but there is no other. So the way of pardon by an atonement gives rest to the conscience. 2. The way of believing the Word of God as being inspired of God, and being our authoritative guide, is a great rest to the understanding. "But do you understand it all?" No, sir, I do not; I do not want to. I want to love a great deal more, but I do not care so much about growing in that particular direction of finding out riddles and being able to thread the spheres. But if I could love my Lord better, and be more like Him, I would be happy. "Well, but you do not understand it, and yet you believe it." Yes, I do; I find it is such a great thing to move my little bark side by side with a great rock, so high that I cannot see the top of it, because then I know I shall be sweetly sheltered there. Well, it is almost as good not to know as it is to know about a great many things, and sometimes better not to know, because then you can adore and consider that when faith bows before the majesty of an awful mystery she pays to God such homage as cherubim and seraphim pay Him before His throne. 3. There is a way which Christians learn of trusting their affairs with God which gives a general rest to their minds. You see, if you are truly a Christian you have not got anything, you have given it all to the Lord. Cannot you therefore trust Him with it? And pray which part of your business would you like to manage yourself? Mark it off and then make a black mark against it, for you will have no end of mischief and trouble there. Oh, happy is that man who leaves everything, soul and body, entirely in the hands of God, and is content with His Divine will. 4. The way of obedience to the Lord gives rest to the soul. He that believes in Jesus obeys Jesus. Oh, if you do right and stand fast in your integrity you shall wear that little herb called "heartease," and he that weareth that is more happy than a king; and if you can go home at night, and that little bird in your bosom, called conscience, can sweetly sing to you that you have done a right thing, you shall rest in peace. And, mark you, even as to temporal things in the long run you shall be no loser; but if you should be, you will count it an honour to lose for Christ's sake and for the right, and in the end, if you lose silver you shall gain gold. The way of obedience to Divine command gives rest to the soul. 5. The way of close communion with Christ is a way of profound rest unto the soul. Once get to be in Him, and to abide in Him, let your communion with Him be unbroken day after day, month after month, and year after year, and ye shall find rest unto your soul. II. THE REST WHICH IS FOUND BY WALKING IN THE GOOD WAY IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL. 1. There is a rest which rusts and injures the soul; but Gospel rest is of a very peculiar kind; it brings satisfaction, but it never verges on self-satisfaction. Oh, to be satisfied in Christ Jesus! Full, and therefore craving to be fuller; fed, and therefore hungering to have more. 2. Next, the rest that comes with Christ is a sense of safety, but it is not a sense of presumption. The man that is most safe in Christ is just the man that would not run any risks whatever. Secure, but not carnally secure; in safety, but not presumptuous. 3. This blessed rest creates content, but it also excites a desire of progress. The man that is perfectly content to be saved in Christ Jesus is also very anxious to grow in grace. 4. He that rests in God is also delivered from all legal fears, but he is supplied with superior motives for holiness. The fear of hell and the hope of heaven are poor motives to effort; but to feel "I cannot be lost; the blood of Christ is between me and the everlasting fire; I am bound for the everlasting kingdom, and by the certainties of the Divine promise as a believer I shall never be ashamed." III. REST OF THIS KIND OUGHT TO BE ENJOYED NOW BY EVERY CHRISTIAN. It is enjoyed by many of us, and it is a grievous error when it is not the case with all real Christians. Some of you say: "I trust I am a Christian, but I do not get much of this rest." It is your own fault. I will tell you one thing, though—you would find more rest if you walked in the middle of the way. The best walking to heaven is in the middle of the road; on either side where the hedges are there is a ditch as well. I do not care to go to heaven along the ditch, on the outside of the road. Have you never heard the American story of a gentleman who invited a friend up to his orchard to come and eat some of his apples—he had such exquisite apples? But though he invited his friend several times, he never came. At last he said: "I wish you would come and taste my fruit—it is wonderful, just in perfection now." He said: "Well, to tell you the truth, I have tasted it, and I was ill after it." "Well," said he, "how came that about?"

"Well, as I was riding along I picked up an apple that fell over into the road." "Oh, dear," he said, "you do not understand it. I went miles to buy that peculiar sort of apple to put round the edge of the orchard; that was for the boys, so that after they had once tasted that particular apple they might not think of coming any farther. But if you will go into the orchard you will find I have a very different sort of fruit inside." Now, do you know that round the margin of religion the trees of repentance and so forth grow—that fruit not over sweet to some palates. Oh, but if you would come inside, but if you would come into the very centre, what joy you would have! Surely, Christians, you have reason enough for delight. What a happy religion that is in which pleasure is a precept! "Rejoice in the Lord always" is as much a command as "Thou shalt keep the Sabbath day." Remember that, and do pray God that you may get into the very middle of the road, know you are there, and keep there year after year by Divine grace, for then you shall find rest unto your souls. Well, then, this rest ought to be enjoyed now. We ought to throw aside these anxious cares of ours; if we do not, in what respect are we better than worldlings? An excursion to heaven is the best relief from the cares of earth, and you may soon be there. Last night a friend living in Colombo, Ceylon, said, "Oh, it is a beautiful place to live in. Although it is very hot where we live, yet in a few hours we get up in the eternal snows where we shall be as cool as we wish." That is just what we are here. It is very hot: the cares and trials of life often parch us, but in five minutes we can be up there in the hill country, and behold the face of Him we love. Why do we not oftener go there? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The bugle call to rest.*—In nothing has God consulted economy less than in the provision He has made to guard us from danger; and the Divine solicitude to rescue us from ruin is strongly contrasted with our perpetual propensity to rush into it. In the moral constitution of the mind, also, the safeguards against danger are no less remarkable than the provisions for enjoyment. Why is conscience made so acutely wakeful and sensitive, but with a view to guard us against the first approaches of sin? Why is memory made so tenaciously to treasure up the results of past experience and failure, but to repress that inconsiderate eagerness which would hurry us on to ruin? In the Bible God has pre-eminently placed the strongest guards on the side of danger. I. **THE ATTRACTIVE VIEW OF RELIGION FURNISHED IN THIS ONE WORD "REST."** God might have made religion a state of penance and bondage, and it would still have been such had we been suffered to "escape so as by fire." Instead of this, He clothes His religion with attractiveness and tenderness. 1. It brings rest to the understanding by the truths it reveals. 2. It brings rest to the conscience by the pardon it imparts. 3. It brings rest by revealing an adequate object on which the affections can repose. The tendency of irreligion is to dishonour and degrade our nature, by confining us to the world and to time; that of real religion is to exalt and ennoble the mind by connecting us with God and eternity. The one leaves us to mourn, with orphaned heart; the other brings God before us as the object most worthy of our affections, and able to meet and satisfy the vast capacities of happiness which His own kindness has originated. II. **CAUSES OF THE REJECTION OF RELIGION BY THE WORLDLY AND INCONSIDERATE.** 1. A false estimate of themselves and of the evil and danger to which, in consequence of sin, they are exposed. 2. The unsuspected influence of evil habits, and the progressive and hardening tendency of unrepented sin. As Jeremy Taylor puts it: "Vice first is pleasing, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed; then the man is impenitent, then he is obstinate, then he resolves never to repent, and then he dies." 3. The injurious and delusive results of a false and formal profession of religion. Despair is a near neighbour of presumption. The system which is founded in fraud must end in delusion. It fails to satisfy, as it fails to sanctify. 4. Because the period is extremely short in which the voice of God, as a Saviour, can be heard at all. "Mercy is like the rainbow which God set in the clouds to remember mankind. It shines here as long as it is not hindered; but we must never look for it after it is night." (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

Ver. 20. **Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable.—Waste worship.**—**I. THE MANIFEST FAILURE OF THESE JEWISH OFFERINGS.** 1. By these their consecration was to be furthered. But they were foul. 2. By these their repentance was to be awakened. But they sinned shamefully. 3. By these their minds were to be directed to the Messiah. But, in their arrogance and care for mere externals, they lost sight of spiritual lessons. 4. By these God

was to be pleased and propitiated. The text indicates their complete miscarriage in this respect. II. THE INDIGNANT QUESTION AND REPUDIATION. 1. God thrusts from Himself the offensive temple-offerings. He demands the heart. Nothing is sweet to God without love. 2. God stigmatises them as purposeless and waste. 3. Worship that offends God is waste, but also something more. Heart hardening. Judgment. Punishment. Lessons—1. The most important matter about our spiritual things is their acceptableness with God. 2. Our best energies are needed, not for externals, but internals. (*W. B. Haynes.*) *Ostentatiousness of hypocrisy*:—Drones make more noise than bees, though they make neither honey nor wax. (*J. Trapp.*)

Vers. 29, 30. **The bellows are burnt.**—*The bellows burnt*:—Apply to—**I. THE PROPHET HIMSELF.** The prophet was exhausted before the people were impressed. So also with Noah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus Himself. Nor since, by apostles, confessors, zeal-consuming preachers, has the iron-hearted world become melted; but they themselves have suffered and perished amid their work. 1. It is the preacher's business to continue labouring till he is worn out. 2. The Gospel he preaches is the infallible test between the precious and the vile. **II. THE AFFLICTIONS WHICH GOD SENDS UPON UNGODLY MEN.** Sent to see if they will melt in the furnace or not. But where there is no grace in affliction the afflictions are sooner exhausted than the sinner's heart is made to melt under the heat caused thereby—*e.g.*, Pharaoh, not softened by all the plagues. Ahaz, "when he was afflicted, he sinned yet more and more." Jerusalem, often chastised, yet incorrigible. Sinners, upon whom God's judgments exert no melting power. **III. THE CHASTISEMENTS WHICH GOD SENDS UPON HIS OWN PEOPLE.** The great Refiner will have His gold pure, and will utterly remove our tin. Do not let it be said that the bellows are used till they are worn out before our afflictions melt us to repentance and cause us to let go our sins. **IV. THE TIME IS COMING WHEN THE EXCITEMENT OF UNGODLY MEN WILL FAIL THEM.** Many activities are kept up by outward energies inciting men. 1. Excitement in pursuit of wealth. Yet how little will the joys of wealth stimulate you in your last moments! 2. Excitement in pursuing fame. Alas! men burn away their lives for the approbation of fellow-creatures; and these fires will die down into darkness. 3. Living for pleasure; but satiety follows, and the flame of joy goes out. 4. Hypocrisy is with some their "bellows"; but this feigned zeal and pretended piety will end in black despair. **V. THOSE EXCITEMENTS WHICH KEEP ALIVE THE CHRISTIAN'S ZEAL.** In certain Churches we have seen great blazings of enthusiasm, misnamed "revivals," mere agitations. Genuine revivals I love, but these spurious things are fanaticism. Why was it the fire soon went out? The man who blew the bellows left the scene of excitement, and darkness ensued. Our earnestness is worthless which depends on such special ministrations. Is the fire in our soul burning less vehemently than in years past? Our obligations to live for Christ are the same; our Master's claims on our love are as strong; the objects for which we served God in the past are as important. Should we grow less heavenly the nearer we come to the New Jerusalem? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The prophet's consuming zeal and the people's unresponsiveness*:—He likens the people of Israel to a mass of metal. This mass of metal claimed to be precious ore, such as gold or silver. It was put into the furnace, the object being to fuse it, so that the pure metal should be extracted from the dross. Lead was put in with the ore to act as a flux (that being relied upon by the ancient smelters, as quick-silver now is in these more instructed days); a fire was kindled, and then the bellows were used to create an intense heat, the bellows being the prophet himself. He complains that he spake with such pathos, such energy, such force of heart, that he exhausted himself without being able to melt the people's hearts; so hard was the ore, that the bellows were burned before the metal was melted—the prophet was exhausted before the people were impressed; he had worn out his lungs, his powers of utterance; he had exhausted his mind, his powers of thought; he had broken his heart, his powers of emotion; but he could not divide the people from their sins, and separate the precious from the vile. (*Ibid.*) **The lead is consumed of the fire.**—*Refining fire*:—We mean precisely the same thing as the Hebrew prophet meant when we say, as nowadays we are so apt to say, that life is a school. People still are puzzled by the punishments of life. The discipline is strict. The rules are rigid. Oftentimes we suffer. It is not by any means all play. But there are lessons to be learned, and forbear-

ance to be used, and suffering to be borne. It seems to us narrow and foolish of Jeremiah to have fancied that the Lord raised up those great Assyrian and Babylonian nations simply for the purpose of trying and testing the Jewish people. It was narrow also of the Jews to fancy themselves the "chosen people," whom God particularly loved and wished to save. Yet all of us to-day are similarly narrow in one sense, and we have to be. We cannot free ourselves, you and I and others like us, from the conviction that we, as men and women, by virtue of the very life that is in us, are the centre and meaning of this entire universe. Believe this in some degree we must. Doubt it, and the very heavens are bleak and bare. Every system in philosophy, every article of religious faith, every discovery in science, is based, more or less directly, upon the supposition of this distinct relationship between the outer universe and the life of man. Let us use, for convenience' sake, the analogy of the prophet. We will suppose that we are placed here as the crude ore is thrown into the furnace, in order to be refined. Along what lines should the process of refinement work? Nothing is more familiar than the claim that sorrow chastens us, and hardships strengthen, and trials test. As Goethe said, "Talent is perfected in retirement, but character only in the stream of life." They tell this concerning Wendell Phillips. Whenever the great orator tended to become a little prosy in his speeches, and to lose some of his customary fire, certain young Abolitionists used to get together near the door and start a hiss. The note of disapproval never failed to arouse the lion in the speaker, and he was electrified at once into matchless eloquence. The world's agencies of trial and toil and difficulty are indeed in vain, the bellows of life are consumed most uselessly, if you and I are not made more courageous and calm and self-reliant by the process. And yet the hard things of this world ought not to be the only ones to have this refining influence. We are weak and ungrateful, and made of anything but precious metal, if we are not purified by the privileges of life, hallowed by its happiness, humbled by success. In everyday life most of us are not deficient in gratitude. We appreciate the kindness and generosity of our friends. But how few of us in comparison fall to our knees in an hour of new-born joy, or reverently think of life's higher meaning, and resolve on a rigider performance of our duties, when success has bathed us in its golden sunshine! There is no much surer test of character than this: What effect has good fortune had? If the person is innately weak to whom some power or privilege has come, he answers it by pride and selfishness and vain indulgence. He feels himself exalted; and, instead of looking up in reverence and humility to his God, he looks down with coldness on his fellow-men. Shall I tell you what is to me one of the most inspiring, beautiful sights in all the wide range of human activity and character? It is to see and know of any one truly great who has been humbled by success, and touched into infinite modesty by the consciousness of superlative ability. It is to find people refined into simplicity and gentle devoutness by the world's blandishments and distinctions and honours. And this has been the refining influence to which the noblest and the truest ones have answered. You all know, too, the saying of the distinguished, world-honoured discoverer, Sir Isaac Newton,—that he was nothing but a helpless child gathering pebbles on a boundless shore, with the great ocean of undiscovered truth stretching away beyond him. I have spoken of sorrow and of joy—the two extremes of existence—as having properly this purifying influence on life. Let me now speak broadly of certain phases of refinement which ought to appear as the result of the world's great processes. 1. First, there is the refining fire of glory, which is so abundant in the outward world. It is for us to answer it by what is known as reverence. We have not the pure metal which is sought, if we are not so refined by the worders of the world as to kneel in worship, and uplift our souls in awe. "This world is not for him who does not worship," said an ancient Persian sage; and our kindred souls give back the truth across the centuries, "This world is not for him who does not worship." 2. Again, there is the burning fact of law. All things around us are done with persistency. Everything is regular. The smallest function is precise. Surely the knowledge of such constancy should have its influence on us. It should take what is pure within us. It should appeal to the clear metal of our better selves, and make us trust. 3. Finally, the fire of utter impartiality surrounds us. The world is laid at each one's feet. The Divine bounty is not given to this person, and denied to that one; but all of us receive. And the answering refinement which should come from receptive human beings, who may doubt its nature or its need? A suggestive legend comes to us from Mohammedan writings. Abraham, it is said, once received an old man

in his tent, who, in sitting down to eat, neglected to repeat a "grace." "My custom," he said, in explanation, "is that of the fire-worshipper." Whereupon the Jewish patriarch in wrath undertook to drive him from his door. But suddenly God appeared to him, and, restraining the churlish impulse, cried: "Abraham, for one hundred years the Divine bounty has flowed out to you in sunshine and in rain; and is it for you to deny shelter to this man because his worship is not thine?" Even thus does nature speak a silent yet severe rebuke to our narrowness, our lack of sympathy, our petty distinctions and rivalries in social life. "Be broad," she cries. "Let love control your acts; to those who need, extend a helping hand." (*P. R. Frothingham.*)

CHAPTER VII.

VERS. 1-7. Stand in the gate . . . and proclaim.—Boldness in preaching:—Some preachers are traders from port to port, following the customary and approved course; others adventure over the whole ocean of human concerns. The former are hailed by the common voice of the multitude, whose cause they hold, the latter blamed as idle, often suspected of hiding deep designs, always derided as having lost all guess of the proper course. Yet, of the latter class of preachers was Paul the apostle. . . . Such adventurers, under God, this age of the world seems to us especially to want. There are ministers now to hold the flock in pasture and in safety, but where are they to make inroads upon the alien, to bring in the votaries of fashion, of literature, of sentiment, of policy, and of rank? Truly, it is not stagers who take on the customary form of their office and go the beaten round of duty, and then lie down content; but it is daring adventurers, who shall eye from the grand eminence of a holy and heavenly mind all the grievances which religion underlies, and all the obstacles which stay her course, and then descend with the self-denial and faith of an apostle to set the battle in array against them. (*Edward Irving.*) **Enter in at these gates to worship the Lord.—The character required in those who would worship God:—**The heathen had a notion that the gods would not like the service and sacrifice of any but such as were like themselves, and therefore to the sacrifice of Hercules none were to be admitted that were dwarfs; and to the sacrifice of Bacchus, a merry god, none that were sad and pensive, as not suiting their genius. An excellent truth may be drawn from their folly: he that would like to please God must be like God. (*H. G. Salter.*) **Amend your ways and your doings.—Religion, the best security to Church and State:—**I. RELIGION, AND THE GENERAL PRACTICE OF IT IN A NATION, IS THE SUBEST ESTABLISHMENT OF STATES AND KINGDOMS. 1. This is true in a natural way; because the duties of religion have a natural tendency to those things which are the foundations of that establishment, namely, peace, unity, and order. 2. But besides a natural tendency in virtue and goodness to the establishment of states and kingdoms, as many as believe religion must likewise believe that the general practice of it in a nation will be always attended with a supernatural blessing from God. For this is the result of all the declarations of God, as to the manner and rule of His dealings with mankind, whether persons or nations, that as many as faithfully serve and obey Him, shall be assuredly intitled to His favour and protection. II. IN EVERY NATION IT IS THE PROPER BUSINESS OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATES, AS SUCH, TO VINDICATE AND MAINTAIN THE HONOUR OF RELIGION. And when I am speaking of authority, and the vigorous application thereof by the magistrate, I cannot omit one thing, which is a mighty enforcement of it, a good example; which, in its nature, is the most forcible way of teaching and correcting, and without which, neither the instructions of ministers, nor the authority of magistrates, can avail, to the effectual discouragement and suppression of vice. III. WITHOUT A SERIOUS REGARD TO THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DUTIES OF RELIGION, THE GREATEST ZEAL IN OTHER MATTERS, EVEN THOUGH IT BE FOR THE ESTABLISHED WORSHIP OF GOD, WILL NOT SECURE THE DIVINE FAVOUR AND PROTECTION, EITHER TO PERSONS OR NATIONS. The external rites of religion are good helps to devotion, and proper means of maintaining order and decency in the public worship; and a zeal to preserve them, with a

serious regard to those pious and wise ends, is very laudable: but to believe that zeal for them will atone for a neglect of the moral and spiritual duties of religion is a dangerous error. (*E. Gibson, D.D.*) **The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these.**—*The folly of trusting in external privileges*:—I. We are to show THE EXTREME FOLLY OF TRUSTING TO ANY RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES, WHILE OUR HEARTS REMAIN UNRENEWED AND OUR LIVES UNHOLY. On what ground can we rely on the continuance of God's favour under such circumstances? Should we, because a friend had conferred many benefits upon us, and forgiven us many offences, be justified in supposing that there would be no limit to his endurance? Yet the Jews—and their case is not singular—seemed to claim a special right to the continued favour of God, in virtue of their religious privileges; not considering that those privileges were a free gift; that they might at any time be withdrawn, without a shadow of injustice; and that while they lasted they were intended to operate, not as inducements to presumption, but as motives to love and thankfulness and obedience. They had in themselves no spiritual efficacy. Neither the character of God, nor His promises, held out any ground of hope on which to build such a conclusion. It would not have been consistent with His holiness, or wisdom, or justice, that the sinner should escape under the plea of any national or personal privileges, however great. And His promises, both temporal and spiritual, were all made in accordance with the same principle. "If ye walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments and do them . . . then I will walk among you, and I will be your God; . . . but if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments, . . . I will set My face against you." The whole tenor of God's providential dispensations is likewise to the same effect. And accordingly, the Jews, great as were their national mercies, found on numerous occasions that they were not exempt from the just displeasure of their Divine Governor. Yet, with all these proofs of God's righteous judgments, their constant cry was, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord": they caught hold, as it were, of the horns of the altar with unhallowed hands; and, notwithstanding the threatenings of the Almighty, were ever prone to trust in those external privileges. At the very time when they were committing the grievous enormities of which the prophet Jeremiah convicts them, they were zealous for the outward worship of God, and boasted highly of their religious profession. But could any folly be greater than that of supposing that this insincere worship could satisfy Him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins? The prophet forcibly points out the extreme folly and delusiveness of such expectations: "Go," he says, "unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first; and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called unto you, but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh." Having thus considered the extreme folly of trusting to external privileges, while the heart is unrenewed and the life unholy, we are—II. TO SHOW THAT THIS FOLLY IS TOO COMMON IN ALL AGES; AND THAT WE OURSELVES, PERHAPS, ARE GUILTY OF IT. How many pride themselves in being zealous Protestants, or strict members of the Established Church, or regular attendants on public worship, while they live in the spirit of the world, and without any scriptural evidence of being in a state of favour with God! How many trust to the supposed orthodoxy of their faith; or to their zeal against infidelity, enthusiasm; while they are ignorant of the scriptural way of salvation, and indifferent to the great concern of making their calling and election sure! How many cherish a secret hope from the prayers of religious parents, the zeal and piety of their ministers. In short, innumerable are the ways in which persons deceive themselves on these subjects; fancying that the temple of the Lord is among them; and on this vain surmise remaining content and careless in their sins, and ignorant of all true religion. Now let us ask ourselves, in conclusion, whether such is our own case. On what are we placing our hopes for eternity? Are we resting upon anything superficial or external: upon anything short of genuine conversion of heart to God? True piety is not anything that can be done for us; it must be engrained in us; it must dwell in our hearts, and show its blessed effects in our conduct. (*Christian Observer.*)

Ver. 5. If ye thoroughly amend. — *Thorough amendment* :— 1. Religion has to do with character and conduct. Religion is that which “binds,” and it has a tremendous grip. It has to do not only with creeds, and forms, and rites, but with character and conduct. 2. Religion makes little of mere emotion. Some persons delight in the excitation of the sensibilities. The Master’s word is, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” This is the proof of genuine love. The mother takes her boy’s kiss as a sign of emotion, but sees in his obedience the proof of principle, which is more than mere feeling. (1) The first characteristic of true religion is a right view of sin. Our prayer should be, “Wash me thoroughly,” even as the spotted robe was in David’s day cleansed in a vat with strong acid and alkali, mauled and bruised with mallet, till the stain was gone. God uses powerful methods to purify. Some dread to be born again, because they know that they will be required to thoroughly amend their ways, i.e., “thoroughly,” as the word was formerly spelled. True amendment goes through and through to the uttermost end—clear to the furthest limit. (2) There must be not only right views, but a clean sweep of sin. The people of Israel found that those they spared of idolatrous nations were thorns in their sides and pricks in their eyes. If we do not drive sin out, sin will drive us out. What we call little sins accumulate, as do the snowflakes which stop a locomotive. We shall arrest the power and blessing of God by tolerating small transgressions. (3) Thorough amendment comprehends character and conduct—what we are and what we do. It were useless to throw our prayers into a malarious swamp and leave the source, the well-head, unclean. Pray that God’s Spirit may create “a clean heart.” Then follow conscience. The amendment enjoined in the text is a new life. Christ and the soul are firmly united, and He is the model. A little fibre, just enough to cling to the sacrament, is not enough. That Hamburg grape-vine would not have yielded you those rich clusters if the branches had not been closely united to the vine. You are Christ’s. You will hate sin because He abhors it. You will also heed Christ’s demands on your time, your income, and your strength. 3. The text promises permanency; not merely a visit, but an abode where one can root and grow, work and worship, till transplanted to heaven. (*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*) *Reformation must be thorough* :—Some men, when they attempt to reform their lives, reform those things for which they do not much care. They take the torch of God’s Word, and enter some indifferent chamber and the light blazes in, and they see that they are very sinful there; and then they look into another room, where they do not often stay, and are willing to admit that they are very sinful there; but they leave unexplored some cupboards and secret apartments where their life really is, and where they have stored up the things which are dearest to them, and which they will neither part with nor suffer rebuke for. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Vers. 9, 10. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely . . . and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?—*Fate* :—“It is my fate,” is the excuse for many a career of shame and sin. I do not think that most persons who practically rest satisfied with this explanation of the evil of their lives put it actually into words. They are content with a vague undefined feeling that some excuse or explanation of the sort is possible. Perhaps we should all escape many perils and evils if we more frequently took care to formulate our undefined thoughts into language, and carefully examine their nature. 1. Our idea of God’s dealings with us is very largely influenced by the condition of the age in which we live. The language of inspiration will be interpreted by us according to the meaning which, in other directions, we already attach to the words which it must employ; and thus the government of communities by laws has so modified our thought of the Divine government that we no longer have the rude conception of a Divine Ruler acting from caprice; we have now rather the idea of a Being who acts through the operation of great universal laws. That conception of God is so far true, and that interpretation of the words of revelation so far accurate; but there has grown up with it the thought that God acts only thus, which is false. We attribute to the action of the All-wise God the imperfections—the necessary imperfections which belong to human institutions. Now, we must not transfer to God our own finality and failure. God’s laws are universal and general; God’s dealings with men are particular and individual. As, in the physical world, we find that equilibrium is produced by the action of two equal and opposite forces, so in the moral world we have

universal irresistible laws, and we have tender loving individualisation, and the resultant of the two is God's calm and equable government of men. Everywhere we see man demanding, and by his conduct showing that he possesses that liberty of action and power of control in the material world which, to palliate his sin, he denies to belong to him in the moral world. You know that the application of heat to certain substances will generate a powerful destructive force. You know such to be a physical law, and what do you do? Do you sit down and say, It is a law of nature, and I cannot resist it? No. You say, "I find it to be a law, and I shall take care either that it shall not come into operation, or if it does come into operation, I shall construct machinery to direct its force, and so make it operate only in the direction which I choose." You ascertain certain laws of health, that infection will spread a certain disease, and do you say, The disease must spread, I cannot fight against a law? No. You take care to keep the infection away from you, to disinfect, and so prevent the operation of that law; and yet that same man when he finds that there are places which will taint his moral nature with disease, that there are scenes or pleasures which will generate in his soul a destructive force, says, "I cannot help it, these things will act so; I have no liberty." You have no liberty to prevent their acting so on you, I admit, no more than you have power to prevent fire igniting powder; but you have power to keep away from them; you have power to prevent those conditions arising under which alone the law will operate. Oh! when we know and feel the evil in the physical world, we take every precaution against its recurrence. How much less zeal and determination do we display concerning our souls! 2. To say that you have a peculiar kind of nature which cannot resist a particular class of sin is to offer to God an excuse which you would never accept from your fellow-man. You treat every one of your fellow-men as having power to resist the inclination of his natural disposition, so far as its indulgence would be injurious to you. If a man rob you or assault you, no explanation of a natural desire for acquisition or for aggression would be listened to by you as a reasonable excuse. To admit the truth of such principles of uncontrollable natural impulse would at once shake society and destroy all human government. And do you think that such excuses as you would not admit are to be accepted as excuses for, or even explanations of those sins which do not happen to fall within the category of legal crimes, but which, much more than those crimes for which the law imprisons and hangs, are destroying the moral order of God's universe, and outraging the highest and noblest principles of truth, and purity, and love? But it cannot be denied that we have strong natural dispositions and passions which we have been given independently of ourselves, and for the possession of which we cannot with justice be held responsible? Certainly—and you never find fault with a man for any faculty or temper which he may have—but you do hold him responsible for the direction and control of it. We can point to countless noble careers to show how the strong impulses of individual natures are indeed irresistible, but their action is controllable. The great heroes whom we justly reverence, who rise above us as some snow-capped mountain towers above the dead level of a low-lying plain, are not those who have destroyed, but those who have preserved and used aright the natural impulses and passions which had been given them. That is the true meaning of such lives as those of St. Paul, or Martin Luther—St. Augustine, or John Bunyan. Ay, and there are many still amongst us who use their natural dispositions and their natural affections, their natural passions—even their natural beauty, which might have been used to lure souls to hell—to win many a one to a nobler and purer life. What a solemn responsibility, then, is the right use of our natural disposition and talents, for others as well as for ourselves. To you, my young friends, especially, I would say, Do try and begin early to recognise the solemnity of life. Do not be downhearted or dismayed if, after you have felt the power of Christ's death, and when you would do good, evil is present with you. Do not let such moments harden you. Try and realise then all the love and mercy and tenderness with which the crucified Lord looks upon you, as He once looked on the fallen apostle, and, like him, "go forth and weep bitterly." Then it will be well with you. Sin shall not reign in you, though for the moment it seems to have conquered you. (*T. T. Shore, M.A.*) *On necessity*.—I. MEN ARE VERY FOND OF ASCRIBING THEIR SINS TO THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE DEVIL, and in such a way as, in the main, to put the responsibility upon him. It is surely taught in the Word of God that evil spirits do foment

wickedness ; that they suggest it ; that they persuade men to it. It is not taught that they infuse it, and perform it in men. It is taught that Satan persuades men to sin ; but the men do the sinning—not he. The power of temptation depends upon two elements : first, the power of presenting inducement or motive on the part of the tempter ; and, secondly and mainly, the strength in the victim of the passion to which this motive is presented. No one could tempt to pride a man that had not already a powerful tendency to pride. The chord must be there before the hand of the harper can bring out the tone. No one could be tempted to avarice that had not a predisposition to the love of property. No man could be tempted to hatred, or to cruelty, or to appetites, one or many, unless there pre-existed a tendency in that direction. Hence, the simple fact of temptation is, that you do wrong, while Satan merely asks you to do it. It is your act. It may be his suggestion, it may be his thought ; but it is your performance. And you do it with plenary freedom, urged, fervered, it may be, by him. II. MEN RELIEVE THEMSELVES, OR SEEK TO DO SO, FROM THE SENSE OF GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY, BY ATTRIBUTING THEIR SINS TO THEIR FELLOW-MEN. They admit the wrong, but they put in the plea that the circumstances were such that they could not help committing it. The example and impunity of other men in transgression are pleaded, the persuasions and influences of other men are pleaded, certain relations to other men are pleaded, as if these things were compulsory. Men attribute their sins to public sentiment, to the customs of the times, to the habits of the community. Are they intemperate ? Intemperance is customary in the circle in which they walk. Are they unscrupulous in their dealings ? Unscrupulousness is the law of the profession which they follow. And when they have been charged with continuous sinning—with the violation of conscience, with the violation of purity, with the violation of temperance, with the violation of honesty or honour—they have still pleaded, “ Yes, we have sinned ; but we are not exceptional ; we do not stand alone ; we are nouns of multitude ; all men do these things ”—as if the inference was, “ Because all men do them, they are not so culpable in us.” Men may sin by wholesale ; but they are punished by retail. There were never such dividends in any bank on earth as are apportioned in the court of conscience. There every man not only is *particeps criminis* in the transgression which he joins others in committing, but he is responsible for the whole sin, though thousands and millions participate with him in it. It is an exceedingly fashionable habit at present to put upon society the guilt of the transgressions of men. Are men idle, and is there deduced from idleness the accustomed fruit ? Society has not made the suitable provisions for these men, or they would not have been idle ! Are men insubordinate, and do they violate the laws ? Society has not made proper laws for such men ! They have not by society been rightly educated, or they would not have been insubordinate ! Are men full of vices and crimes that spring from fertile ignorance ? Society, as a schoolmaster, ought not to have let them be ignorant ! Do men murder ? Society is to blame ! Do men steal ? Society is the responsible scapegoat for thieves ! You shall find philosophers on every side that wag their heads and say, “ Now you see that society does not fulfil its duties and functions : society ought to have stopped these things.” I will admit that in society there are many things that men ought to do which are left undone, and many things that they ought to leave undone which are done ; but to say that upon society is to be put the responsibilities of the individual characters of all its citizens, is to imply that you give to society power to enforce those responsibilities ; and if you give to society that power, you give it a power such as was never contemplated even by the extremest despotic theory of government. Society may in some instances be the tempter, and may in some instances have its individual part in the wrong-doing of its citizens ; but it does not take away from any man that does wrong, the whole, undivided, personal responsibility of that wrong. III. THE LAST CLASS OF THE CATEGORY OF EXCUSES IS THAT OF FATALITY. “ We are delivered to commit sin ; we are bound over to do it ; we cannot help doing it ”—so say some men. On the one hand, men are apt to be jealous of their liberty ; but to avoid responsibility for transgression they disclaim their liberties, and plead a want of power to choose ; a want of power to do that which they have chosen ; or a want of power to reject that which they have determined to reject. 1. One class of men regard thought and volition as the inevitable effect of natural causes. They are no more avoidable, they say, than are the

phenomena of nature. Effect follows cause as irresistibly in the one case as in the other. And so man is just as helpless as a mill-wheel, which is made to turn over, and over, by a power that is not under its control. Against this theory, we oppose the universal consciousness of men in the earlier stages of their moral character. Men know perfectly well that they have no plenary liberty; that they have only limited liberty. It is certainly true that, if blue is presented to my eye, I cannot prevent the impression of blue being made on my mind. It is true that, if light is presented to my eye, I cannot prevent the inevitable effect that light produces. But if, for any reason, I prefer not to have light, although when it shines I cannot hinder the happening of its actual effects, I can prevent my eyes from coming where the light falls. There is profound Divine wisdom in that part of the Lord's Prayer which seems strange to our youth—"Lead us not into temptation." Well might powder pray, "Deliver me from the fire"; for if the fire touches it, there is no help for it—there must be an explosion. And there are many circumstances in which, if inflamed passions, inflamed tempers, in the soul's warfare in life, subject themselves to certain causes, they will lead a man to sin. Therefore the plea is, "Lead me not into temptation: let it not come upon me." Men are responsible for their volitions, and for those conditions which produce volitions—and this is the opinion of men generally. 2. A more frequent and more subtle plea of irresponsibility is founded on the modern doctrine of organisation. One man says, "I may lie; but I was delivered to do it when I was created with such an inordinate development of secretiveness." Another man says, "I may be harsh and cruel; but I was delivered to be so from my mother's womb; there is such immense destructiveness in my organisation." Another man says, "You that have large intellectual developments, and are able to see and foresee, may be responsible for falling into sin; but I have no such development; I cannot foresee anything; I have to take things as they find me, and I am not responsible." At first it would look as though this was very rational; but it is not. It is not phrenological. It is not philosophical. And that is not all; the men that use these pleas do not themselves believe in them. There are abundant proofs of the falsity of the claim which they set up; but for my present purpose it is quite sufficient to say that, when men sin and plead fatalism or organisation as a justification of their wrong-doing, they do not believe the doctrine that they themselves advance. No man will accept an insult from another on the plea that that other man cannot help giving it. If a man deals you a blow in the street, not accidentally, but because, as he says, he is naturally irritable, having large combativeness, and cannot help it, you do not listen calmly to the explanation, and say, "All right, sir; all right." No man admits for one single moment any such thing as that men are to be excused for all sorts of misdemeanours, because they happen to be peculiarly organised. The whole intercourse of man with man would be destroyed; the community would be dissolved; society would rush, like turbulent streams in the midst of spring rains, down to destruction, if you were to take away the doctrine that a man can control his conduct, his thought, his will. It does not follow that, because a man follows his strongest faculty, he must follow it to do wrong with it. Here is the fallacy—or one of the fallacies—which men run into. If a man has large secretiveness, it does not follow that he should lie. A man may be secretive, and not transgress. Secretiveness may leaven every faculty of the mind, and that without making one of them commit sin. It has a broad sphere, and a wholesome sphere; and if you say, "I must follow my strongest faculty," I reply that it does not follow that you must follow it contrary to moral law—contrary to what is right. Then another thing to be considered is the determining influence. A man is either sane or insane; and the distinction is this: If a man can no longer control his action by the antagonism of faculties; if, for instance, by the antagonism of reason and the affections he cannot control the passions; if the antagonism among themselves of the balanced faculties is so weak that the individual is incapable of governing himself, then he is insane. But if a man is not insane, there is in him a power proceeding from the balance of faculties, by which the erring one or ones may be controlled. So that every man, up to the point of insanity, has latent in him, if he pleases to educate it and exercise it, the power of controlling by other forces in his mind those which incline him to go wrong. Well, now, if there be this antagonistic power, it becomes a question of dynamics. Men say, "I have such a powerful tendency

to go wrong that you ought not to punish me." It is not to punish you, so much as it is to stimulate the dormant faculty from whose inactivity that tendency proceeds, that you are made to suffer. If when my child is convicted of wrong, he having been tempted by vanity to break down into lies, I severely chastise him, and put him to shame, I inflict pain upon him not only as a punishment, but as a restorative. For I say to myself, if that child's conscience is so feeble, I must give him some stimulus. If his fear is so influential in the wrong way, I must spring it in the other direction. In other words, just the opposite of the popular pleading is true. The weaker the child is to resist evil, the more powerful must be the motive that is brought to bear upon him to do well. I remark, in view of these statements and reasonings—1. Sin is bad enough ordinarily. I do not refer to its influence upon others, but to its reactionary influence upon our own moral state. Not only is it bad enough, but ordinarily it is made worse by the mode in which men treat it. If men stopped, whenever they did wrong, and measured it, and called it by its proper name, and turned away from it, although the process of recovery would be slow, it would in many respects be salutary, by way of strengthening and educating the mind; but when men commit sin, and institute a special plea, and defend their wrong-doing, and conceal it, and equivocate concerning it, they are corrupted even more by the defence than by the wrong-doing itself. How sad is that condition in which the compass will not point to the polar-star! If there be fatal attractions on the ship, and if the shipmaster has steered by a compass that is not true in its directions, it would be better if he had thrown it overboard; because he has perfect confidence in it, and it has been lying all the time. And if the conscience, that is the compass of the soul, is perverted, and does not point to truth and right, and men are guiding themselves by it, how fatally are they going down to destruction! 2. What is the reason of the stress that is laid in the Word of God on the subject of confessing and forsaking sin? "Let him that stole steal no more," &c. "Confess your faults one to another." This doctrine was the great recuperative element. It was the preaching of John. It was the initial preaching of Christ. It was the preaching of the apostles. It is the annunciation of the Gospel. Confess and forsake your sin. Own that it is sin. Be honest with yourself. Make at last to yourself a full and clear acknowledgment that wrong is wrong. All men fail, and come short of their duty; but some justify, and palliate, and excuse, and deny, while others confess, and repent, and forsake—and these last are the true men. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Organisation and responsibility*:—That men are variously constituted is a fact not merely profoundly interesting to the speculative philosopher, but of the greatest practical consequence to the Christian philanthropist. While the genus, man, is founded on a common basis, the individual is marked by characteristics singular to himself. Let us look at some special instances of peculiar organisation, and then consider them in relation to personal responsibility. For example, take the man whose dominating characteristic is acquisitiveness. That man's creed is a word, and that word is but a syllable: his creed is Get; nothing less, nothing more,—simply Get! With him benevolence is a matter of weights and scales; with him buying and selling and getting gain are the highest triumphs of mortal genius. Ask him why. Instantly he recurs to his organisation. He says, "God made me as I am; He did not consult me as to the constitution of my being; He made me acquisitive, and I must be faithful to my organisation; and I will go forward to meet Him at the day of judgment, and tell Him to His face that He has made me as He made me, and I disclaim all responsibility." The organisation of another man predominates in the direction of combativeness. The man is litigious, quarrelsome, cantankerous, violent. Ask him why. He says, "I must be faithful to my constitution; my whole manhood is intensely combative; I did not make myself; God has made me as He made me, and I disown all laws of obligation." Here is a man with little hope. He sees a lion on every way; he dreads that ruin will be the end of every enterprise; he knows not the sweetness of contentment or the repose of an intelligent hope; he is always mourning, always repining; his voice is an unceasing threnody, his face a perpetual winter. Ask him why. He says, "God so made me; if He had put within me the angel of hope, I should have been sharer of your gladness; I should have been your companion in the choir; I should have been a happier man: He covered me with night that owns no star; He gave my fingers no cunning art of music; He meant me to look at Him through tears

and to offer my poor worship in sighs." We cannot enter into all the questions which may lie between God and man on the subject of organisation. Let us take one or two such cases as have just been outlined. We found the acquisitive man getting gold, getting at all risks; getting till his conscience was seared and his understanding darkened. In that case ought we to sympathise with the man, saying, "We are sorry for you; we lament that your organisation compels you to be avaricious: we know you cannot help it, so we exempt you from all responsibility" ? No! we would say as in thunder; No! we do not find fault with the organisation of the acquisitive man; but if he pleads the excuse already cited, we openly charge him with having degraded and diabolised that constitution; he has not used it, but abused it; he has not been faithful, but faithless, and must be branded as a criminal. The man's organisation is acquisitive; be it so: that circumstance in itself does not necessitate crime. There are two courses open to the acquisitive man. To him we say, Do be faithful to your organisation, do get, get money by right means, get exaltation by legitimate processes; but with all thy getting, get understanding, "for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver," &c. The combative man; what of him? Do we sympathise with him? "Sir, your case demands commiseration, inasmuch as you must be faithful to your organisation, and that organisation happens to be a dreadful one" ? No! to the combative man we say, There are two courses open to you: you can fight with muscle, and steel, and gunpowder; you may train yourself to be pitiless as a tiger; you may be petulant, resentful, hard-hearted: the choice is before you to pronounce the elective word! Or, there is another course open: you may choose weapons that are not carnal; you may resist the devil; you may "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The argument which the fatalist bases upon organisation is self-annihilating when applied to the common relations of life. All human legislation assumes man's power of self-regulation, and grounds itself on the grand doctrine of man's responsibility to man. At this point, then, Divine revelation meets human reason, and insists upon the same principle in relation to God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. *I spake unto you, rising up early.*—*God's call to sinners*:—I. A GRACIOUS CALL. We are utterly undeserving of it. Though we are transgressors, guilty, corrupt, depraved,—yet God calls upon us—to escape—to live—to be saved—to turn unto Him, and be for ever blest and happy. II. AN AFFECTIONATE CALL. The call of a merciful Creator who hath no pleasure in the death and destruction of His fallen creatures: and would rather they should repent and live; the call of a tender Father, who looks with compassion upon the prodigal wanderer, invites and urges him to abandon his wretchedness and want, and come back to his home of plenty, and his Father's bosom again, and assures him of a joyous welcome if he will; the call of a Friend—that Friend that sticketh closer than a brother—even of Jesus our best friend, our elder brother. III. A VARIED CALL. From every part of the outspread volume of creation, there issues a voice calling upon us, to know, fear, adore, worship, the great Creator. And as well as by His works, we are called upon by His ways—by His dealings with the children of men. The misfortunes and calamities that occur to others; and the bereavements, afflictions, and trials that happen to ourselves—the constant experience we have of the uncertainty of our present existence, and of the instability of all earthly good, by these and many similar things we are addressed and admonished to seek a more enduring substance, a more incorruptible and unfading inheritance. From every page, also, of the book of God there proceedeth a call, exhorting us to depart from iniquity, and follow after holiness,—to supplicate for pardoning mercy and for assisting grace. IV. AN OFT-REPEATED—A REITERATED CALL. We are not appealed to once or twice, and then abandoned to our folly. Forbearance is exercised towards us from year to year; "line is given upon line, and precept upon precept,"—here a little and there a little; so that we may have the last possible opportunity of being saved, and may not be left in despair until the last moment of the day of grace hath expired, and our souls be beyond the region of impression and awakening. V. AN EARNEST CALL. Men may be light and trifling. God is always serious—always in earnest. He is in earnest in what He does, and in what He speaks. All the appeals and persuasions by which the Almighty follows

you, as children hastening madly on to destruction, are embodied in the very terms, and wear the very air of the utmost earnestness; yea, so serious and earnest are they, that, when it is considered from whom they come, and to what they relate, the wonder is, that men are not at once startled by them, and arrested in their downward course, and constrained to hasten to the only safe Refuge from the gathering and impending storm. VI. AN URGENT CALL. Its reference is to the present: it demands immediate attention and instant compliance. (*C. Cook.*)

Ver. 16. **Pray not thou for this people.**—*Intercessory prayer forbidden*:—1. God's prophets are praying men. 2. God's praying prophets have a great interest in heaven, how little soever they have on earth. 3. It is an ill omen to a people when God restrains the spirits of His ministers and people from praying for those condemned. 4. Those that will not regard good ministers' preaching cannot expect any benefit by their praying. If you will not hear us when we speak from God to you, God will not hear us when we speak to Him for you. (*M. Henry, D.D.*)

Vers. 17, 18. **Seest thou not what they do in the streets of Jerusalem?**—*The streets of the city*:—I. AS AN INDEX TO CHARACTER. 1. The streets are the pulse of commercial prosperity. The man who goes from a dull, sluggish place to a city of great business activity must quicken his pace, or get run over. 2. The street on which a man lives is no index to his character. It does not even indicate the amount of money he has. Not a few proud families stint their table to pay their rent on a costly street, in order to make or keep up appearances. Their fine street, to those who know the facts, is an index of their pretensions. Another man who has plenty of money lives on a cheap street, because he is too niggardly to pay rent for more comfortable quarters. To those who know him the street is an index of his meanness. A Christian man may choose to live on a cheap street, because he prefers to save money with which to do good. His street indicates self-denying liberality. 3. What can be seen on the streets of a city, however, is to a great extent an index of the character of its people. Dirty streets suggest dirty morals. If indecent hand-bills pollute the streets of a city, it indicates either sinful apathy, or a very low moral tone. II. AS A TEST OF CHARACTER. To walk down one of our streets is to some men like going into a furnace. Their moral courage is tested at nearly every step. There is within them a demon of drink that can be waked from his sleep by the smell of a beer barrel. A deep-sea diver laid his hand on something soft, and curious to know what it was, he took hold of it to examine it. Fatal curiosity! The long tentacles of an octopus reached out and grasped him in its deadly embrace. The friends above, feeling the struggle, drew him to the surface, to find only a corpse still in the clutches of the monster. Many a young man has come from his pure country home to the great city, and, prompted by a curiosity excited by the signs on the streets, has entered one of these homes of the devil-fish. Soon its slimy tentacles are wrapped around him, soul and body. (*A. C. Dixon, D.D.*) *The streets and their story*:—The prophet evidently knew what was going on in the city. He had gone up and down the streets by night and by day, and had seen the sins and iniquities of the people. The great city of Jerusalem lay like a putrid sore, filled with all manner of pollution and corruption. The time had come for a warning. Hiding no detail of its iniquity, he catalogued before the sin-laden people the awful record of their sin, and launched against their filthiness and impenitence the sentence of the condemnation of God. It was no pleasant task. To sing in sweeter strains the adoration of God and the beauties of holiness had been a far more glad work—but to sing of holiness in such a city had been like singing of springs amid the sands of the arid desert. Moreover, the Word of God had commanded, again and again, "Cry aloud! spare not! lift up thy voice like a trumpet," &c. I suppose an over-cautious but easy-going city cried out against the prophet who left his harp to throttle sin. I suppose its wicked inhabitants had a great many sneers and scoffs for the preacher who ventured to look in upon their wickedness; but he heard God's Word and he did it; he called things by their right names, and shook above them the thunderstorm of Divine wrath and the penalties of the broken law. Sin must be assailed in the name of God. Its colours must be shown, clear of the prism tints by which it dazzles and deceives. Its wiles, hidden too often behind the screens of shame and misery, must be

brought to light, and men warned in the name of facts, in the name of experience, in the name of God, against the man-traps of hell. I want to show you sin as it is and it always must be, and from its actual facts of awful misery I want to read a warning. The old legends tell of a dual life that walks the earth; how in the shades of night, when all else is slumber-bound and still, another life comes out and fills the night with weird events. The elf-folk, hidden all day in earth caves and crannies, now come out and fill the sleeping earth with a weird, unnatural life. The old legend has a sort of awful reality here in our darkened streets, for when the day is spent, and the life of business sinks to rest, and the great buildings darken into shadow, another life comes out and passes to and fro in the darkened streets and plies its concerns in the silent shadows. It is a life of sin and of shame. We pause a moment, and watch and listen. Now and then a belated passer-by hastens with hurried step, but it is almost noiseless—this night life on these silent streets. Here and there, there are figures standing within the shadows. A young man emerges from the building, where late accounts have kept him long after the hours of accustomed toil. A dozen steps, and he is accosted; there is a rustle and a voice, and then maybe a woman's laugh ringing out with strange echo in the darkness. They loiter along with slow step, and together are lost to our view, and the night covers up this silent trap of hell, whose snares are spread for unwary feet. A little further and we drive hurriedly across the glare, where the crowds flow along the great night arteries of the city—a motley crowd, vastly differing from the daylight throng. There are hundreds of young men, scores of young women, whose days are spent in shops and behind counters, and whose nights court ruin in the streets. The air is noisy and the lights are dazzling; here and yonder are those brilliantly lighted stairs that lead up into apparent gloom, for all the curtained windows show by their darkness. It is the old story: "The idle brain is the devil's workshop." The life that simply works to live, and that only six hours, if six hours will keep the body, courts the devil for his master. And yet, go out among the thousands of young men in this city to-night, and let us question them as to the object of life, and you may well wonder at the multitudes who only live to live. No thought of anything above the body, no glimpse of anything beyond the sky—an animal life, serving only appetite and seeking only pleasure. Oh, is that all of life? To spend the day in toil, the night in empty pleasure; our days for nothing, and our future in eternal poverty of soul. Oh, hear me preach the gospel of yourself, your better self; its possibilities, its powers, its future. Think what you may be, and then be it, by God's grace, and cheat the devil as you save your soul. I marked most of all in these streets the presence of death. They were full of dead men, of dead women, of corpses, walking, talking, jesting in loathsome death. Do you remember Valjean's dream in "*Les Misérables*"? How, conscious of his crime, he slept, and sleep revealed to him the death of sin. He dreamed he was at Romainville, a little garden park near Paris, full of flowers and music and pleasure. But as he in his dream comes to this domain of revelry, the flowers, and the trees, and the very sky, all are of the colour of ashes. Leaning against a wall he finds a man at the corner where two streets meet. "Why is all so still?" The man seems to hear not and makes no reply. In amazement Valjean wanders on through vacant rooms and courts and through the gardens, all the colour of ashes, and finds everywhere silence; by the fountains, in the pavilions, everywhere these silent men and women, who have no answer to his questions. In horror he endeavours to fly from the ashen abode of terror, when, looking back, he finds all the inhabitants of the lifeless town suddenly elustering about him, and their ashen lips open, they cry to him, "Do you not know that you have been dead for a long time?" And with a cry Valjean awakens and feels his sin. So I saw in these ways of sin dead men all about me. Beneath that silken robe and sparkling necklace, loathsome death; behind that laugh and empty jest, a dead man; walking, talking, drinking, feasting, and yet dead. Dead in sin, helpless in habit's chains, snared in the man-traps of hell. (*T. E. Green, D.D.*) *Home missions*.—First, glance at the circumstances and conduct of the Jewish people, which gave rise to the language of the text. During the days of Jeremiah, and of all the later prophets, they appear to have sunk into the very depths of national degeneracy. The sanctions of the Divine authority, and the terrors of Divine indignation, were equally disregarded with the promises and protection of the Most High. The prophet would have awakened them to a sense of their criminality and danger; but in vain. He interceded in secret for the reversal of that righteous sentence by which

they were doomed to prove the folly and misery of their own ways; but this also was without effect. While his voice was still tremulously pleading for their forgiveness, and the saint and patriot blended in every gushing tear, and every irrepressible emotion,—the mandate of almighty justice, tempted too far and wearied of forbearance, imposed an awful interdict—"Pray not thou for this people," &c. How happy that no such solemn prohibition rests upon ourselves; but that we may pour forth our utmost fervour in supplicating for mercy upon those who are ready to perish! How unspeakable the happiness of reflecting, too, that we have an Advocate on high, whose plea can never be thus silenced. What was the particular nature of their idolatry at this season we know not,—or by what offerings they sought to propitiate and honour that mysterious divinity which they worshipped as "the queen of heaven"; but that it was a service accompanied with whatever was fitted to inflame the jealousy and provoke the retribution of the God of Israel, the tenor of this book and of their subsequent calamities suffers us not to question. But there is one reflection forced upon our minds by the mention of this subject, which is perpetually arising in the perusal of these sacred documents,—how inveterate and how wonderful is the depravity of the human intellect, as well as the corruption of the human heart! How great, too, is the compassion of God!—how impressive and encouraging the illustration of His long-suffering! "He remembered that they were but dust," &c. This is the compassion and long-suffering which we are called every day to recognise, amidst provocations and unfaithfulness which would have wearied out all other grace but the grace of Omnipotence, and which no might could restrain itself from punishing but that which upholds the mountains and which grasps the thunderbolt. Its very power alone is our security. We cannot meditate upon these facts without one other suggestion,—how great is the necessity for continued zeal and diligence, on the part of good men, to counteract to the uttermost the evils, not only of their own hearts and conduct, but of those among whom they dwell. The condition of men at large forces itself on our notice, as one of universal calamity and peril,—“Seest thou not what they do?” Let us suppose the spectator one from a distant region, an inhabitant of one of the remoter provinces of intellectual being,—acquainted with the character, and reposing with joyful confidence in the presiding power, of the Creator,—but unread in the history of man. He has heard of redemption, and is desirous to explore it; but he knows not yet the state of those for whom it was designed. And he is permitted this momentary inspection of the human system, that he may gather from it the elements of heavenly truth, and “the manifold wisdom of God.” Alas! how perplexed and intricate would all appear! What numberless anomalies, difficulties, and causes of shame and wonder, would everywhere astonish and overwhelm him! For what end would such a system seem to have been constructed, or wherefore still upheld, or tending to what result, or interpretative of what purposes, or susceptible of resolution into its contradictory phenomena by what reconciling and all-commanding principles, or calculated to excite what other sentiment except the melancholy apostrophe, “Wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain!” Descending from the contemplation of the whole, he would consider each several particular with the intensity of interest which that stupendous but appalling spectacle had summoned into being. And first, he would probably be arrested with the secular condition of mankind, and their extreme differences in the nature and degrees of social happiness. The effect would be as painful as the scene was intricate. He would shrink and tremble, as if within the boundaries of chaos, or the empire of darkness and of blind misrule. He would next consider their religious state. And now, what would be the agitation of his feelings, or in what explanation of such strange appearances could he find or seek relief? Here, he would sicken at the sight of gross and grovelling idolatries; there, at the bewildering glare of cruel yet invincible delusions; and elsewhere, at the reveries and dreamy visions of a spurious philosophy, neutralising at once every claim of human duty, and every attribute of God. Nothing would seem to him so terrible as our exposure to the jealousy and wrath of our Creator; nor anything so unfathomable as the mystery of His compassion. Outraged, defied, forgotten; His being denied by some, His noblest characters mocked, falsified, contemned by others; His best gifts perverted to the vilest purposes, His gentle inflictions misinterpreted or impiously repelled, His forbearance converted into an argument to set aside His veracity, His glorious and terrible name, even where it is not unknown, employed only to add force

to blasphemy, or emphasis to imprecation and falsehood:—what could the stranger anticipate but the kindling up of His fury, while its flame should burn unto the lowest hell! Thus prepared—how would he dart his eager eye toward the scenes of men's future and everlasting habitation! To what, he would ask himself, can all be hastening onwards? Where must this pilgrimage of sin and folly end? Conceive now of the surprise and the delight with which he would hear of the means provided for the restoration of men. That astonished spectator is no creation merely of the fancy. Many "a watcher," and many "a holy one," looks down upon the scene, and wonders. All that environs us is revealed, in a light of which we are strangely unconscious, to innumerable witnesses. We walk ourselves, at every step, beneath their gaze. And it is their judgment, not ours, respecting the dependencies and results of moral action, which shall be confirmed in the decisions of the last day. (*R. S. M'AU, LL.D.*)

Ver. 18. **The children gather wood.**—*What can children do for God?*—I. GOD IS SETTING UP A KINGDOM IN THIS WORLD. A very glorious and gracious kingdom. 1. Righteousness. Teaches us to do justice. 2. Peace—to love and pursue it. 3. Joy. God makes all happy who come into His kingdom. II. GOD EXPECTS US ALL TO WORK TO SET UP THIS KINGDOM. Christ came to set it up; ministers preach and labour for it; missionaries go to heathen; all God's people aid. III. CHILDREN CAN DO SOMETHING TO SET UP THIS KINGDOM. 1. You can pray; that God would make you willing subjects of this kingdom. 2. You can talk; speak to others about Jesus, pardon, God, heaven. 3. You can work; give to missionary society, &c. IV. CHILDREN ARE ALWAYS HAPPY WHEN TRYING TO SET UP THIS KINGDOM. Why? Because make others happy. Angels are happy, because employed making others happy. God is happy, for He blesses every one. And, when we act like God, we ourselves are happy. V. GOD WILL NEVER FORGET THE LABOURS OF LITTLE CHILDREN FOR HIM. When children wanted to come to Jesus, He noticed their disposition, and said, "Never prevent a child from coming to Me"; then took in arms and blessed. When they sang in temple He noticed their song, and said, "Hearst thou what these say?" God loves everything done by children, because it is a proof of their obedience and love. (*J. Sherman.*) *Children's service:*—"Queen of Heaven," i.e., Ashtaroth, or the Moon. The Israelites fell into this idolatry in the time of the Judges. Solomon was carried away by it. Josiah suppressed it. We may learn a useful lesson from these young idolaters. I. THEY WISHED TO BE USEFUL IN RELIGION. II. THEY DID WHAT THEY COULD. III. WHAT THEY DID WAS OF SERVICE. What can you do? For example, in—1. Money. 2. Word. 3. Effort. 4. Prayer. IV. GOD DOES NOT DESPISE CHILDREN'S WORK. This fact is one which should be seriously pondered by children, parents, teachers. (*Lay Preacher.*) *Christians contrasted with heathens:*—It is said that Matthew Wilks, one of the founders of the London Missionary Society, chose this text when he preached the anniversary sermon; and in those days when trite and commonplace remarks from the pulpit were considered orthodox, and anything that was a little fresh and novel was looked upon with suspicion, every eye in the large assembly expressed astonishment at the preacher's selection. He had not proceeded far, however, when the feeling of astonishment gave way to pure delight, when all seemed convinced that the text, though uncommon, was by no means inappropriate. I have not seen the sermon; I only know that he dealt with it in the following manner. He said, I will contrast your objects with those of the worshippers of the queen of heaven. I will compare your ardour with theirs. I will muster your agents. And it was this part of the subject, in which he referred to the agents, namely, men, women, and children, which gave rise to the system of auxiliary institutions which now pervade the whole country, and combine in its support young and old, rich and poor. (*Eccentric Preachers.*) **To make cakes to the queen of heaven.**—*On making cakes* (A talk with Children):—The people who lived in Jerusalem at this time, alas! worshipped the sun, and called it Baal, also the moon, and called it Ashtaroth,—just as our ancestors did at one time in this country, calling the day upon which they worshipped the sun Sunday, and the day upon which they worshipped the moon Monday. In Jerusalem, at the time referred to in our text, the people used to offer cakes to the moon. These cakes were always made round to resemble the moon. This offering was considered to be a very important one, and all wanted to have a share in making the cakes and presenting them. Now the first thing that had to be done

was to get plenty of firewood. You cannot make a cake without fire, and you cannot get fire without fuel. Thus I think I can hear a Jewish mother say, "Now, my children, I want you to get some good firewood for to-morrow—wood that will burn brightly; I am going to make some cakes for the queen of heaven, and—who knows?—perhaps there may be a few tit-bits left!" Off the children go. That's just the work they like; they can stoop easily, or jump over the hedge or fence, and tear their clothes without having much scolding, as they are gathering wood for their mother. Little Hannah gathers her apron full, and Dan or Benjamin as much as he can carry in his arms, and they return home full of glee. They have done their part. But the following morning the fire had to be kindled. It required strong arms to kindle a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood vigorously together. The fathers could do that best; for they had muscular arms, and they gladly did their part. Then there was need of clean and gentle hands to knead the dough, and there were none who could do that as well as the mothers, aunts, and the elder sisters. It was their turn now, and the children would look earnestly on and wonder whether the dough would go far enough to make the necessary number of cakes for the "queen of heaven," or the moon, and one or two over. They little knew that the mother or sister had put in an extra handful of meal for that purpose. Then there was the baking and the consumption of the odd cake or two by the little wood-gatherers. But beyond all this, there was a great pleasure reserved for them all—the privilege of presenting to the moon the cakes in the making of which they had all had a part, and which were as round and as perfect as a woman's hand could make them. Children have their part to do still. Often, as in this case, the work begins with children. They cannot do much; they cannot kindle a fire, or make a cake or a loaf; but they can gather wood, supply the fuel, and others will kindle the fire and provide an offering fit for the altar of God. You cannot as yet, at least, go forth to distant lands as missionaries and Zenana workers, and take the bread of life—not as a gift to God, but as a gift from God—to the heathen; but you can enable others who are older than you to do all this. You can contribute your pence to the missionary society, &c. (D. Davies.)

Ver. 24. **Went backward, and not forward.**—*Backward*.—I. ILLUSTRATIONS OF GOING BACKWARD IN REGARD TO RELIGION. 1. From Jewish history. Compare best days of Solomon, when temple was dedicated, with these when Jeremiah preached at gate. National mind darkened, conscience enfeebled, heart hardened. 2. Churches. Galatia (Gal. iii. 1-3, v. 7, 8), Ephesus (Rev. ii. 4), Sardis (Rev. iii. 1). 3. Individual life. (1) Brought up in Christian home; back into thoughtlessness, dissipation, infidelity. (2) Awakened by power of truth, and gained a place in household of faith; go backward and "make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience." (3) Trod noblest heights of Christian service; back to stagnation and ease. II. CAUSES OF THIS GOING BACKWARD. 1. Negatively. (1) God never causes a human being to go backward from what is pure and good and true. (2) Nor must the charge be laid at the door of men or of Satan. 2. Positively. (1) The primary cause must be sought in man himself, his inclination to the things which are behind. Spiritual feebleness. (2) The secondary causes are temptations; the lusts, pleasures, and gains he desires to enjoy. (3) His weakness in yielding results from neglect of the means of strength, the Word of God, prayer, means of instruction and grace. III. CONSEQUENCES OF GOING BACKWARD. 1. Displeasure of God. 2. Such as turn back are liable to sink into lowest depths of irreligion. 3. Experience of deepest remorse and reproach of conscience. Conclusion.—1. Stand fast in the Lord. 2. Despair not, but return. (R. Ann.) *The backslider defenceless*.—When Christian, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, thought about going back, he recollected that he had no armour for his back. He had a breastplate, he was covered from head to foot by his shield, but there was nothing to protect his back, and therefore, if he retreated, the adversary could spit him with his javelin in a moment. So he thought that bad as it was to go forward, it would be worse to go backward, and therefore he bravely cut a path for himself straight onward for glory. Look at that fact whenever you are tempted: do not endure the idea of turning tail in the day of battle. May retreat be impossible to you! God makes it impossible by His grace. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 27. **They will not hearken to thee.**—*God's foreknowledge of the sinner's refusal of His Word*.—I. INSTANCES ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE TEXT. 1. The

original transgression of first parents. 2. The old world. 3. Pharaoh. 4. Jews as a nation. II. HOW CAN THIS BE EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED? 1. Unless God did know results such as described He would be imperfect. 2. He is not the cause of the rebellion He foretells. 3. He never influences men to do wrong. 4. There are many ends to be attained by God. By speaking, though He knows men will not hearken. (1) God exhibits His true desire for their salvation. (2) He treats men as reasonable and responsible beings. (3) He leaves them without excuse. Conclusion—1. Man's free agency is his glory. 2. God's infinite goodness is undoubted. 3. Our duty is manifest—to hear, obey, believe. 4. Thus men will be finally inexcusable, having had means employed for their restoration to holiness and God. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Preaching without effect*:—God has been putting into the mouth of His servant Jeremiah a varied message of reproof and counsel, of promise and blessing. The message contains equal encouragement to those who should repent, and denunciations of wrath on all who, rashly confident in external privileges, should continue to insult by the impiety of their lives. Thus, there is a close resemblance between the sermon which the prophet was instructed to deliver and those which, in our days, the ministers of God must utter. We know it to be our business, in dealing with a mixed assembly of those who make profession of religion and those who make none, to use language very similar to that which Jeremiah here employs; conjuring men that they “trust not in lying words which cannot profit,” but that they “amend their ways and their doings, lest God's anger and God's fury be poured out and burn, and there be none to quench it.” Here, then, it is, that our text comes in upon us with all its startling and perplexing assertion; that losing sight of the peculiar circumstances of the Jews, we may regard the ministers of the Gospel as commanded to preach, even if beforehand assured that their preaching would be fruitless. We cannot but think, that, determining by human computation what course would be the most fraught with advantage to their hearers, preachers would reckon it best to keep silence if they were certain none would be converted by their message. It admits not of question, that men, who hear the Gospel, and give no heed to its announcements, are disadvantaged by the very circumstance of having been its auditors. Now there was actually given to Jeremiah that information, which, for the sake of argument, we have supposed imparted to ourselves. Yet he was not on this account to abstain from delivering his message. The certainty of rejection was in no degree to interfere with the duty of proclamation. Now if ineffectiveness of preaching in bringing round conversion, supposing it previously ascertained, would be no sufficient reason for abstaining from preaching, there must be ends answered by the publication of the Gospel over and above that of the gathering in of the elect people of God. The way which shall be made by the preached Word in each separate case is necessarily already known to the Omniscient, so that with God it is previously a thing of as much certainty as it afterwards can be with ourselves, who will receive and who reject the proffered salvation. The foreknowledge has no influence on the reception; it lays no constraint on the will, and it gives no bias to the will. And now, allowing only that God's foreknowledge, and not God's predestination, enters as a prerequisite into such a declaration as that made in our text, the question still remains to be examined, why God should onjoin the preaching of the Gospel in cases where He is assured that this preaching will be ineffective? We think that the grand answer to this question is to be found in the demands of that high moral government which God undoubtedly exercises over the creatures of this earth. Let it be remembered, that each amongst us lives under the moral government of God, which takes its character from the interference of Christ; that we are to be tried before the assembled universe as beings to whom was offered deliverance through a Surety; and is it not clear that, if this our last trial be conducted with that rigid justice which must characterise every procedure of God, it shall be made evident to every rank of intelligence that those that perish might have been saved; and forasmuch as they are condemned for having rejected salvation, salvation had been literally placed within their reach? (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VERS. 4-7. Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding.—*A great evil and an urgent question.*—**I. A GREAT EVIL.** “Backsliding.” 1. It is an evil in its nature; it is a great sin against God, involving the basest ingratitude, the abuse of the greatest mercies, and the violation of the most solemn vows. 2. It is an evil in its influence. (1) Upon self. It arrests the progress of the soul, darkens its prospects, curtails its liberty, and destroys its usefulness. (2) Upon others. It encourages the religious sceptic, it staggers the anxious inquirer, it embarrasses the friends of truth. **II. AN URGENT QUESTION.** “Why?” 1. Not by the force of circumstances over which they have no control. No power in the universe drives them back against their will. 2. Not by the withdrawal of heaven’s helping agency. 3. The causes are in themselves. Neglect of the means of spiritual improvement, the study of the Scriptures, and the ministry of the Word; the cherishing of some secret sin; engrossment in worldly pursuits; fellowship with sceptical and ungodly men. (*Homilist.*) *Backsliding tendencies.*—The tendency to the lukewarmness of spiritual life is in us all. Take a bar of iron out of the furnace on a winter day, and lay it down in the air, and there is nothing more wanted. Leave it there, and very soon the white heat will change into livid dullness, and then there will come a scale over it, and in a short time it will be as cold as the frosty atmosphere around it. And so there is always a refrigerating process acting upon us which needs to be counteracted by continual contact with the fiery furnace of spiritual warmth, or else we are cooled down to the degree of cold around us. (*A. Maclaren.*) *To the backslider.*—**I. THE CAUSES OF BACKSLIDING.** 1. The fear of man. 2. Intercourse with worldly society. 3. Presumption. 4. Secret sin. 5. Neglect of prayer. **II. THE SYMPTOMS OF BACKSLIDING.** 1. The absence of pleasure in attending to the secret exercises of religion. 2. Irregular and unprofitable attendance on public ordinances. 3. Unwillingness to act or suffer for the honour of Christ. 4. Uncharitable feelings toward fellow-Christians. 5. Indulgence in sins once abandoned. **III. THE FORMS OF BACKSLIDING.** 1. Declension into error. 2. Declension into unbelief. 3. Declension into lukewarmness, or want of love. 4. Declension into prayerlessness. 5. Declension into immorality. 6. Declension into open rejection of a Christian profession. **IV. THE EVILS OF BACKSLIDING.** **V. THE CURE OF BACKSLIDING.** 1. Let the backslider remember from whence he has fallen. 2. Let the backslider reflect on his guilt and danger. 3. Let the backslider return to God, from whom he has wandered. 4. Let the backslider live near to Christ. 5. Let the backslider forsake the sin into which he has fallen. 6. Let the backslider learn to depend on the promised aid of the Holy Spirit. (*G. Brooks.*) *National degeneracy.*—**I. WHAT DENOMINATES A RELIGIOUS PEOPLE.** The Jews were a religious people in distinction from all other nations who were given to superstition and idolatry. They professed to believe the existence of the only living and true God. All the nations at this day, who profess to believe the truth of Christianity, and who observe the public worship of God and the ordinances of the Gospel, are called religious nations, though the great majority may be totally destitute of vital piety. It is the explicit profession and external conduct of a people that give them their religious character. **II. WHEN A RELIGIOUS PEOPLE MAY BE SAID TO BE A BACKSLIDING ONE.** Grace, in the present state, does not entirely destroy nature. Large measures of moral corruption remain in the hearts of the best of men in the most religious nations. So, every people, who profess to believe the Gospel and live under its influence, have something in them that dislikes the character, the laws, and the government of God. On this account they are bent to backsliding from Him. Among every religious people there is a great, if not the greatest part of them, who are under only the restraining, and not the sanctifying, influence of the Gospel. It is when they break over such restraints as ought to keep them from backsliding from Him; and they are perpetually backsliding, while they are constantly breaking over one restraint after another. 1. They break over the restraints of His goodness. He promised to make them the most numerous, the most wealthy, and the most respectable nation on earth. 2. A religious people who are perpetually backsliding grow worse and worse under the restraint of Divine authority. He gave His peculiar people His judgments, His statutes, and His laws, which were far superior to those of any other nation. There was another way by which God

often laid a restraint upon His backsliding people, and that was by His rod of correction; but they often broke over this restraint, and persisted in their wicked ways. 3. A perpetually backsliding people will hold fast deceit, and refuse to return to God from whom they have revolted, even under the severest tokens of His wrath. III. WHY A BACKSLIDING PEOPLE WILL PERSIST IN BACKSLIDING. This is owing to some great delusion. 1. They delude themselves by backsliding very gradually. They first forget the goodness of God in one smaller favour, and then in another; and this leads them to forget God in greater and greater favours, until Divine goodness loses all its restraining influence over them. In the same imperceptible manner they break over all the restraints of Divine authority and of Divine corrections. Such a gradual backsliding becomes more and more habitual, and, of course, more and more insensible. Every backslider always feels self-condemned for the first instances of his deviation from the path of duty. But one deviation naturally leads to another, and serves to palliate it, till self-regret and self-reproach cease to operate, and men feel as easy and innocent in their gradual declensions as they did before they began to backslide; and, like Ephraim, while they have grey hairs here and there upon them, they know it not. 2. All backsliding consists in men's walking in the ways of their hearts, instead of walking in the ways of God's commandments. They backslide because they love to backslide; and what they love, they endeavour to persuade themselves is right. If they are reproved, they will justify rather than condemn their backsliding. 3. Backsliders are more or less under the blinding and deluding influence of the great adversary of souls. He is now deluding all the heathen world, and insensibly involving them in fatal darkness, and leading them blindly to destruction. And he is more or less concerned in spreading errors and delusions in all the Christian world, who love and hold fast deceit. Improvement.—1. It appears from the description of a religious people which has been given in this discourse, that we in this country deserve that character. 2. If we have given a just description of a perpetually backsliding people, that character justly belongs to us. 3. It appears from what has been said, that our national sins are very great and aggravated. They are of the nature of backsliding, which greatly enhances their criminality. Backsliding is not a sin of ignorance, but a sin of knowledge. Our national vices, immoralities, and errors, have been committed against greater light and stronger restraints than those of any other nation. 4. It appears from what has been said, that no external means nor motives will reform a backsliding people. They backslide so gradually and insensibly, and are so fond of their backslidings, and are under such a powerful influence of the great deceiver, that they will hold fast deceit, and refuse to repent, return, and reform. Their perpetual backsliding is perpetually stupefying their hearts and consciences; for they feel no guilt and fear no danger. They are certainly out of the reach of men and means to save them from ruin. Hence, 5. This people have abundant occasion for fasting, humiliation, and prayer. Their situation is extremely critical and dangerous, and every way adapted to affect every benevolent heart. It is the imperious duty of all the Noahs, Jobs, and Daniels to arise and plead with God to take His own work into His own hands, and bow the hearts of this people to Himself. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) **They refused to return.**—*Man's backwardness to repent.*—1. God reasons with us from what we do in other cases. "Shall they fall," &c. (ver. 4). He makes us judges in our own cause. If a man slips and gets a fall, does he lie where he fell, without making any attempt to get up again? "Why, then," God saith, "doth this people what no others do? Why do they fall, and rise not? stay, and return not?" Despair of pardon leads many to continue in sin. But is there cause for this despair? Is it God that is unwilling? No; "they refused to return." The Lord, as it were, saith, How often would I have gathered them together, and they would not! My outward calling you by the Word, My inward moving by the Spirit, My many benefits, My gentle chastisements, My long-suffering—all show, that I was willing for your return. 2. God reasons with us from His own anxious desire. He represents Himself to us as hearkening with patient, attentive ear, if He may catch from us the words of repentance. And what does God expect to hear from us? "What have I done?" These words, said not with the lips only, but from the deep feelings of the heart, may lead to better things. How vile was the act of sin in itself! how full is it of shame and remorse! What have I done, as in the sight of God, so fearful in power, so glorious in majesty? What have I done as for any profit derived, any passing,

empty pleasure? How have I injured my body and my soul! 3. God sends us to the birds of the sky; to creatures without reason, that we, reasonable beings, may learn our duty from them. "Yea, the stork," &c. These birds have an appointed time for coming back; they know and observe it. There is an "accepted time," if we would know it; if, like the birds, we would observe, and take it; and the Scripture tells us, that that time is "now." (*E. Blencowe, M.A.*)

Vcr. 5. They hold fast deceit.—*On the deceitfulness of the heart in stifling convictions*.—These words, as immediately referring to the people of Judah, might denote their preposterous confidence in the assistance of neighbouring nations, or in the testimony of their false prophets, who assured them of peace and prosperity, notwithstanding all God's declarations to the contrary; and their refusal to return to Him in that way which He had enjoined, by faith in His pardoning mercy through the blood of the covenant, and genuine repentance. In general, they express the conduct of sinners under the power of deceit, who reject all the calls, invitations, and expostulations of God, turn a deaf ear to all the warnings of conscience, and resist all the common operations of the Spirit. I. SOME OF THE PROOFS THAT THE HEART AFFORDS OF ITS DECEITFULNESS, IN THE METHODS WHICH IT TAKES FOR STIFLING CONVICTIONS OF SIN. 1. Many drown their convictions in the mire of their lusts. When conscience is, in some measure, awakened because of former sins, they endeavour to overpower it, by making its load the heavier, that, if possible, it may sink under it altogether, and trouble them no more. 2. Many extinguish convictions by flying to the world. Multitudes are in this manner ruined for eternity. Even the innocent enjoyments of life prove the destruction of myriads. 3. The hearers of the Gospel often quench their convictions by doubting the truth of the doctrine. In this way did sin make its entrance into the world; and all along, it has proved a great support of it. The unbelief of the heart comes in to the assistance of the love of sin. 4. Many stifle their convictions by turning them into ridicule. They try to laugh themselves out of convictions just as a coward endeavours to get rid of his fear, by inward ridicule: not that they really disbelieve the things that give them trouble, but they wish to do so. And by habituating themselves to laugh at the shaking of the spear, like the coward at heart, they may acquire a fictitious courage, and really get the mastery over them. 5. Men overpower their convictions by extenuating sin, or apprehending that they are not guilty in the eye of the law, because free of grosser immoralities. But this is as great folly, in a spiritual sense, as it would be for a thief or robber to imagine that he was in no danger of the sentence of the law of his country, because he had not yet committed murder; or, for a man indulging himself in strong drink, to apprehend that he run no risk of intoxication, because he could still hold the cup to his head. 6. The heart often stifles convictions by representing eternal concerns as of little importance. By far the greatest part of men, although they see a dying world around them, live as if themselves alone were to be immortal. Or, one might be apt to imagine from their conduct, that they altogether denied the immortality of their souls, and believed that they would perish with their bodies. 7. Many endeavour to fly from a wounded conscience, and so hold fast deceit by flying from the means of grace. The only condition on which such persons will submit to the sound of the Gospel, is that they have nothing but smooth things prophesied to them. 8. Others extinguish convictions by magnifying the difficulties of religion. It seems to them a great hardship to perform so many duties, to be instant in season and out of season. They reckon God's commandments grievous, and the reward scarcely an equivalent for the labour. 9. Convictions are often stifled by the hope of abundance of time, and the promise of a future consideration. Thousands and ten thousands fall the miserable victims of a false hope. When the concerns of their precious souls intrude themselves on their thoughts, they endeavour to banish them, from the expectation of length of days, and of a continued enjoyment of a merciful dispensation. II. THE GREAT DANGER OF STIFLING CONVICTIONS. 1. This conduct is of the most hardening nature. All sin is so. He who sins to-day makes the commission of sin easier to conscience to-morrow. There is a progress in sin as well as in holiness. And there is no sin of a more heart-hardening nature than this of quenching convictions. When men make their neck an iron sinew, the brow becomes brass. Obduracy in resisting God is always succeeded by effrontery in sin. 2. He who stifles convictions willingly

continues under the sentence of condemnation, consents to it, and seals himself up under it. Convictions are the messengers of incensed justice, sent forth against the transgressor, warning him of the necessity of fleeing into the city of refuge. He who refuses to listen, scorns the refuge provided, and runs his risk of meeting with the avenger. 3. The expected time of consideration may never arrive. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and we have not the least reason to think that he ever returned. 4. God may justly deny heart-mollifying grace. They rebelled and vexed His holy Spirit, and He was turned to be their enemy. 5. He may cease to be a reprover. This is often the case. When the sinner continues to stifle convictions, God takes away His messengers. Or, the means may be continued, and yet be altogether blasted to them. The Bible becomes a book that is sealed. The Word is a dead letter. The most awakening sermons leave them as fast asleep in sin as they found them. For the Lord hath said, My Spirit will not always strive with man. 6. He may contend with them in the course of His providence. He hath long fought against them, as He threatens the Church of Sardis, with the sword of His mouth. Now He will fight against them with the sword of His hand. 7. God gives them up to their own lusts. A man needs no other devil to possess him than these. The name of such a possession is legion. Thus he becomes exceeding fierce in sin, and hurries on headlong to destruction, as if it advanced of itself, with too slow a pace. 8. In judgment He may lay occasions of sin in their way. God can tempt no man. He forces no man to sin, because He infinitely hates it. But when He sees sinners determined on iniquity, He sometimes chooses their delusions, as He threatens in His Word: I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them. 9. God may judicially harden their hearts. It is one of the inconceivable mysteries of Divine operation, that God should in righteous judgment give up a sinner to obduracy, and yet be at an infinite distance from the sin. But so it is. 10. God may refuse to hear, although they should call. He laughs at the sinner when trying to break His bands. But His holy scorn will be far more awful in the end. (*J. J. Jameson, M.A.*)

Vers. 6, 7. **I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?**—*God's inquisition*:—1. That God hath an ear and an eye to our carriage and dispositions, to our speeches and courses. If we had one always at our backs that would inform such a man what we say, one that should book our words, and after lay them to our charge, it would make us careful of our words. Now, though we be never so much alone, there are two always that hear us. God hears, and God's deputy in us, conscience, "hearkens and hears." God books it, and conscience books it. This doth impose upon us the duty of careful and reverent walking with God. Would we speak carelessly or ill of any man if He heard us? When we slight a man, we say we care not if he heard us himself. But shall we slight God so? Shall we swear, and lie, and blaspheme, and say we care not though God hear us, that will lay everything to our charge, not only words but thoughts? "No man spake aright." But what evidence doth He give upon this inquisition? "They spake not aright," which is amplified from the generality of this sin. When God had threatened judgments, He hearkened and heard what use they made of them, but "they spake not aright." In how many respects do we not speak aright in regard of the judgments of God? 1. In regard of God, men speak not aright when they do not see Him in the judgment, but look to the creature, to the second causes. 2. We talk amiss in regard of others, when we begin to slight them in our thoughts and speeches. Oh, they were careless people; they adventured into company, and it was the carelessness of the magistrates; they were not well looked to; they were unmerciful persons, &c. Is it not God's hand? 3. We talk amiss of God's judgments in regard of ourselves. (1) When we murmur and fret any way against God, and do not submit ourselves under His mighty hand as we should. (2) When we take liberty to inquire of the judgments of God abroad, and never make use of them. So much for the evidence. Come we now to God's complaint upon this evidence. "No man repented him of his wickedness." They did not repent of their wickedness, and the fault was general: "No man repented." The first yields this instruction. That it is a state much offending God, not to repent when His judgments are threatened. The longer we live in any sin unrepented of, the more our hearts will be hardened: the more Satan takes advantage against us, the more hardly he is driven out of

his old possession, the more just it may be with God to give us up from one sin to another. The understanding will be more dark upon every repetition of sin, and conscience will be more dulled. Those that are young, therefore, let them take the advantage of the youth, and strength, and freshness of their years to serve God. That which is blasted in the bud, what fruit may we look for from it afterwards? Again, what welcome shall we expect, when we have sacrificed the marrow of our years to our lusts, to bring our old age to God? Can this be any other than self-love? Such late repentance is seldom sound. Our hearts are so false and so dull, we have need to take all advantages of withdrawing ourselves from our sinful courses. And to encourage us to do it, let us consider, if we do this, and do it in time, we shall have the sweetness of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. You will say, We shall lose the sweetness of sin; ay, but—

1. You shall have a most sweet communion with God.
2. It is the way to prevent God's judgments, as we see in Nineveh and others.
3. Should we be stricken, if we have made our peace with God, if we have repented, all shall be welcome, all shall be turned to our good. We know the sting is pulled out. "No man repented of his evil ways." We see, then, that generality is no plea. "We must not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exod. xxiii. 2). We must not follow the stream, to do as the world doth. It hath been the commendation of God's children, that they have striven against the stream and been good in evil times. If there be but one Lot in Sodom, one Noah and his family in the old world, he shall be looked to as a jewel among much dross. God will single him out as a man doth his jewels, when the rubbish is burnt. God will have a special care to gather His jewels. It shows sincerity and strength of grace, when a man is not tainted with the common corruptions. "No man repented." They did not say in their hearts and tongues, "What have I done?" They were inconsiderate, they did not examine their ways.
1. A man can return upon himself; he can try his own ways, and arrest, and arraign himself. "What have I done?" This shows the dignity of man; and considering that God hath set up a throne and seat of judgment in the heart, we should labour to exercise this judgment.
2. God having given man this excellent prerogative to cite himself and to judge his own courses, when man doth not this, it is the cause of all mischief, of all sin and misery.
3. The exercising of this judgment, it makes a man's life lightsome. He knows who he is and whither he goes.
4. Whatsoever we do without this consideration, it is not put upon our account for comfort. When we do things upon judgment, it is with examination whether it be according to the rule or no. Our service of God is especially in our affections, when we joy, and fear, and delight aright. Now how can a man do this without consideration? For the affections, wheresoever they are ordinate and good, they are raised up by judgment. Now if we would practise this duty, we must labour to avoid the hindrances. The main hindrances of this consideration are—

- (1) The rage of lusts, that will not give the judgment leave to consider of a man's ways; but they are impetuous and tyrannous, carrying men, as we shall see in the next clause, "as the horse rusheth into the battle."
- (2) Too much business, when men are distracted with the things of this life.
- (3) It is a secret and hard action; because it is to work upon a man's self. The world doth not applaud a man for speaking of his own faults. Men are not given to retired actions. They care not for them, unless they have sound hearts.
- (4) This returning upon a man's self, presents to a man a spectacle that is unwelcome. If a man consider his own ways, it will present to him a terrible object. Therefore as the elephant troubles the waters, that he may not see his own visage, so men trouble their souls, that they may not see what they are. "Every one turns to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." Every one hath his course, his way, whether good or evil. The course of a wicked man is a smooth way perhaps, but it is a going from God; it leads from Him. And where doth it end? for every way hath its end. It is a going from God to hell. There all the courses of wicked men end. "As the horse rusheth into the battle." Here it is comparatively set down. If you would see how the "horse rusheth into the battle," it is lively and Divinely expressed (Job xxxix. 19). The horse rusheth into the battle—

- (1) Eagerly, as in the place of Job.
- (2) Desperately, he will not be pulled away by any means.
- (3) Dangerously, for he rusheth upon the pikes, and oftentimes falls down suddenly dead. Herein wicked men are like unto the horse, going on in their course eagerly, desperately, dangerously.
1. They go on eagerly. It is meat and drink unto them. "They cannot sleep until they have done wickedness."
2. As they go eagerly, so desperately and irreclaimably

too; nothing will restrain them. Though God hedge in their ways with thorns, they break through all (Hos. ii. 6). 3. As they go eagerly and desperately, so dangerously too; for is it not dangerous to provoke God? to rush upon the pikes? to run against thorns? "Do you provoke Me to jealousy," saith God, "and not yourselves to destruction?" (1 Cor. x. 22.) No. They go both together. "Yea, the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times," &c. God confounds the proud dispositions of wicked men by poor, silly creatures—the crane, the turtle, the swallow, and the like. What their wisdom is we see by experience. They have an instinct put in them by God to preserve their being by removing from place to place, and to use that which may keep life. Now, man is made for a better life; and there be dangers concerning the soul in another world, yet he is not so wise for his soul and his best being as the poor creatures are to preserve their being by the instinct of nature. When sharp weather comes they avoid it, and go where a better season is, and a better temper of the air; but man, when God's judgments are threatened and sent on him, and God would have him part with his sinful courses, and is ready to fire him, and to force him out of them, yet he is not so careful as the creatures. He will rather perish and die, and rot in his sins, and settle upon his dregs, than alter his course. So he is more sottish than the silly creatures. He will not go into a better estate, to the heat, to the sunbeams to warm him. He will not seek for the favour of God, to be cherished with the assurance of His love, as the poor creature goeth to the sun to warm it till it be over hot for it. The thing most material, is this: That God, after long patience, hath judgments to come on people; and it should be the part of people to know when the judgment is coming. But how shall we know when a judgment is near hand? 1. By comparing the sins with the judgments. If there be such sins that such judgments are threatened for, then as the thread followeth the needle, and the shadow the body, so those judgments follow such and such courses. For God hath knit and linked these together. 2. There is a nearer way to know a judgment, when it hath seized on us in part already. He that is not brutish and sottish, and drunk with cares and sensuality, must needs know a judgment when it is already inflicted, when part of the house is on fire. 3. We may know it by the example of others. God keeps His old walks. What ground have we to hope for immunity more than others? We may rather expect it less, because we have their examples; and so they wanted those examples to teach them which we have. 4. General security is a great sign of some judgment coming. There is never more cause of fear, than when there is least fear. The reason is, want of fear springs from infidelity, for faith stirs up fearfulness and care to please God. 5. We may know that some judgment is coming, by the universality and generality of sin, when it spreads over all. As the deluge of sin made way for the deluge of water, so the overflow of sin will make way for a flood of fire. God will one day purge the world with fire. But now for particular sins, whereby we may know when judgment is coming. (1) Injustice. Is not innocency trodden down oftentimes? (2) And so for religion. It is generally neglected. Indifference and formality. (3) Persecution of religion and religious men. (4) When men will go on incorrigibly in sin, as these here, "they rush as the horse into the battle"; when they will not be reclaimed, it is a forerunner of destruction. (5) Another particular sin whereby we may discern a judgment coming is, unfruitfulness under the means; as the fig-tree, when it was digged and dunged, and yet was unfruitful, then it was near a curse. (6) Nay more, decay in our first love is a forerunner of judgment, when we love not God as we were wont (Rev. ii. 5). Well, but what shall we do when judgments are coming? 1. First, In the interim between the threatening and the execution. Oh improve it, make use of this little time; get into covenant with God; hide yourselves in the providence and promises of God; make your peace, defer it no longer. 2. Mourn for the sins of the time, that when any judgment shall come, you may be marked with those that mourn. 3. Be watchful. Let us shake off security, and do everything we do sincerely to God. We may come to God to make our account, we know not how soon. Let us do everything as in His presence, and to Him. In our particular callings, let us be conscionable, and careful, and fruitful. (*R. Sibbes.*) *Man on earth*:—I. AS THE SPECIAL OBJECT OF DIVINE ATTENTION. Why? We may imagine that—1. Man's spiritual infirmities on earth would draw towards him the special notice of his Maker. 2. Man's critical position. 3. Man's social influence. II. AS THE PROBATIONARY SUBJECT OF REDEEMPTIVE DISCIPLINE. Under this system three things are required of him—1. Rectitude

of language. In conformity with moral truth. 2. Contrition of heart. 3. Self-searching thought. III. AS THE WICKED ABUSER OF THE SYSTEM UNDER WHICH HE LIVES. 1. Reckless obstinacy. 2. Unnatural ignorance. "Yea, the stork," &c. (1) These creatures have remarkable instincts, suitable to the external circumstances of their nature. So have you. They have the instinct of perceiving coming changes, and the instinct of adjusting themselves to those changes. (2) These creatures invariably render obedience to their instincts. You do not. How unnatural! (*Homilist*.) *Interrogating our conduct*:—How attentive God is to us and our actions! He sees His prodigals when yet a great way off; to Him there is music in our sigh, and beauty in a tear. Never do we have a desire towards God, or breathe a prayer to heaven, but God has been watching and hearkening for it: it was but one tear on the cheek, yet the Father noticed it as a hopeful sign; but one throb went through the heart, yet He heeded it as an omen that not quite hardened by sin. I. Words of EARNEST PERSUASION, urging all, and especially the unconverted, to ask this question, each for himself, and solemnly answer it. 1. Searching yourself can do you no hurt. Little can be lost by taking stock. 2. You may be a great deal better for the process: for, if your affairs are all right with God, you may cheer and comfort yourself; but there are many probabilities that they are wrong; so many are deceived, and anything rather than self-delusion. 3. The time for self-examination is short: soon you will know the secret, death will rend off the mask. 4. Though you may deceive yourself, you cannot God. II. Words of ASSISTANCE in trying to answer the question. 1. To Christians: "What hast thou done?" You reply, "Nothing to save myself; that was done for me. Nothing to make a righteousness for myself; Christ said, It is finished! Nothing to merit heaven; Jesus did that for me before I was born!" Yes; but say, What hast thou done for Him? for His Church? for the salvation of the world? to promote thine own spiritual growth in grace? 2. To moralists: "What hast thou done?" You answer, "All I ought to have done! You may tell me of sins, but I have done my duty: observed Sabbath, said prayers, given to poor, &c.; and if good works have any merit, I have done a great deal!" True, if any merit; but very unfortunate that they have not, for our good works, if we do them to save ourselves by them, are no better than our sins. 3. To the worldly: "What done?" "It is very little I do amiss; now and then just a little mirth." Stop; let us have the right name for that mirth. What do you call it in any one else? "Drunkenness." "I have been a little loose in talk sometimes!" Write it down, "Lascivious conversation." Sometimes you have been out on the Sabbath? "Sabbath-breaking." You may have quoted texts of Scripture to make jokes of them, and used God's name in foolish talk? "Swearing." Did you ever adulterate in your trade? "Stealing." Wished you could get your neighbour's prosperity? "Covetousness, which is idolatry." Ever really prayed? "Prayerlessness." Neglected God and Bible? "Despising Him." May the Spirit touch your consciences, and convince you of your sins! 4. To the unconverted: "What done?" By your sins you have destroyed your soul, resisted the Gospel, spurned Christ. Yes; and think what you have done to your children: taught them the ways of spiritual ruin. To your companions: tempted some to take the first stray step into folly, indulgence, iniquity. Doth not your heart quail within you because of self-ruin and ruin of others? III. Words of AFFECTIONATE ADMONITION to those who have had to answer the question against themselves. 1. Solemn that the years roll on and yet you are unsaved. You, not altogether hardened, yet "done" nothing to determine for Christ, and lay hold on eternity. 2. There will be a time when you will ask the question, but it will be too late. If you only knew what they feel, and could see what they endure, who have lost opportunity and lost themselves, you would, ere too late, pause and ask, "What have I done?" As immortal spirits, bound for endless weal or woe, fly ye to Christ, seek for mercy at His hand, trust in Him, and be saved. (*C. H. Spurgeon*.) *God listening*:—The figure is a graphic and vivid one; it is that of the Divine Being stooping from heaven, and with inclined ear listening critically yet hopefully to human speech, if mayhap there be but one bright word, one tone of music, one sigh of contrition. The Lord did not listen generally, promiscuously, as if listening to a confused noise of sound; but He listened specifically, He tried every word, He detained every syllable, if haply He could detect in it one sound or sign that He might construe hopefully. But it was in vain. Even Divinent kindness could make nothing but black ingratitude of all the energetic speech:

it was a torrent of iniquity; it was a river black, foul; it was a rain of poison. God does not bring these charges against the human family lightly. God can see flowers if there are any. He can see them before they open their mystery, and proclaim in fragrance their gospel; He knows where they are sown and planted. But He looked, and there was none; He expected, and was struck to the heart with disappointment. "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" There was no self-cross-examination. When men cease to soliloquise they cease to pray. The hardest witness man undertakes to interrogate is his own soul. Yet philosophy has found out the advantages of self-inquest. The Pythagoreans asked themselves once a day, "What have I done?" The inquiry creates a space in the day for itself, makes one inch of praying-ground in the desert of the day's life. How few men dare probe themselves with that inquiry! It is a question double-edged. It is recorded of Cicero, in pressing one of his accusations against an adversary, that he told that adversary that if he had but put two words to himself he might have cooled his passion, controlled his desires, and turned his impulses to high utility. Said the orator, "If thou hadst said to thyself, *Quid ego?* thou mightest have stopped thyself in this tremendous assault." That is, What have I done? What do I? What is my course? What are the facts of the case? (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 7, 8. **The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times.**—*Instinct contrasted with reason in its discernment of times*:—I. THE BIRDS OF PASSAGE SHOW IN THEIR PERIODIC MIGRATIONS, THEIR DISCERNMENT OF SEASONS, AND THIS BOTH AS REGARDS THE TIME OF THEIR VISITING AND THE TIME OF THEIR LEAVING US. Probably some peculiarity in the material structure of migratory birds renders them extremely sensitive to changes of temperature—and as these changes always recur at certain seasons of the year, they observe seasons, and make a corresponding change in their places of abode. So great is their sagacity, so true their instinct. II. CONSIDER THE OPERATION OF UNSANCTIFIED REASON IN DISCERNING TIMES. 1. Consider the invitations of this season of grace. (1) The Saviour's voice issuing forth from the pages of the written Word, addresses sinners in such soothing accents, and holds forth to them promises so refreshing, that one would think it could hardly fail of winning an entrance into their hearts, and finding a response there! (2) But we believe that in every case in which the sinner has made a nominal profession of Christ's religion, and been formally admitted to the participation of Christian privileges, the Holy Spirit seconds, by an inward action upon the conscience, this external call of the Saviour. In the abysmal depths of the consciousness He strives with the reluctant soul, and whispers in accents, which even the giddy whirl of vanity and frivolity cannot entirely drown or shut out, "Come." (3) God employs subordinate human agents to herald in the ears of His people His invitations of grace. The bride, that is the Church, says "Come." She says so by her ministers, who are her commissioned representatives. (4) God invites us to return in penitence and faith to His bosom by the dispensations of His providence, no less than by more immediate and direct summons (*Hos. v. 15; Mic. vi. 9*). 2. But if the majority of sinners be not gently won by the invitations of grace, they will haply be driven by terror to take refuge in those offers. Let growing age and infirmity bring death and judgment very near—the prospect will surely urge the wanderer to return with hurried steps to the sheepfold! When hoar hairs are here and there upon him, he will lay to heart the cheerless desolate prospect which lies before him in the vista of futurity, and fly before the approaching winter of God's wrath! (*Dean Goulburn.*) *Migration heavenward*:—When God would set fast a beautiful thought, He plants it in a tree. When He would put it afloat, He fashions it into a fish. When He would have it glide the air, He moulds it into a bird. The prophet was out of doors, thinking of the impitenences of the people of his day, when he heard a great cry overhead. He looks up, and there are flocks of storks, and turtle-doves, and cranes, and swallows, drawn out in long line for flight southwards. As is their habit, the cranes had arranged themselves into two lines, making an angle—a wedge—splitting the air with wild velocity; the old crane, with commanding call, bidding them onward, until the towns, and the cities, and the continents slid under them. The prophet, almost blinded from looking into the dazzling heavens, stoops down and begins to think how much superior the birds are in sagacity about their safety than men. I. THEY MINGLE MUSIC WITH THEIR WORK. The most serious undertaking of a bird's

life is this annual travel. Naturalists tell us that they arrive weary and plumage-ruffled, and yet they go singing all the way, the ground the lower line of the music, the sky the upper line of the music, themselves the notes scattered up and down between. I suppose their song gives elasticity to their wings, and helps on the journey. Would God that we were as wise as they, mingling Christian song with our everyday work. A violin, chorded and strung, if something accidentally strike it, makes music; and I suppose there is such a thing as having our hearts so attuned by Divine glory that even the rough collisions of life will make heavenly vibration. Some one asked Haydn why he always composed such cheerful music. "Why," he said, "I cannot do otherwise. When I think of God, my soul is so full of joy that the notes leap and dance from my pen." I wish we might all exult melodiously before the Lord. The Church of God will never become a triumphal Church until it becomes a singing Church.

II. **THEY FLY VERY HIGH.** During the summer, when they are in the fields, they often come within reach of the gun; but when they start for their annual flight southward they take their places mid-heaven, and go straight as a mark. The longest rifle that was ever brought to shoulder cannot reach them. We fly so low that we are within range of the world, the flesh, and the devil. So poor is the type of piety in the Church of God at this day that men actually caricature the idea that there is any such thing as a higher life. Moles never did believe in eagles. But because we have not reached these heights ourselves, shall we deride the fact that there are any such heights? I do not believe that God exhausted all His grace in Paul, and Latimer, and Edward Payson. I believe there are higher points of Christian attainment to be reached in the future ages of the Christian world.

III. **THEY KNOW WHEN TO START.** If you should go out now, and shout, "Stop, storks and cranes, don't be in a hurry," they would say, "No, we cannot stop. Last night we heard the roaring of the woods bidding us away, and the shrill flute of the north wind has sounded the retreat. We must go." So they gather themselves into companies, and turning not aside for storm or mountain top, or shock of musketry, over land and sea, straight as an arrow to the mark, they go. And if you come out this morning with a sack of corn, and throw it in the fields, and try to get them to stop, they are so far up that they would hardly see it. They are on their way south. You could not stop them. Oh! that we were as wise about the best time to start for God and heaven. I was reading of an entertainment given in a king's court, and there were musicians there with elaborate pieces of music. After a while Mozart came and began to play, and he had a blank piece of paper before him, and the king familiarly looked over his shoulder and said, "What are you playing? I see no music before you." And Mozart put his hand on his brow, as much as to say, "I am making it up as I go along." It was very well for him; but, oh! we cannot extemporise heaven. If we do not get prepared in this world, we will never take part in the orchestral harmonies of the saved. Oh! that we were as wise as the crane and the stork, flying away, flying away from the tempest. Some of you have felt the pinching frost of sin. You feel it to-day. You are not happy. There are voices within your soul that will not be silenced, telling you that you are sinners, and that without the pardon of God you are undone for ever. Oh! that you would go away into the warm heart of God's mercy. The southern grove, redolent with the magnolia and cactus, never waited for northern flocks as God has waited for you. Another frost is bidding you away: it is the frost of trouble. Where do you live now? Oh, you say, "I have moved." Why did you move? You say, "I don't want as large a house now as I used to want." Why do you not want as large a house? You say, "My family is not so large." Where have they gone to? Eternity! (T. De Witt Talmage.) *Migratory birds* (children's address):—It is very remarkable that in the whole globe there is no place suitable all the year round for birds of this order; and that these untaught and unthinking creatures should shift their habitation, and make long voyages through the vast empire of the air. God has imprinted upon their nature that wonderful instinct which enables them to determine when to go and which way to take. The prophet, with the deep instinct of a poet, sees, and declares to Israel, the inner meaning and lessons of the laws and habits of these aerial voyagers.

I. **WE MUST OBEY THE "CALL" OF GOD.** At "the appointed time" the birds feel an impulse or moving within them that they must be going, they congregate together, like swallows in autumn, all ready for their long journey. So in the same way, by the movements of conscience and the voice of Divine truth, God is calling us. Abraham

obeyed that "call," and left his idolatrous surroundings, and so did the fishers of Galilee, they left their nets and followed Christ. In the second part of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, you see how the children left the city of destruction and went on the heavenly journey. II. DO NOT DELAY TO START. You have noticed the birds preparing: the trees and hedgerows are covered with them, and there is such a chattering! Stragglers are coming in, one after the other, and, at last, the signal is given, wings flutter, and then, like a moving dark cloud, the birds begin their wonderful passage across the pathless seas. But some swallows are too late, they are left behind, and perish in the cold. We read in the Bible that Lot's wife lingered and was overtaken by death: the five foolish virgins were all unprepared and "too late"; but the Psalmist was of a different character; he said, "I made haste, I delayed not to keep Thy commandments." III. BEWARE OF TEMPTATIONS. What is it that makes some of the birds late, so that they cannot start with the others? Perhaps, the sunshine! Everything looked so beautiful, the trees were decked in splendour, like Joseph's coat of many colours, and the fat red berries glowed like little balls of fire, and so the birds were tempted to delay their journey until it was too late. It was so with the Jews in Babylon. God called them out of the land of captivity, and opened a way for them through the desert, back to the temple and city of their fathers, but many of them were tempted to remain behind; they had nice houses in Babylon, and there were many pleasant things there, from which it was hard to break away. So the world to-day will seek to keep you back from God, and prevent you beginning the heavenward journey. Beware of its temptations, and pray God to make you strong to overcome. IV. LIKE BIRDS, FLY HIGH, THAT IS, LIVE NEAR TO GOD. There are two advantages the birds have when they fly high up in the air, they can see farther, and they are a greater distance from the guns and snares of the earth, and the weapon of the enemy. In churches, the lectern, on which rests the Bible, is generally a burnished eagle, as if to say, that just as the eagle soars upward and upward towards the sun, so the Bible, if we daily and prayerfully read it, will bring us into the light of God's own presence. Then shall we see the way of life more clearly, and "escape the fiery darts of the evil one." God, too, will fit us for our long journey just as He strengthens the birds for theirs, giving to the swallow long and powerful wings, and to the quail and other birds of shorter pinions marvellous strength of body. Cullen Bryant beautifully says of the waterfowl—

"He who from zone to zone,
Guides thro' the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way which I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright."

(A. Hampden Lcc.)

Duty of repentance illustrated:—I. Respecting THE NATURE OF THE DUTY; the similitude in the text directs us to consider it as a return, a treading back our steps, as birds of passage return to the country from which they departed. We may then define repentance to be, A change of mind, operating in a change of conduct. 1. The leading step in the process must of necessity be conviction. No man will think of returning into the right way, unless he be made sensible that he has wandered out of it. Conviction is produced gradually. Upon some hint given to a man, either from within or from without, he begins to suspect himself in the wrong; and then, if he be honest enough to prosecute the inquiry, discovers at length that he actually is so. Sometimes it is flashed upon the mind at once—he awakes, and the dream is at an end. It is produced by various means, by disappointments, by crosses, by losses, by sickness, by the death of a friend, by a passage in Scripture, or a discourse upon one, by the incidents of common life, or the changes that happen in the natural world; in short, there is hardly a circumstance of so trivial a nature, but that providence, in some instance or other, has been pleased to make it instrumental to this salutary purpose. 2. The next step to conviction, in the process of repentance, is sorrow. The man who has offended his Maker, and is become thoroughly sensible that he has done so, and of the consequences of his having done so, cannot but be grieved to find himself in such a situation. The degree of this sorrow is varied almost infinitely by the different temperaments of mind and body in the penitents, and the different views under which sin presents itself to their several

imaginations. And, therefore, the same degree is not to be exacted of all. By enthusiasm it has been, not unfrequently, aggravated even to frenzy and madness. In Scripture it is drawn with an aspect perfectly sober, but yet described, in many instances, as very intense, like that occasioned by the languors of sickness in its last stage, or the pain arising from dislocated or broken bones, and venting itself in complaints and lamentations, in sighs and tears. There are temporal calamities, which can draw tears plentifully from most persons; nay, a fictitious representation of them can produce the effect. Spiritual ones, perhaps, would do the same, if we felt them as we ought to feel them; as due retirement and meditation would cause us to feel them; and as we shall one day feel them, when death shall be seen levelling his dart at our pillow, and the throne of judgment rising to the view, beyond him. 3. A third step is confession. One of an ingenuous mind, who is heartily sorry for his offences, will not be ashamed or backward to own that sorrow. 4. A fourth step is resolution to amend. 5. One step more remains, and only one, but that very steep and difficult of ascent, which is, to carry what we have resolved into execution. It is this which finishes and crowns all the rest. II. THE MOTIVES TO IT. Evil to be avoided, and good to be obtained, are the motives, which influence and produce all human actions. To escape from the rigours and storms of winter, and to enjoy the sweets of a milder and more gracious season, is the instinctive cause, why the heaven-taught monitors, to whom we are referred, migrate from one country to another. It is to avoid the judgments of God, and partake of His mercies, that man is called to repent. 1. The evil, then, to be avoided, is "the judgment of God," consequent upon sin, and sure to overtake it, if unrepented of. Sin, which is the transgression of the law, cannot but be noticed by Him who gave that law; and if noticed, must be punished, either in this life, or that which is to come. Sin is often punished in this life; much oftener than we are aware; indeed so often, that we may say to you as Moses to Israel (Numb. xxxii. 23). It would be in vain, however, to dissemble, that in the present state, as is the offence, such is not always the punishment. Notorious sinners often partake not, to appearance, the common evils of life, but pass their days in prosperity and health, and die without any visible tokens of the Divine displeasure. To take off, in some measure, the force of the objection, it must be remarked, that, besides those judgments of God, which lie open to the observation of mankind, there are others, even in the present life, of a secret and invisible kind, known only to the party by whom they are felt. In the brilliant scenes of splendour, of luxury and dissipation, surrounded by the companions of his pleasures, and the flatterers of his vices, amidst the flashes of wit and merriment, when all wears the face of gaiety and festivity, the profligate often reads his doom, written by the hand whose characters are indelible. Should he turn away his eyes from beholding it, and succeed in the great work, during the course of his revels, yet the time will come, when from scenes like these he must retire, and be alone: and then, as Dr. South says, "What is all that a man can enjoy in this way for a week, a month, or a year, compared with what he feels for one hour, when his conscience shall take him aside, and rate him by himself?" There is likewise another hour which will come, and that soon—the hour when life must end; when the accumulated wealth of the east and the west, with all the assistance it is able to procure, will not be competent to obtain the respite of a moment. It will still be alleged, perhaps, that instances are not wanting of the worst of men, in principle and practice, going out of life with no less composure than the best. I believe these instances to be very rare indeed. But however, by habits either of sensuality or infidelity, the conscience may be drugged, and laid asleep in this world, let it not be forgotten that there is another world beyond this, in which it must awake, to sleep no more. And if in this world some sins are punished, as we have assurance they are, while others of far greater magnitude and more atrocious guilt are permitted to go unpunished, it will follow, by a consequence which the wit of man cannot gainsay, should he study for a thousand years to do it, that such sins, not being punished here, will most inevitably be punished there. 2. The good to be obtained needeth few words. (1) The light of heaven shining upon our tabernacle, the Divine favour attending us and ours, through every stage of our existence, sanctifying prosperity, and turning adversity itself into a blessing, while it becomes an instrument to rectify the disorders of our minds, to soften the few hard places remaining in our hearts, to smooth and lay even the little roughnesses in our tempers; thus gradually

and gently preparing us for our departure hence, and fitting us for the company of "the spirits of just men made perfect." (2) The answer of a good conscience, diffusing peace and serenity over all the powers and faculties of the soul, refreshing like the dew falling on the top of Hermon, exhilarating as the fragrance of the holy oil descending from the head of Aaron; sweetening the converse of society, and the charities of active life, and affording, in retirement and solitude, pleasures concealed from the world around us, joys in which "a stranger intermeddleth not." (3) The reward in heaven, the glory that shall be revealed, to be known only when it shall be revealed; the bliss without alloy, and without end, which he cannot conceive who has not experienced, and which he who has experienced can find no human language able to express. III. Some short RULES for the conduct of our repentance. 1. Stifle not convictions. Attend to every suggestion of this salutary kind, from what quarter soever it may proceed: attend, and slight it not. It is the voice of God calling you to repentance. Listen, and obey. 2. Be serious. The subject will cause any man to become so, who considers it as he ought to do; who reflects, what sin is in the sight of God, what sorrow it occasioned to the Son of God, what destruction it hath brought upon the world, and is about to bring upon himself, unless prevented by a timely repentance. (*Bp. Horne.*)

Ver. 7. **But My people know not the judgment of the Lord.**—*A set time for judgment:*—The judgment of God is either directive, corrective, or destructive. This last is meant here. It is spoken of the judgment of utter ruin and desolation upon whom the former judgment has not taken due effect. In the count of the Holy Ghost in Scripture, a man knows no more than he believes, and is affected with, and makes use of: they knew not, they considered not, believed not, were not affected with, neither did they make use of it, either the judgment itself, nor the time of the judgment, either to fear it, or to fly from it: so that they were more unwise for themselves, and for their temporal and eternal safety, than the unreasonable creatures; they knew not the judgment of the Lord. I. THERE IS UNTO A SINFUL NATION A SET AND APPOINTED TIME OF JUDGMENT. 1. There is a time of sinning, a set and an appointed time. (1) A fulness of sin, appointed by God that it shall have its period (Gen. xv. 16; Zech. v. 6). (2) A measure of wrath, which every vessel of wrath shall treasure up (Rom. ii. 4, 5). 2. There is a time of patience, when the Lord holds His peace and reproves not (Psa. l. 21, 23). There is a time of repentance, when God defers the judgment after sinning, on purpose that man may return and come in (Rev. ii. 21). 3. The times of patience and repentance have their periods; indeed these times are not of the same length to all: to some God shows but a little patience, and to others a great deal, riches of patience and forbearance. But the longest day hath its evening. 4. When the time of patience is expired, there is then a time for judgment, a day of recompense, a year of vengeance, a time for the expending of those treasures of wrath that have been so long laying in; because there was by sinning a time of treasuring: and so there shall also come a time of spending (Rom. ii. 4, 5), a time for the wall that is swelled out to hang, but there will come a time also when it will fall (Isa. xxx. 13). 5. When this time doth come, the Lord will forbear a people no longer: this determining of judgment in the time of it is exceedingly set before us in the Word, and that under divers expressions. (1) The Lord doth express it by a full and a peremptory resolution that He will do it (Ezek. xxi. 27). (2) It is called a decree, or the bringing forth the decree (Zeph. ii. 2). Decrees are acts of authority. They are established and firm. (3) It is called swearing in His wrath (Psa. ix. 11). (4) Those means that usually prevail with God, and turn away threatened judgment, prevail nothing in the time of judgment. Repentance, prayer, fasting, intercession of the godly. When once the set time for judgment is come, the Lord will forbear a people no longer. II. THIS TIME OF JUDGMENT MAY AND MUST BE KNOWN. Otherwise they could not be blamed. What, then, are the signs preceding judgment? 1. A fulness of sin (Joel iii. 16; Jer. i. 11, 12). An almond-tree hath the first ripe fruit of any tree, and it notes the hastening of them to ripen their sins; and the Lord saith, as they did hasten their sins to a ripeness, so He would hasten to ripen His judgments, so that this is a certain sign foregoing judgment. But when is sin full? When is it ripe in a nation? (1) When a people seeks to make void the law. (2) Corrupting the worship of God by human inventions. (3) Confederacy with idolaters. (4) Abusing the messengers of God. (5) Not laying to heart the afflictions of

our brethren. 2. The beginnings of judgment are an evident token that the time of judgment draws near (Luke ii. 30, 31). By a lesser judgment God makes way for His anger, for a perfect and an utter ruin (Psa. lxxviii. 50). (1) All nations about them were against them (Jer. xii. 9). (2) The general corruption and decay of truth and wisdom of men in places of greatest trust (Isa. i. 22). (3) The subversion of fundamental laws (Psa. lxxxii. 5). (4) Private and intestine divisions. Use—1. Not to know the time is misery enough; therefore men are taken suddenly and unawares (Eccles. ix. 12). 2. That you may know the time to improve this promise (Eccles. viii. 5). 3. A wise man foresees the evil, and hides himself, but fools pass on and are punished (Prov. xxii. 3). (1) By a work of humiliation (Hab. iii. 16). (2) A work of reformation (Zeph. ii. 3). (3) Improve all the promises. (4) Be much in prayer. (5) Betake thyself to the mediation of Christ. (*W. Strong.*) *Seek safety before the storm comes*:—Merchants take care to insure their goods before the ship clears the dock. It would be useless, when the news of a terrible sea-storm came, to run to the office, and then expect to make all safe and right. O living but dying man, at once, to-day, prepare for the coming storm. (*E. Foster.*)

Ver. 11. They have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.—*Healed or deluded? Which?*—The people among whom Jeremiah dwelt had received a grievous hurt, and they felt it, for they were invaded by cruel enemies, their goods were plundered, their children were slain, and their cities burned. Jeremiah, with true love to his nation, warned them that the cause of all their trouble was that they had forsaken their God. To-day God's servants have a task before them sterner even than that of the ancient seers. It is not ours to point to smoking ruins and the carcasses of the unburied dead—plain evidences of a grievous hurt; but our work is to deal with spiritual sickness, and to come among a people who confess no hurt. Great multitudes of our hearers do not welcome the news of a heavenly remedy, because they are not aware that they are sick. A physician who has to commence his practice by convincing his neighbours that they are sick has not a very hopeful sphere before him. Such is our work: we have first of all to declare in the name of the God of truth that man is fallen, that his heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, that he is a sinner doomed to die, and such a sinner that there is no reclaiming him unless the Ethiopian can change his skin and the leopard his spots. Truths so humiliating to human pride are by no means popular; men prefer to hear the smooth periods of those who parade the dignity of human nature. Many there are who confess their disease, but the disease of sin has wrought in them a spiritual lethargy, so that they find a horrible rest in their lost estate, and have no longing to rise to spiritual health, of which, indeed, they know nothing. They are guilty, and willing to remain guilty; inclined to evil, and content with the inclination. Ah, me! but we must bring them out of this. They will perish unless they are quickened out of this indifference: they will sleep themselves into hell unless we can find an antidote to the opiates of sin. After these things are done, we have but stormed the outworks of the castle, for there still remains another difficulty. Convinced that they want healing, and made in a measure anxious to find it, the danger with the awakened is lest they should rest content with an apparent cure, and miss the real work of grace. I. IT IS VERY EASY FOR US TO BE THE SUBJECTS OF A FALSE HEALING. 1. We might infer this from the fact that no doubt a large number of persons are so deceived. If a large number of persons are so, then why should not we be? The tendency of other men is probably in us also. Why not? Are there not many persons who consider that all is well with them because they have been observant of church ordinances from their youth up, and their parents were observant for them before they actually came upon the stage of responsibility? Too many are reliant entirely upon external religion. If that be attended to carefully they conclude that all is right. I am afraid, too, that many who do not rely upon religious forms yet confide in doctrinal beliefs. They are sound in the faith—orthodox, evangelical. They heartily detest any doctrine that is not scriptural. I am glad to find that it is so with them; but let them not rest in this. To cover a wound with a royal garment is not to heal it, and to conceal a sinful disposition beneath a sound creed is not salvation. 2. Depend upon this, that if there is a chance of our being deceived at all we are always ready to aid in the deception. We are almost all of us on the side of that which is most easy and comfortable to ourselves: the exceptions to this rule are a few morbid

spirits who habitually write bitter things against themselves, and a few gracious souls whom the Holy Spirit has convinced of sin, who would comfort themselves if they could, but dare not do so. Take this, then, for granted, that there are many ways of being slightly healed, and we are most of us likely to be pleased with one or other of them. 3. Besides, flatterers are not yet an extinct race. False prophets abounded in Jeremiah's day, and they may be met with still. 4. Slight healing is sure to be fashionable among a great many, because it requires so little thought. People will do anything but think according to the Word of God. How few sit down and answer the question, "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" They would sooner hear a thunder-clap than be asked to consider their ways. 5. Superficial religion also will always be fashionable, because it does not require self-denial. Do you wonder that vital godliness is at a discount when it proclaims war to the knife against a lifelong indulgence? 6. Slight healing, also, is sought by men, because it does not require spirituality. 7. But let me warn you with all the energy I possess against ever being satisfied with any of the slight healings that are cried up nowadays, because they will all end in disappointment, as sure as you are living men. Remember that if you pass through this life deceived there will await you an awful undeceiving in the next world. II. BE IT OURS TO SEEK TRUE HEALING. But then, as we have already said, this true healing must be radical. Oh, pray to have it so! Oh that we might each one now lie at Christ's feet as dead till He shall touch us and say, "Live." Truly, I desire no life but that which He gives. I would be quickened by His Spirit, and find in Him my life, my all. Now go a step further. The healing we want must be a healing from the guilt of sin. Every offence you have ever committed must be washed right out, even the least stain of it must vanish, and it must be as though it had never been, and you must be as though you never had offended at all. "How can that be?" say you. It is clear it cannot be by anything that you can do; and this again drives you to the prayer of my text, "Heal me, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved." How can it be? Only by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Saviour. But you must not only be free from sin, you must be freed from sinfulness: a work must be wrought in you, and in me, by which we shall be clean rid of every tendency to do evil. Does not this make you cry, "Heal me, O God, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved"? It ought to do so, and in so doing it will work your safety. In answer to your cry the eternal Spirit shall come upon you, creating you anew in Christ Jesus: He shall come and dwell in you, and shall break down the reigning power of sin, putting it beneath your feet. It is most desirable to be so healed in soul as to stand the test of this present life. I have known friends discharged from the hospital as healed of disease who were bitterly disappointed when they came into everyday life: a little exertion made them as ill as ever. A person had a piece of diseased bone in the wrist; it was taken out by the hospital surgeon, and the arm seemed perfectly healed, but when she began to work the old pain returned, and it was evident that the old mischief was there still, and that a part of the decayed bone remained. Thus some are saved, so they think; but it is only in seeming, for when they get into the world, and are tried with temptation, they are just the same as they used to be. They have not received a practical salvation; and nothing but practical salvation is worth having. A sham cure is worse than none. III. LET US GO WHERE TRUE HEALING IS TO BE HAD. It is quite certain that God is able to heal us of all our sins: for He who created can restore. Whatever our diseases, nothing can surpass the power of omnipotent love. Blessed be the name of the Lord, no work of grace can be beyond His will, for He delighteth in mercy. The Lord is so fond of healing sin-sick souls, that He had but one Son, and He made a physician of Him that He might come and heal mankind of their deadly wound: and He being made a physician came down among us, and sought out for His patients, not the good and excellent, but the most guilty, for He said, "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Jesus, then, the beloved Physician is able and willing to meet the case of every one of us. His wounds are an unfailing remedy. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Two kinds of peace; the false and the true:*—It was the fault of the Jews, on whom Jeremiah denounced the judgment of God for their sins, that, instead of repenting, they comforted themselves with false hopes of mercy, and cried, Peace, peace, when there was no peace. "I hearkened, and heard," saith the prophet, "that they spake not right: no man repented

him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ! " " They did not amend their doings ; they did not execute judgment between a man and his neighbour ; but they still oppressed the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. " And the alarm which might be caused by the awful declarations of the prophet they soon forgot : they healed the hurt slightly ; they believed the false prophets, who spake smooth things to them. Too often do we meet with cases exactly similar amongst ourselves. God has denounced judgments upon sinners ; the ministers of God proclaim these judgments, and, if possible, to alarm the consciences of sinners. There would scarcely be anything more surprising, were we not so accustomed to it, than the general indifference and fearlessness which is shown in respect to the judgments of God. Is it true that God has actually appointed a judgment-seat, at which we must all appear ? Is it certain, that a punishment which is eternal awaits transgressors ? Still, however, it sometimes happens, where the Word of God is faithfully preached, that an uneasy suspicion of danger will arise, and an alarm be produced in the mind, respecting the judgment to come. Inquiry will then, perhaps, be made as to the way of safety. I wish them to consider the uneasiness they feel, however painful, as a great blessing, for which they have more reason to offer up thanksgivings to God than perhaps for any mercy they ever before experienced. A state of careless ease is the state of danger. Let us not, therefore, stifle such convictions ; let us not look upon them as an evil ; let us not lament that our quiet has been interrupted ; but rather cherish them, as the means used by Providence for our good. Let such persons, however, beware of laying too great a stress upon present peace. It should ever be laid down as a rule, that grace is to be sought in the first place ; then peace. But many reverse this. Comfort should never be made our principal or direct end ; though it too often happens that doctrines are valued, ministers chosen, and means used, only on account of the degree of comfort which they excite. The bad effects of thus unduly valuing present peace are very serious. That uneasiness of mind which is the parent of humility and the nurse of repentance ; that uneasiness, which, if cultivated, would produce a spirit of holy jealousy and watchfulness over ourselves, a just and extensive view of our duty, and a tenderness of conscience, is stifled in its very birth ; and the consequence is obvious : superficial convictions produce superficial peace and superficial practice.

I. THE FALSE WAYS BY WHICH MEN ENDEAVOUR TO OBTAIN PEACE. Here I must begin with remarking, that the strength of a person's peace is no proof of the soundness of it. It is not unusual to see even notorious sinners dying in peace, and to meet with enthusiasts of various and opposite kinds rejoicing in a peace of mind which is not clouded by a single doubt. For let a person be only firmly convinced that he is right, and peace will follow naturally. Hence it will vary according to a person's natural temper, his modesty or his arrogance, his knowledge or his ignorance, as well as according to the doctrines he imbibes. We may learn from this view of the subject the great importance of sound scriptural knowledge and true religious principles. A false peace must be built on error or ignorance, and these are removed by a thorough knowledge of the truths of Scripture. We must examine whether our views are just concerning the terms of salvation, and the necessary evidence of the safety of our state.

1. It is far from being uncommon to hear a person declare his religious creed in such terms as these : " Whatever bigots may affirm, or enthusiasts believe, I am certain that God is our merciful Father, and will make allowance for the frailties of His creatures. He knows what passions He gave us, and will surely consider their strength and our weakness. It is dishonourable to Him to indulge any fear of His goodness. Such cases as those, to which human laws do not extend, Divine justice may reach ; but as for those whose lives, allowing for human infirmity, are on the whole respectable, surely they need entertain no uneasy apprehensions. " Let a person receive these sentiments, it matters not upon how slight evidence—it matters not that the Word of God contradicts them—and he will have peace ; and this peace he will enjoy so long as he continues firm in these sentiments. It is only some uneasy fear that sin may not be so easily forgiven ; some secret suggestion of conscience that all is not right within, which can shake this man's peace.

2. Such a peace as this can only be the result of gross ignorance, and neglect of serious inquiry. Where the conscience is enlightened by some degree of scriptural knowledge, there must be something much more than this to serve as a foundation for the peace of the soul. There are persons, therefore, who seek peace by the adoption of a new religious system, perhaps a

true one. They read the Scriptures, and they attend to religious conversation with much curiosity and desire to know the truth: a complete change perhaps takes place in their religious opinions: their imagination is alive to religion; their thoughts are occupied with it. Now, supposing the system of religion which they have adopted to be the true one, still it may be asked, does the mere belief even of the truth save the soul? Can a mere speculative faith, however true, save a man? Does our Saviour, or do His apostles tell us to depend on our opinions, on the fancies of our minds, or the clearness of our conceptions? 3. Another class of persons build their peace, not upon the declarations of Scripture respecting the character of those who shall be accepted, but upon some secret suggestions, some impression made on the mind, some vision or voice, some uncommon feeling, by which they imagine they are assured of the favour of God towards them. God does not give one revelation to supersede another: He does not point out a hope in His Word upon which we may and ought to rely, and then, rejecting that as imperfect, communicate one in a different way. "We are saved," saith the apostle, "by faith"; in another place, "by hope." They both imply the same thing, and both prove that it is not by sight, by feeling, by impressions: for these are not faith; these have not the truth revealed in Scripture for their object, but the truth revealed to ourselves. What a door is here opened for delusion and enthusiasm! How is the attention thus drawn from the Word of God, to follow an unknown guide! How do we leave the promises, to build upon the phantoms of fancy! It must be allowed, indeed, that the Holy Spirit is the great Author of light and peace: but He communicates them, as we learn from Scripture, by impressing the truths revealed in the Bible on our hearts; by removing our prejudices against them; by disposing our hearts to attend to them; by exciting holy affections in consequence of the view we have of them. Thus the Spirit testifies of Christ, not of us; fills us with joy in believing the old, not in receiving a new, revelation; makes known the truths of Scripture, not truths with which Scripture is unconcerned.

II. WHAT IS THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN PEACE? 1. It is not to be denied, that some good persons have built their peace on those evidences which I have just laid down as unsatisfactory; but in this case, it has been their error that they have neglected what was truly a good evidence, and dwelt upon what was imperfect and unsound. We are apt to lay too much stress upon what is peculiar to ourselves and to our party, and too little upon what is really important, and what is held to be so in Scripture. 2. We may lay it down as a maxim, that grace in the heart is far more important than light in the understanding, or than comfort and peace, however founded. The peace of the Gospel has a close connection with sanctification, as well as a manifest influence upon it. And one great evil which arises from all false ways of obtaining peace is this, that they have no necessary connection with sanctification. Whatever peace, or whatever feelings we have, let us mark their practical influence: if they tend to produce, not a partial, but an universal respect to all God's will, so far they are right, and all true Christian peace will tend to produce that effect. It remains now to explain what is the just and proper foundation on which a solid peace may be built. Here it is hardly necessary to premise that Scripture is our only unerring guide in such inquiries. Now, in his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul treats of this subject, not indirectly or briefly, but expressly and fully. In the fifth chapter he states the way in which a Christian obtains peace with God, and is enabled to rejoice in hope of His glory. This foundation appears to be faith. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Peace, I have said, is at first to be obtained by believing. But suppose a person, who fancies himself a believer, still lives in the practice of sin; is he, nevertheless, to maintain peace, to stifle the alarms of conscience, and to look only to his faith in the revelation of Christ? God forbid. His conduct proves that his faith is insincere. He must humble himself before God as a sinner, and pray for true faith; for an influential, purifying view of the Gospel. Thus, then, faith must be the foundation of our peace, but uprightness the guard of it. Faith and peace will then go hand in hand, attending the true Christian in his journey to heaven. Does he fall into sin? His peace will decay. Would he have it renewed? It must be by renewed repentance, and renewed application to the Saviour, who takes away sin and communicates pardon and sanctifying grace. Thus his faith will be strengthened, and his peace restored. Let us examine on what our peace towards God is founded. Is it on our own good life? If so, it is false. Is it on our faith? If so, is our faith sincere? Does it teach us reliance on Christ, and lead us to

continual applications to Him for grace? Does the love of Christ constrain us to live to Him rather than to ourselves? Does it produce in us a uniform and sincere obedience to His holy will? If not, we may justly fear that our faith is vain, and that we are yet in our sins. Lastly, let us ever bear in mind, that to Christ alone must we be indebted for salvation. Though the Scriptures speak of our being saved by faith, yet, properly speaking, it is Christ alone who can save us. He has made a full and sufficient atonement for sin. (*Christian Observer.*)

Ver. 17. *I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you.—Penalty:*—There are countries that are desolated by animals; there have been harvests eaten by locusts; there have been vineyards stripped by insects; there is, therefore, no violence in the figure, and there is nothing of the nature of exaggeration. The animals have one keeper. God can make them live where He likes. The sight of that cockatrice might make a man almost pray. It would turn many a blustering, blatant sinner in the city into a coward if he could but once catch sight of it on the counting-house floor; then any prophet would be welcome who could charm the evil thing. But this cockatrice will not be charmed. It will look with proud disdain upon your traps and snares and all your offered flatteries, and all your bribes to its cruel dignity; it has come to do God's judgment work, and it will not accept the compromise the sinner proposes. These words are full of sadness, full of horribleness: but we must be horrible before we can be gracious; we must know what the law is before we can know what the Gospel is; we must preach—oh, sad confession, and hurtful to a dainty and irrational sentimentality!—we must preach hell, if haply men may, by the terror of the Lord, be brought to know the meaning of His grace. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 19, 20. *Is not the Lord in Zion?—A discourse for a revival season:*—These words, as they stand in the Book of Jeremiah, were probably meant to set forth the sin of Israel. The prophet's heart is very full of sadness; he can hear the cries of the people in the streets of Jerusalem. They are moaning for sorrow, because of the oppression of the Chaldeans—the nation that dwelt afar off; and in the midst of their bitterness they remember the God whom they had forgotten in their prosperity: but this remembrance is not a gracious one; they do not remember Him to humble themselves, but to bring accusations against Him. They inquire, "Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her King in her?" As if they felt, "The people of the Lord, the people of the Lord are we, and therefore He is bound to send us a deliverance." They accuse the faithfulness of Jehovah, because He greatly suffers them to be downtrodden for their sins. Then the Lord, speaking by the prophet, tells them the reason why, although present among them, He did not help them: "Why have they provoked Me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities?" If they believed Him to be present, why did they set up false gods? I. We have in the text a CRY. 1. Observe the word "Behold." The "behold" here is the mark of astonishment. We are to "Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of My people" as an unusual thing. So seldom does Israel cry unto the Lord, she is so negligent of prayer, she is so silent when she ought to be incessant in her petitions, that when at last she does cry, her voice is a wonder in God's ears. And yet it ought not to be a wonder, it ought not to be a strange thing for God's people to be in earnest, or for sinners to feel brokenness of heart. If prayer be the Christian's breath, why then, to see a multitude breathing, should never be a spectacle. If to pray unto God be the Christian's daily privilege, then to approach the throne of God with prevalent earnestness, should never be looked upon with astonishment. 2. Notice how this prayer is described. It is a cry: "Behold the cry." A cry is the most natural form of utterance. It is a natural expression made up of pain and desire for relief. When a brother merely prays what we call prayer, he stands up and utters very proper words, very edifying, very suitable, no doubt, and then he has done. Another brother comes forward; he wants a blessing, he tells the Lord what he desires; he takes the promises, he wrestles with God, and then he seems to say, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." He cannot be satisfied till, with the cry of "Abba, Father," he has come before the throne and really obtained an audience with the Most High. 3. Note again, for every word of our text is suggestive, it is "Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of My people." It is not enough to be earnest, you must know what you are earnest about; the cry must have a voice which is as far as possible understood by yourself, and a voice which has a meaning in it before

God. I must direct my prayer unto God, as David says, pull my bow, direct the arrow, take aim at the centre of the target, and then when the arrow flies it is likely to reach its place. 4. Further, study the matter of the voice—it was “for them that dwell in a far country.” In what a far country does every sinner dwell! Now, the prayers, I hope, of God’s people, have been going up for all the far-off ones, that infinite mercy would make them nigh by the blood of Christ. 5. Remark another word in the text—for “those that dwell in a far country”: there are some of you who make a long abode in a far country. The fact is, you have taken up your dwellings; you have made a settlement in one of the parishes of the city of destruction; you are making out a claim to be enrolled in the devil’s register; you dwell in the far-off land. If you were uneasy and felt yourselves to be strangers and foreigners in the land of destruction, how would I clap my hands for joy; for you would soon be rid of your old master if you once felt sick of him. 6. The cry is “The cry of the daughter of My people.” Oh, it is so sweet to think that our prayers, poor as they are, are the prayers of God’s own people, and therefore they must be heard. You are the Lord’s children, therefore He will hear you. Would you let your child constantly cry to you and not answer Him? II. We will now turn to the QUESTION: “Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her King in her?” I will answer that question at once in the affirmative. “The Lord is in Zion: her King is in the midst of her.” Having answered this question, it suggests many more. 1. If the Lord be indeed in Zion, and the King be in the midst of her, why do we pray as if He were not? He is with you, ready to answer by fire, if, like Elias, you have but faith with which to challenge His promise and His power. 2. Why do you despond because of your own weakness? “We have not a sufficient number of ministers; we have little wealth; we have few places of public worship; we have few gifted members,” and so on. So some unbelievably talk. “Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her King in her?” What more do you want? “Oh! we would like to be strong.” Why would you be strong? That you must be disqualified to be used by God? Why, any fool can kill the enemy with a cannon, but it takes a Samson to smite them with the jawbone of an ass. And so, when God has the choice of weapons, and He always has, He chooses the weaker weapon, that He may get to Himself the greater renown. 3. If God be with us, why these great fears about the prosperity of the Church? The God of Zion is here, the King of Zion is here. I grant you, we do not sufficiently recognise His presence; we are not, as we should be, obedient to His commands; but I charge you, O ye soldiers of the Cross, believe in the presence of your Captain, and press where ye see His helmet amidst the din of war. His Cross is the great emblazoned banner which leads you on to glory. Press forward! to suffer, to deny yourselves, to bear witness for Christ; for the battle is the Lord’s, and the King Himself fights in the van. III. ANOTHER QUESTION. “Why have they provoked Me to anger with their graven images and with strange vanities?” 1. Here is a question for the Lord’s people. It becomes a very solemn thing when God is in His Church how that Church behaves herself. Suppose that Church to set up false principles: if her King were not there she might take the kings of the earth to be her head. But dare she do that when her King Himself is there? 2. This text has a particular voice to sinners. You have been saying, “God is in the midst of His people—how is it I have not had a blessing?” I will ask you this question, “Why have they provoked Me to anger with their graven images and with strange vanities?” Do not ask why the Word is not blessed to you; do not ask why you do not enjoy the prayer-meeting: answer my question first. Why hast thou provoked Me to anger with thy tricks in trade, with thy Sabbath-breaking, with thy lying, with thy loose songs, with thy mixing up with worldly company, with thy profanity? IV. ANOTHER CRY. I wish I might hear this cry this morning, for then I should not hear it in the world to come, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Manifestations of the presence of God*:—The ancient polity of the Jewish nation was a pure and splendid theocracy. Jehovah was their King. He gave them their laws, selected their judges, appointed their prophets, and He reigned the Lord supreme, having chosen them to be His peculiar people, and special possession. I. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE MEMBERS OF A PROFESSING CHURCH TO BE DECEIVED CONCERNING THE PRESENCE OF GOD, AND CONCLUDE THAT HE IS WITH THEM, WHEN IN REALITY HE IS FAR FROM THEM. 1. Deceived on this important point are those who conclude God is with them because they have imposing forms and splendid places of worship. If pompous forms of worship and gorgeous temples

marked the presence of God with men, the evidence would go to show that God was more with the ancient heathen than with the ancient Jews. It would exalt Mahomet and Mohammedanism over Christ and Christianity. 2. Deceived on this important point are those professing churches who conclude God is with them, because they have creeds and councils in their favour. Were, however, this conclusion correct, it would prove that the presence of God might be found with the mere letter of truth, or even error. 3. Deceived on this important point are those professing churches who conclude God is with them because they have extensive knowledge and numerous gifts. In danger of this error were many who were members of the Church of God at Corinth. An error St. Paul fully exposed, showing that those things which they so highly valued were worthless in comparison with sacred charity, true love to God, and pure love to man. 4. Deceived also on this important point are those churches and individuals who conclude God is with them because He was once with them. Who will question the truth, that He was with the Jews as a people, when Moses sang (Exod. xv. 13)? But is He with them now as a nation, as the rod of His inheritance, the Zion wherein He delighteth to dwell? Has not the evil He warned them against come upon them (Jer. vi. 8)? Then in reference unto individuals, having once been with them, is no certainty that He abides with them. Was He not with Saul when chosen of God to be the King of Israel (1 Sam. x. 7)? Was He not with Solomon when he devoutly dedicated the temple to the Lord, and prayed (2 Chron. vi. 41)? Was He not with Judas when called to the apostleship? Now to say nothing concerning the hour of death, was His presence perpetually with these through life? Then let us not, neither as churches nor as individual members, depend on the past, nor be satisfied with anything short of having God indisputably with us now; bearing in remembrance that His presence is conditional (2 Chron. xv. 2).

II. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE MEMBERS OF A PROFESSING CHURCH TO BE FULLY ASSURED OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD AMONG THEM—KING IN ZION. 1. God is where the Word of truth is faithfully preached and believingly received. 2. God is where the ministry of the Gospel is effectual to accomplish the purposes for which it is proclaimed. 3. God is where the members of the Church grow in sacred knowledge, and increase in holiness of heart and life. 4. God is where the discipline of Christ is scripturally observed and maintained. 5. God is where a professing people dwell together in the bonds of Christian charity. To this Christians are called by their name, their profession, and hope of eternal life. III. IT REMOVES THE MEMBERS OF A PROFESSING CHRISTIAN CHURCH FREQUENTLY AND FAITHFULLY TO PRESS ON THEMSELVES THE SOLEMN, WEIGHTY INQUIRY, IS THE LORD IN OUR ZION, IS HER KING WITH US? Have we the marks of the Divine presence already stated? Let us examine ourselves as a Christian community on this subject, and that with the sincerity of those who would not be deceived. 1. Is the Word of truth faithfully preached by us as ministers? 2. Is the ministry of the Gospel among us successful to accomplish its gracious designs? 3. Are we as people wise in sacred knowledge and intent on full conformity of the will and image of God? 4. Have we a wholesome scriptural discipline? 5. Are we as a professing Church united in the bonds of Christian charity? IV. IT BECOMES A CHRISTIAN CHURCH, SENSIBLE OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE BUT DESIROUS OF A MORE SPECIAL MANIFESTATION OF GOD WITH THEM AND TO THEM, TO EMPLOY THOSE MEANS WHICH ARE CALCULATED TO PROMOTE HIS MORE GLORIOUS ABODE IN ZION. 1. This they should do by a full and constant acknowledgment of the sovereign authority and rule of Christ (Eph. i. 22). His kingship in Zion is not a supposed character, but a positive possessed office; and weighty must be the guilt and condemnation of those who deny His claim, and reject His rule. 2. This they should do by diligently seeking an increase of personal holiness (Psa. cxxxii. 14, 16). 3. The more glorious presence of God should also be sought by the members of the Church, in the exercise of fervent, persevering prayer. (*W. Naylor.*) *The royal presence*.—The great thing is to ascertain the fact of the Lord's presence with His people. Now, where the Lord's presence is, there are tokens special, peculiar, and infallible, by which it is evidenced. Where the Lord is, everything will go well: the Gospel will triumph, and the righteous will be glad. On the contrary, the Lord's absence is marked by wickedness, carnality, darkness, and dissolution. 1. An indispensable evidence that God is in the churches, we think to be a united, loving people. The Spirit is the source of love; and it is His first fruit. 2. Where this love is present, and in powerful operation, it will produce another evidence—a consistent, holy deportment.

Love and purity are inseparable; but purity of heart will be indicated by purity of life. 3. The Lord's presence is always accompanied by special zeal for His glory: a desire to promote His honour, and to extend His kingdom. 4. An invariable accompaniment of the King's presence is liberality in the disposition of worldly substance. His people realise the fact that they are not proprietors, but stewards, to whom is committed treasure, which is exclusively His own. 5. The spirit of humble waiting at His footstool, for the lessons of His wisdom, is another indication of His presence. The churches will be teachable, devout, and obedient in all things. 6. A further evidence of the royal presence is, the possession of high attainments in spiritual things: the citizens of Zion will largely enjoy the comfort of love, the patience of hope, and every blessing provided for them. 7. As a rule, another token of the Lord's presence will be, that while His people walk in His fear, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they will be multiplied. The message of love, spoken in love, will operate with melting power on the hearts of men. (*The Christian Witness.*)

Ver. 20. *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*—*Harvest past, summer ended, and men unsaved*:—The passage is full of lamentation and woe, and yet it is somewhat singular that the chief mourner here is not one who needed chiefly to be in trouble. Jeremiah was under the special protection of God, and he escaped in the evil day. Even when Nebuchadnezzar was exercising his utmost rage, Jeremiah was in no danger, for the heart of the fierce monarch was kindly towards him. "Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee." The man of God, who personally had least cause to mourn, was filled with heavy grief, while the people who were about to lose their all, and to lose their lives, still remained but half awakened; complaining, but not repenting; afraid, but yet not humbled before God. A preacher whom God sends will often feel more care for the souls of men than men feel for themselves or their own salvation. Is it not sad that there should be an anxious pain in the heart of one who is himself saved, while those who are unsaved, and are obliged to own it, feel little or no concern? See yonder man about to be condemned to die, standing at the bar, the judge putting on the black cap is scarcely able to pronounce the sentence for emotion, and all around him in the court break down with distress on his account, while he himself is brazen-faced, and feels no more than the floor he stands upon! How hardened has he become! Pity is lost upon him, if pity ever can be lost. I. The language of COMPLAINT. These Jews said, "The seasons are going by, the year is spending itself, the harvest is past, the vintage also is ended, and yet we are not saved." In effect they complained of God that He had not saved them, as if He was under some obligation to have done so, as if they had a kind of claim upon Him to interpose: and so they spoke as if they were an ill-used people, a nation that had been neglected by their Protector. This complaint was a very unjust one, for there were many reasons why they were not saved, and why God had not delivered them. 1. They had looked to the wrong quarter: they expected that the Egyptians would deliver them. The same folly dwells in multitudes of men. They are not saved, and they never will be while they continue to look where they do look. All dependence upon ourselves is looking to Egypt for help, and leaning our weight upon a broken reed. Whether that dependence upon self takes the form of relying upon ceremonies, or depending upon prayers, or trusting in our own attempts to improve ourselves morally, it is still the same proud folly of self-dependence. All trust but that which is found in Jesus is a delusion and a falsehood. No man can help you. Eternal barrenness is the portion of those who trust in man and make flesh their arm. 2. Those people had prided themselves upon their outward privileges; they had presumed upon their favoured position, for they say in the nineteenth verse, "Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her King in her?" Faith in Jesus is the one thing needful; vain is the fact that you were born of Christian parents, ye must be born again; vain is your sitting as God's people sit in the solemn service of the sanctuary, your heart must be changed; vain is your observance of the Lord's day, and vain your Bible reading and your form of prayer night and morning, unless you are washed in Jesus' blood; vain are all things without living faith in the living Jesus. 3. There was another and very powerful reason why these people were not saved, for,

with all their religiousness and their national boast as to God's being among them, they had continued in provoking the Lord. Thou must have done with the indulgence of sin if thou wouldst be eluded from the guilt of it. There is no going on in transgression, and yet obtaining salvation: it is a licentious supposition. Christ comes to save us from our sins, not to make it safe to do evil. 4. Another reason why they were not saved was because they made being saved from trouble the principal matter. Was there ever a murderer yet who did not wish to be saved from the gallows? When a man is tied up to be flogged for a deed of brutal violence, and his back is bared for the lash, depend upon it he repents of what he did; that is to say, he repents that he has to suffer for it; but that is all, and a sorry all too. He has no sorrow for the agony which he inflicted on his innocent victim; no regret for maiming him for life. What is the value of such a repentance? 5. There was another reason why these people were not saved and could not be. "Lo, they have rejected the Word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them?" Do you read your Bible privately? Did you ever read it with an earnest prayer that God would teach you what you really are, and make you to be a true believer in Christ? Have you read it with regard to yourself, asking God to teach you its meaning, and to make the sense of it press upon your conscience? Do you reply, "I have not done that"? Why then do you wonder that you are not saved? To put a slighter test than the former: when you hear the Gospel, do you always inquire, "What has this to do with me?" or do you listen to it as a general truth with which you have no peculiar concern? 6. There is a further reason why some men are not saved, and that is because they have a great preference for slight measures. They love to hear the flattering voice whispering, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace"; and they choose those for leaders who will heal their hurt slightly. He who is wise will go where the Word has most power, both to kill and to make alive. Do you want a physician when you call upon him to please you with a flattering opinion? Must he needs say, "My dear friend, it is a very small matter; you want nothing but pleasant diet, and you will soon be all right"? If he talks thus smoothly when he knows that a deadly disease is commencing its work upon you, is he not a deceiver? Do you not think you are very foolish if you pay such a man your guinea, and denounce his neighbour who tells you the plain truth? Do you want to be deluded? Are you eager to be duped? Do you want to dream of heaven, and then wake up in hell? 7. All this while these people have wondered that they were not saved, and yet they never repented of their sin. Repentance was a jest with them, they had not grace enough even to feel shame, and yet they made a complaint against God, saying, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." What monstrous folly was this!

II. Now, may the Spirit of God help us while we would lead unconverted persons into the CONSIDERATION of this matter. 1. First consideration, "We are not saved." I do not want to talk, I want you to think. "We are not saved." Put it in the personal, first person singular. 2. Furthermore, not only am I not saved, but I have been a long time not saved. What opportunities I had! I have been through revivals, but the sacred power passed over me; I remember several wonderful occasions when the Spirit of God was poured out, and yet I am not saved. 3. Worse still, habits harden. Harvests have dried me, summers have parched me, age has shrivelled my soul: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer, I am getting to be old hay, or as withered weeds fit for the burning. 4. The last summer will soon come, and the last harvest will soon be reaped, and you, dear friend, must go to your long home. I will apply it mainly to myself: I must go upstairs for the last time, and I must lay me down upon the bed from which I shall never rise again; if I am unsaved my room will be a prison chamber to me, and the bed will be hard as a plank, if I have to lie there and know that I must die,—that a few more days or hours must end this struggle for existence, and I am bound to stand before God. O my God, save me from an unready deathbed! Souls, I charge you by everything that is rational within you, escape for your lives, and seek to find eternal salvation for your undying spirits. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

The prophet's lament:—There is no much sadder and heavier burden than that borne by him who is profoundly conscious of evils, and of threatened disaster, in some popular policy—some policy with which all around him are content and pleased, and of the happy issue of which they are confident; who, while his friends and fellows are entirely satisfied with things as they are, and flatter themselves that the course pursued will be surely productive of or

conducive to good, carries about with him daily a deep conviction of existing serious defects, and of involved mischief and woe. No hope, no hope ! That was the peculiar burden of Jeremiah, that was the vision forced upon him, the message he was constrained to deliver, while the people and their leaders were nursing the assurance that all was going well, that a work was being prosecuted which would secure salvation. Few things are more unpalatable and painful, than to feel it incumbent on you to say to any for whom you entertain sentiments of friendship and affection, what is calculated to damp and dishearten, to spoil the dreams of those who are dreaming pleasantly, deliciously, to destroy or disturb fond hopes ; than to feel it incumbent upon you, instead of sympathising with the joy of such hopes,—as you fain would, were it possible,—to shake your head and contradict them. There are cases in which upon the whole it may be best to refrain from meddling with hopes, the baselessness of which we perceive with pity, to let the possessors go on indulging them without any interference from us, until they shall awaken at length, in the course of events, to the chill of the disappointing reality. Unfounded and fallacious as their hopes are, and certain ere long to be painfully shattered, they may be less harmful, less fraught with mischief, than our present interruption of them might be. But cases there are, on the other hand, in which the right thing, the wisest and the kindest thing, will be at once to attack and scatter, or endeavour to scatter them, however unwelcome the task, and whatever suffering we may cause. The sooner the subjects of them can be shaken out of their hold, can be made to recognise their falsity, and be set face to face with the severity of the actual, the better. It was thus with the people of Judah in Jeremiah's time. Their hope that the reforms in progress were securing them against the rod that had been threatened, was not only a delusion but a snare ; it was creating and fostering within them a false spirit, was preventing any true discernment on their part of what was really wanting in them, of their real unwholesomeness and corruption, and was unfitting them to bear the rod when it should fall, with the meek resignation, the humble submission, requisite to render it a purifying and chastening discipline. But this cry of his over his country in the streets of Jerusalem,—by how many has something like it been breathed inwardly, with sorrow and bitterness, concerning themselves, as they have stood contemplating what they have, and what they are, after seasons in their history, seasons that had enfolded golden opportunity or shone bright with promise. Who is there, beyond the boundaries of youth at all, who has not had his seasons of promise, that have left him sighing forlornly over broken hopes ? Infinite, in this respect, is the pathos of human life, crying dumbly evermore for the infinite pity of God. Or again, is it not frequently the case that bygone circumstances and situations are recalled with a sorrowful, humiliating sense of our not being the men in moral stature, in moral fibre and feature, which they should have contributed to make us, which they gave us in vain the opportunity of becoming—that remembering them, we feel with a pang of grief and shame, the good thing they might have wrought in us which they have not wrought ; how we might have been disciplined by them, or stimulated to larger growth, to culturing action and endurance,—and were not ? “ Oh, could we weep,” some are saying to themselves. “ Oh, could we weep as once we wept, when similar situations and circumstances returned. If the recurrence now and again, of former scenes, of former contacts and conjunctures, could but stir in us the transient hopeful emotion which they used to excite, could but set us temporarily sighing, aspiring, resolving, as they used to do, when they always brought with them the promise at least, of our going on to better things ; but the promise, alas ! was never fulfilled, the transient hopeful emotion faded without producing aught ; and now, the recurrence of the former scenes, the former contacts and conjunctures, ceases to awaken the emotion. The birthdays, the anniversaries, the quiet Sunday mornings, the hours of silence and solitude, that once agitated us with rushes of unwonted tenderness, with little wavelets of earnest thought, and higher impulse, which might have led to something further, to something of permanent effect,—they no longer touch us thus as they come and go ; they have no longer the slightly quickening influence that they had ; our harvest in them is past, our summer in them is ended, and we are not saved.” Is not such the secret cry of some, who yet, however, are not unsalvable by any means, since they are still able to weep that they cannot weep ? What is it, in conclusion, with the best of us, but failure ? Let the pity of the Lord our God be upon us !

And yet may we not believe, do we not feel to our solace, that at the least, something has always been reaped?—reaped for sowing, albeit with tears, in fields beyond; nay, that even in the mere lowly and penitent sense of short-coming, which seems perhaps almost all that has been gained, we shall be carrying away with us from hence, a gathered seed-grain, to be for fruit, perchance for the fruit we have hitherto missed, “behind the veil.” (*S. A. Tipple.*) *The course of time*:—What different emotions prevail in the mind, through different periods of human life! In our early hours, when health is high, and the heart warm, hope is the feeling that takes the lead; and who, that calls to mind the events of his youth, can fail to remember his train of lively and sanguine opinions? The boy views everything through the magic telescope of an eager fancy. He longs for the future: every day seems to him to go on tardy pinions; keeping him from he knows not what, but still from something which strongly impresses his mind with imaginary beauties, and which he is sure is to make him happier at some approaching period. But as time advances, the spirit of the dream is changed; manhood begins to find out what the world is really made of. When we come to mingle, as interested actors, in its schemes and tumults, its windings and turnings; when we come to perceive its selfishness and its rigour; to mix up in the everyday exertions of its dull routine; and to suffer the various disappointments of its fickle favours,—we then conclude that hope and reality are two different things; and that like the clouds about the evening sun, though at first they are brightly coloured, yet that they are but clouds after all, and that when the light is gone, the tempest often remains. Then it is that another feeling arises in the mind: we fly from hope to memory. It is with these reflections I would desire you to consider the text. What is hope, if it enter not within the veil, sure and steadfast, an anchor of the soul? And what is memory, if it look back on worldly pleasures only, and be not accompanied by that “looking forward,” and that “pressing towards the mark,” which will induce us rather “to forget the things which are behind” in the anticipations of “that blessed hope,” and that “glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”? It often happens to us to walk over those scenes of nature in winter which we had visited in summer; and the contrast is sometimes peculiarly striking. “Is this the spot that gave us such pleasure? are these all the remains of our former entertainment?” Alas! the same reasoning often comes upon us in the strange realities of a chequered life. Nature in her revolutions is but a model of the existence of man. We, too, have our summer of pleasure, and our winter of sorrows. Let it teach us this—not to value the world at more than it is worth; to use it without abusing it; and to find out a surer refuge for our hearts to fix on. This brings me to another way, less allegorical, of considering the text. “The earth bringing forth grass; the herb yielding seed; and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself,” all bespeak a design from the great Designer, and the workmanship of a Divine hand. No art can imitate the nicety of nature. The brightest robe of Solomon in all his glory must yield to the lily of the field. The meanest insect that preys upon a fruit-tree is the workmanship of Him who made the universe. “Shall He not take care, then, of you, O ye of little faith?” “The summer is ended, and we are not saved.” We have not looked from nature up to nature’s God. We are not led by gratitude and affection to love the Author of all this assemblage of mercies. We cannot yet say to Him with filial truth, “Abba, Father.” This is what every summer should teach us, and the state it should bring us to. This is what the bounty of God should encourage in our hearts, namely, “to love Him, because He has first loved us.” This is taking, like Moses, a distant view of the heavenly Canaan, and making the wilderness of earth, while it leads us towards the promised land, “to rejoice, and be glad, and blossom as the rose.” But we come now to a still more personal sense in which the words of the text may be applied. “The harvest is past, the summer is ended”: you have had your spring-time of youth, with all its hopes; your summer of manhood, with all its bloom; and the autumn of enjoyment, with all its maturities. These seasons have passed from you, and the winter of age is arrived,—that gloomy time which we once shrunk back from even in idea, and which we always determined, whenever it did come, should find us servants of God, and sincere candidates for “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Let me ask you, first, how it has found you? Has it found you with lamps trimmed, and with oil to burn in the night of the grave? Are you in a state of salvation? As earth retires from before

you, does heaven arise the more to your sight? As you grow older, do you grow wiser?—wiser, not in art, or science, or human philosophy, but in the wisdom of the heart, in a knowledge of yourselves, of your own insufficiency, of the power and riches of Christ, of the vanity of the world and its vexation of spirit, of the necessity of resting your all in the ark of a covenant God? But the words of the text by no means apply exclusively to the aged. Their sound is gone out unto all ages; and they utter intelligible language to the young. The winter of age, or the winter of another year, may never arrive to you. Why do you not put on that armour of your Saviour which will carry you unharmed through every change and chance of this mortal warfare? You are as much answerable to God for the talents committed to you, as the oldest man alive. Employ them in the service of Him who gave them, and who gave them also for this very purpose—to redound to His glory, and to work out your own salvation. If pleasure be your aim, Jesus Christ will interfere with no real pleasure, and will give you new ones of the choicest kind. Is tranquillity your object? Christianity has a “peace which passeth understanding”! Are sublime and noble contemplations the employment of your mind? What facts are so noble as the eternal truths of the Gospel? Is fancy your delight? what field for imagination can be so brilliant as those bright visions which human eye hath never seen, where the future destinies of the faithful in the Lamb are mysteriously but gloriously pointed out; where every present faculty of the soul shall be expanded and perfected; and new ones and better ones added an hundredfold? And all this accompanied, in the united testimony of God’s Spirit with our spirit, by a happiness which every converted man must feel in the sacred consciousness that he is justified through Christ, and reconciled in the sight of God. (*E. Scobell, M.A.*)

The harvest past:—There is scarcely a more painful reflection to the mind of man, than that the season of avoiding great calamities, and of securing great blessings, has been neglected, and is irrecoverably gone. The distress will be heightened in proportion to the magnitude of the evil which might have been avoided, and of the blessings which might have been secured.

1. The season of youth passed in impenitence, is to multitudes such a season. The sensibilities of the soul are more easily touched, conscience is more susceptible and faithful, the affections are more easily moved, the soul is capable of receiving more permanent impressions—the whole inner man is peculiarly accessible to the influence of eternal things.
2. The same precious season is often terminated by some single acts of wickedness, or by yielding in some single instance to temptation. Could we draw aside the veil that conceals the providence of God, we should doubtless see, in the history of every soul that is lost, some act, some purpose, some state of heart, some violence done to conscience, which was the fatal step away from the grace of God—the commencement of that downward career, in which mercy was never to reach him—the turning-point of life and death eternal—the hour in which his day of grace terminated, and from which the only result of his protracted life, was the accumulation of wrath—the hour when the harvest was past, when the summer ended.
3. The same precious season is often terminated by the abuse and perversion of distinguishing grace. It is related that in a place where Mr. Whitefield preached, and was greatly opposed by many, that not one of his opposers was known afterward to give evidence of piety, and that nothing like a revival of religion was known there, until every such opposer was dead. When, in addition to the more ordinary means of grace, opportunities of hearing the Gospel preached, are multiplied—when religion and the concerns of the soul become extensively the topics of conversation in families and among neighbours—when the professed followers of Christ awake to a faithful discharge of these duties and converse with sinners, solemnly and pungently, about the neglected concerns of the soul—and when these extra opportunities and means are resolutely shunned and neglected, or when, in any way, their influence is resisted, then it is that multitudes put themselves beyond the influence of the most powerful means that will ever be used for their salvation, and live only to “treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.”
4. This season of mercy often terminates with a season of peculiar Divine influence. There are periods in the life of almost every one when the truths of religion have peculiar efficacy. The Spirit of God carries those truths to the conscience with a power which cannot be wholly resisted. Such intervals of conviction may be longer or shorter, the conviction itself may be more or less pungent, but let the subject resist and grieve away the Spirit of God, and the last state of that man is worse

than the first. At such a season, God seems to make His last, highest efforts to save; and those unhappy men who resist them, and still persevere in impenitence, of all others run the most fearful risk of final abandonment of that God who has done so much to save them. It is of such that God says, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." 5. Death ends the day of grace to all. It ushers the soul that is unprepared into the presence of its Judge to receive its unchangeable doom. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment." The end of probation must come. The mighty angel standing on the earth and the sea shall lift his hand to heaven, and swear that time shall be no longer. Then all will be eternal, unchangeable retribution. (*N. W. Taylor.*)

The harvest past.—I. LIFE IS MADE UP OF A SERIES OF PROBATIONS. Its various parts are favourable periods for affecting the future. The present may be so used as to be of advantage to us hereafter. 1. Life is a probation in regard to the friendship and favour of our fellow-men. We do not at once step into their confidence without a trial. Many a man toils through a long and weary life to secure by his good conduct something which his fellow-men have to bestow in the shape of honour or office, content at last, if even when grey hairs are thick upon him, he may lay his hand on the prize which has glittered before him in all the journey of life. 2. Especially is this true of the young. Of no young man is it presumed that he is qualified for office, or business, or friendship, until he has given evidence of such qualification. 3. The study of a profession, or apprenticeship, is such a probation. It is just a trial to determine whether the young man will be worthy of the confidence which he desires, and it will decide the amount of honour or success which the world will give him. There is an eye of public vigilance on every young man from which he cannot escape. The world watches his movements; learns his character; marks his defects; records and remembers his virtues. 4. The whole of this probation for the future often depends on some single action that shall determine the character, and that shall send an influence ever onward. Everything seems to be concentrated on a single point. A right or a wrong decision then settles everything. The moment when in the battle at Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington could say, "This will do," decided the fate of the battle, and of kingdoms. A wrong movement just at that point might have changed the condition of the world for centuries. In every man's life there are such periods; and probably in the lives of most men their future course is more certainly determined by one such far-reaching and central decision, than by many actions in other circumstances. They are those moments when honour, wealth, usefulness, health, and salvation seem all to depend on a single resolution. Everything is concentrated on that point—like one of Napoleon's movements at the bridge of Lodi, or at Austerlitz. If that one point is carried, the whole field may soon be won. In the decision which a young man often makes at that point, there is such a breach made on his virtuous principles; there is such an array of temptations pouring into the breach—like an army pouring into a city when a breach is made in a wall—that henceforward there is almost no resistance, and the citadel is taken. II. WHEN A TIME OF PROBATION IS PASSED, IT CANNOT BE RECALLED. If it has been improved aright, the advantages which it conferred in shaping the future life, will abide; if it has been misimproved or abused, it will be too late to repair the evil. A young man is fitting for a profession, or for commercial life. If he suffers the time usually allotted to such a preparation to pass away in idleness or vice, it will soon be too late to recall his neglected or wasted opportunities. There are advantages in preparing for a profession in youth, which cannot be secured at a subsequent period of life. A young man is professedly acquiring an education. If he suffers the time of youth to be spent in indolence, the period will soon arrive when it will be too late for him to repair the evil. In the acquisition of languages; in the formation of industrious habits; in cultivating an acquaintance with past events, he has opportunities then which can be secured at no other time of life. At no future period can he do what he was fitted to do then, and what ought to have been done then. Whatever opportunities there were then to prepare for the future, are now lost, and it is too late to recall them. The period has passed away, and all that follows must be unavailing regret. I need not pause here to remark on the painful emotions which visit the bosom in the few cases of those who are reformed after a wasted and dissipated youth. Cases of such reformation sometimes occur. A man after the errors and follies of a dissipated early life; after he has wasted the opportunities which he had to obtain

an education ; after all the abused care and anxiety of a parent to prepare him for future usefulness and happiness, sometimes is aroused to see the error and folly of his course. What would he not give to be able to retrace that course, and to live over again that abused and wasted life ! But it is too late. The die is cast for this life—whatever may be the case in regard to the life to come.

III. THERE ARE FAVOURABLE SEASONS FOR SECURING THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL, WHICH, IF SUFFERED TO PASS AWAY UNIMPROVED, CANNOT BE RECALLED. The grand purpose for which God has placed us on earth, is not to obtain wealth, or to acquire honour, or to enjoy pleasure here ; it is to prepare for the world beyond. On the same principle, therefore, on which He has made future character and happiness in this life dependent on our conduct in those seasons which are times of probation, has He made all the eternity of our existence dependent on the conduct of life regarded as a season of probation. And on the same principle on which He has appointed favourable seasons for sowing and reaping, He has appointed favourable seasons to secure our salvation. For it is no more to be presumed of any man without trial that he is prepared for heaven, than it is that a young man will be a good merchant, lawyer, or physician, without trial. There are periods, therefore, which God has appointed as favourable seasons for salvation ; times when there are peculiar advantages for securing religion, and which will not occur again. 1. Foremost among them is youth—the most favourable time always for becoming a Christian. Then the heart is tender, and the conscience is easily impressed, and the mind is more free from cares than at a future period, and there is less difficulty in breaking away from the world, and usually less dread of the ridicule of others. The time of youth compared with old age has about the same relation to salvation, which spring-time and summer compared with winter have with reference to a harvest. The chills and frosts of age are about as unfavourable to conversion to God as the frosts and snows of December are to the cultivation of the earth. But suppose that youth is to be all of your life, and you were to die before you reached middle life, what then will be your doom ? 2. A season when your mind is awakened to the subject of religion, is such a favourable time for salvation. All persons experience such seasons ; times when there is an unusual impression of the vanity of the world, of the evil of sin, of the need of a Saviour, and of the importance of being prepared for heaven. These are times of mercy, when God is speaking to the soul. Compared with the agitations and strifes of public life, they are with reference to salvation what gentle summer suns are to the husbandman, compared with the storm and tempest when the lightnings flash, and the hail beats down the harvest which he had hoped to reap. And the farmer may as well expect to till his soil, and sow and reap his harvest, when the black cloud rolls up the sky, and the pelting storm drives on, as a man expect to prepare for heaven in the din of business, in political conflicts, and in the struggles of gain and ambition. But all—all that is favourable for salvation, in such serious moments, will soon pass away, and when gone they cannot be recalled. 3. A revival of religion, in like manner, is a favourable time for securing salvation. It is a time when there is all the power of the appeal from sympathy ; all the force of the fact that your companions and friends are leaving you for heaven ; when the strong ties of love for them draw your mind towards religion ; when all the confidence which you had in them becomes an argument for religion ; and when, most of all, the Holy Spirit makes your heart tender, and speaks with any unusual power to the soul. But such a time, with all its advantages, usually soon passes away ; and those advantages for salvation you cannot again create, or recall—any more than you can call up the bloom of spring in the snows of December. IV. VARIOUS CLASSES WHO WILL UTTER THIS UNAVAILING LAMENTATION, AND THE REFLECTIONS OF THE SOUL, AS IT GOES UNFORGIVEN UP TO GOD. 1. Such words will be uttered by the aged man who has suffered his long life to pass away without preparation to meet his Judge. 2. The language of the text will be uttered at last by the man who often resolved to attend to the subject of religion, but who deferred it until it was too late. 3. These words will be uttered by the thoughtless and the gay. Life to them has been a summer scene in more senses than one. It has been—or they have tried to make it so—just what a summer day is to the gaudy insects that you see playing in the rays of the setting sun. It has been just as volatile, as frivolous, as useless. But the time has come at last when all this gaiety and vanity is to be left. The beautiful summer, that seemed so full of flowers and sweet odours, passes away. The

sun of life hastens to its setting. The circle of fashion has been visited for the last time; the theatre has been entered for the last time; the pleasures of the ball-room have been enjoyed for the last time; music has poured its last notes on the ear, and the last silvery tones of flattery are dying away, and now has come the serious hour to die. (*A. Barnes, D.D.*) *The goodness of God a motive to gratitude, and an incentive to spiritual activity*.—I. THE FEELINGS THAT OUGHT TO BE SUGGESTED TO OUR MINDS BY THE LITERAL HARVEST. 1. The recollection of God's faithfulness. We ask for the corn, and the wine, and the oil; we cry to the earth, by which they can be produced; the earth calls to the heavens, by whose genial influences alone the earth can yield them; the heavens look up to God, and God hears the heavens, and the earth receives, and the earth gives us all that we need; and thus we receive it directly from the hands of God Himself. 2. To feel our dependence. All the science and ingenuity of mankind united together, cannot produce one drop of water, or a single blade of grass. 3. The exercise of gratitude. Fears we may have had on account of the apparent unfavourableness of the season, but we have reason to rejoice that these fears have, in a great measure, been disappointed; that God has fulfilled His promise, and given us plenty in our borders for man and beast. 4. God's forbearance. Only reflect upon it, that while men are never thinking of God, while they are blaspheming His holy name, putting away His Gospel, finding reasons in this very world He has made in order to deny His existence and providence, while men are doing this, He is pitying them and giving them of His fulness, opening His hand and supplying liberally their wants! 5. We should regard the end that God must be supposed to have in view in all this. Every putting forth of His beneficence, every ray of light that comes on our world, while they furnish us with a beautiful manifestation of the Divine character, are designed as invitations to come to be reconciled to that God who has been giving us all things richly to enjoy. 6. A recollection of the flight of time. What do we mean by the "harvest"? That the seasons have again rolled around—that we are so much nearer death, and eternity, and the final destiny of our immortal spirits. It is a solemnising thought! II. NOTICE SOME OF THOSE USES WHICH ARE MADE OF THE SEASON BY THE SACRED WRITERS, FOR THE PURPOSE OF ILLUSTRATING AND CONVEYING RELIGIOUS TRUTH. 1. The completion of religion in the soul. Contemplating an individual as the subject of God's grace, we have an illustration in the figure before us of the rise, progress, and completion of religion in the soul. We find this very beautifully described by our Lord Himself (Mark. iv. 26). 2. Another idea is suggested—the secret and mysterious origin and operation of religion in the heart. To this our Lord has Himself beautifully alluded in the parable I have read, "The seed springs and groweth up, he knoweth not how." 3. Another thing that is beautifully taught us in this parable is the progressive nature of the advancement of religion in the character. "For the earth bringeth forth fruit in itself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." 4. The last idea is the termination of all the anxiety which was necessarily connected with the watching of this progress, and the bringing forth of this fruit. The end of the present dispensation of things in the world and in the Church. There will be an end of the preaching of the Gospel, of prayer, of the Saviour's intercession. All these things are to come to an end. "Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." 5. The appearances of things at that time will be connected with all that is passing now. All the results of the present dispensation of things will be observed. Everything will appear as it really is. III. THE FIGURE SEEMS, IN THIS PASSAGE, TO REFER, NOT SO MUCH LITERALLY TO THE HARVEST ITSELF, AS THE RESULT OF AGENCIES, BUT RATHER TO THE ENJOYMENT OF THESE AGENCIES—THE ENJOYMENT OF THE SUMMER AND AUTUMN, WHEN OPPORTUNITY WAS GIVEN, AND IMPROVEMENT MIGHT HAVE BEEN MADE. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." We might take up the property of sufficiency as expressing the particular feature of the harvest to which I wish to advert. 1. What a sufficiency of knowledge you have! God hath spoken once, yea, twice; He hath given you line upon line, precept upon precept; He hath taught you to conceive rightly of Himself, of His nature, His designs, His will, in regard to us; He has revealed man to himself, as well as revealed Himself to man. 2. There is a sufficiency of provision. 3. You have abundance of motives and inducements. Think of God's exceeding great and precious promises—think of their freeness, their universality, their adaptation to your state and circumstances—think of God actually waiting to be gracious, inviting

you to come to Him. 4. Do you lack opportunity? Have you no cessation from labour, no hours for retirement? Have you not time—have you really not time to reflect, to reason, to read God's Word, to offer prayer to God, to scrutinise and examine the real state of your own character? 5. You have a sufficiency of capacity. God does not require of you to do that by your own efforts of which you are incapable; He does not require you to find a Holy Spirit for the purification of your hearts; but He does require that when He has found these, when He has found this Saviour, when He has provided this Holy Spirit, He does require you to receive His truth, to come to that Saviour, to accept His salvation, to ask for the influences of that Sanctifier. So that "if ye have not," says our Saviour, it is for this reason, "because ye ask not." (*T. Binney.*)

Seasons of grace:—I. TO PROMOTE OUR SALVATION FROM THE DOMINION AND CONSEQUENCES OF SIN, WE ARE GRACIOUSLY FAVOURED OF GOD WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. 1. The teaching of His Gospel. By it we are instructed concerning—(1) The necessity of salvation. (2) The provision of salvation. (3) The method of salvation. 2. Warnings of His providence. (1) Jehovah warns by dreadful calamities. (2) By prevailing sickness and disease. (3) By sudden death. 3. Influence of His Spirit. (1) Convincing men of the evil of sin. (2) Drawing men from sin. (3) Reproving men for sin. 4. Labours of faithful ministers. II. TO PROMOTE OUR SALVATION, WE ARE NOT ONLY FAVOURED OF GOD WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS, BUT ALSO WITH NUMEROUS GRACIOUS SEASONS AND FAVOURABLE OPPORTUNITIES. 1. A summer season of youth. 2. Summer seasons of affliction. They afford opportunities for solemn thought, holy meditation, serious inquiry, important reflection, and faithful self-examination. 3. Summer season of special visitations of grace. III. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS AND FAVOURABLE OPPORTUNITIES TO PASS AWAY, AND LEAVE MAN A STRANGER TO SALVATION. 1. The Word of God asserts the truth. 2. Numerous facts establish the truth. IV. THE STATE OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT SAVED BY GRACE IS MOST DEPLORABLE AND PERILOUS. 1. An unsaved state is a state of guilt. 2. An unsaved state is a state of misery. 3. An unsaved state is a state of danger. V. APPLY THESE IMPORTANT TRUTHS. In doing so, we would consider the language of this Scripture as the language of—1. Penitential regret—for having abused such precious blessings, and neglected such favourable opportunities. 2. Awakened fear—the fear of a person who discovers his danger, and is concerned about it. 3. Serious inquiry. "Can I, after abusing so much goodness—after placing myself in such circumstances of jeopardy, yet obtain salvation?" Thanks to the long-suffering grace of God, it is possible. 4. Affectionate warning. Your privileges are passing away—your time is consuming—your careless conduct is inexcusable—and your eternal destiny will soon be fixed. (*W. Taylor.*)

Lost opportunity:—To understand fully the import of these words it would be useful to consider the state of the people in whose name they were uttered by the prophet, namely, the Jews, who were at this period on the eve of destruction. But there are many situations in the life of every man to which this lamentation may be applied with the utmost propriety and force. I. EVERY PERSON WHO STILL REMAINS IN SIN MAY, AT THE CLOSE OF A YEAR, OR THE RECURRENCE OF ANY OTHER MARKED INTERVAL OF TIME, USEFULLY ADOPT THIS LAMENTATION. Every passing hour removes the sinner farther from eternal life. Mankind are never stationary in their moral condition, any more than in their being. He who does not become better, becomes worse. Nor is this all. The declension is more rapid than we ever imagine. Blindness is a common name for sin in the Scriptures, and is strongly descriptive of one important part of its nature. Nor is it blindness to Divine things only, to God and Christ, to its duty and to its salvation; but it is also blindness with respect to itself. Hence his state is in every respect more dangerous than he does or will believe, and his declension more rapid than with these views he can possibly imagine. This is true of every period of his life. Of consequence, the loss of a year, a day, an hour, is a greater loss than he can be induced even to suspect. He ought to remember, that he has not only lost that period, but converted it into the means of sin and ruin; that he is more sinful, more guilty, and more odious to God, than at the beginning of it; that all the difficulties which lie between him and salvation are increased beyond his imagination; his evil habits strengthened, and his hopes of returning lessened, far more than he is aware. He ought also to cast his eyes around him, and see that all, or almost all, others, who have, like himself, trusted to a future

repentance, have from year to year become more hardened in sin by these very means ; have thought less and less of turning back, and taking hold of the paths of life. Such as they are, will he be. Their thoughts, their conclusions, their conduct have been the same ; their end, therefore, will be his. God has, with infinite patience and mercy, prolonged your lives ; and, in spite of all your sins, has renewed His blessings to you every morning. The gate of salvation is still open. The Sabbath still smiles with peace and hope. The sceptre of forgiveness is still held out for you to touch and live. In what manner have you lived in the midst of these blessings ? Have you solemnly, often, and effectually, thought on the great subject of religion ? Are you nearer to heaven, or nearer to hell ? To what good purpose have you lived ? Is not the harvest, in one important sense, past to you ? II. Another situation, to which this melancholy reflection is peculiarly applicable, is **THAT OF A DYING SINNER**. Human life is one continued scene of delusion. Present objects too often gain all our attention, and all our care. To them alone we attach importance, and that, an importance far beyond what their value will warrant. They engage, they engross, our labours, our anxiety, our hopes, our fears, our joys, and our sorrows. By such men the health and well-being of the soul are contemned and forgotten ; and the soul itself is scarcely remembered amid the vehement pursuit of wealth, honour, and pleasure. But do these things accord with truth and wisdom ? The blessings of this world are necessary to the life, support, and comfort of man, while he is here ; and they are also means of enabling him to do good to his fellow-men, and in this way to benefit his soul. In this view I acknowledge their value. But for what else can they be valuable ? They are means, not ends. As means, they are useful ; as ends, they are but dross. Future things, on the contrary, have far less value in our eyes than they really possess, especially eternal things. We think them distant, but they are near ; we think them uncertain, but they are sure ; we think them trifles unconnected with our happiness, whereas they are things of infinite moment and of infinite concern to us. This delusion not uncommonly travels with us through life, and is not shaken off till we appear before the bar of God. On a dying bed, however, it often vanishes ; and, if sickness and patience leave us in the possession of our reason, juster views prevail, with respect both to things present and things future, things temporal and things spiritual. Under the influence of this clear discernment, in this new state of the mind, the following observations will show with how much propriety he may take up this despairing lamentation. Among the objects which may be supposed most naturally to arise to the view of a sinner on his dying bed, his youth would undoubtedly occupy a place of primary importance. In what colours will his various conduct during this period appear ? He is now on the verge of eternity, and just bidding his last adieu to the present world and all its cares, and hopes, and pleasures. Where are now his high hopes of sublunary good ? Where his lively, brilliant spirits, his ardent thirst for worldly enjoyment, for gay amusement, for sportive companions, and for the haunts of festivity, mirth, and joy ? These once engrossed all his thoughts, wishes, and labours. Where are they now ? They have vanished with the gaiety of the morning cloud, they have fled with the glitter of the early dew. In this precious, golden season God called to him from heaven, and proclaimed aloud, " I love them that love Me, and those who seek Me early shall find Me. Receive My instruction, and not silver ; and knowledge, rather than fine gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. I will cause those that love Me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures." His face was then clothed in smiles, and His voice only tenderness and compassion. Christ also, with the benignity of redeeming love, invited him to come and take the water of life freely. The Spirit of grace, with the same boundless affection, whispered to him to turn from every evil way, and every unrighteous thought, to the Lord his God, who was ready to have mercy on him, and abundantly to pardon him. With what amazement will he now look back, and see that he refused these infinite blessings ; that he turned his back on a forgiving God ; closed his ears to the calls of a crucified Redeemer ; and hardened his heart against the whispers of salvation, communicated by the Spirit of truth and life ! Riper years will naturally next offer themselves to his view. The bustle of this period seemed at the time to be of real importance ; and, although not devoted to godliness, yet to be occupied by business serious and solid. But now, how suddenly will this specious garb drop, and leave, in all their nakedness, his avarice, his ambition

and his graver sensuality ! Of what value now are the treasures which he struggled to heap up ? On what mere wind did he labour to satisfy the hunger of his soul ! How will his boasted reason appear to have been busied ! Instead of being employed in discovering truth, and performing duty, he will see it, throughout this most discreet period of life, labouring to flatter, to justify, to perpetrate iniquity ; to persuade himself that safety might be found in sin. Blind to heaven, it had eyes only for this world. Deaf to the calls of salvation, it listened solely to those of pride. Insensible to the eternal love of God, it opened its feelings only to the solicitations of time and sense. Behind manhood, we behold age next advancing ; age, to him the melancholy evening of a dark and distressing day. Here he stood upon the verge of the grave, and advanced daily to see it open and receive him. How will he now be amazed, that, as death drew nigh, he was still in no degree aware of its approach. In all these periods with what emotion will he regard his innumerable sins ! How many will he see to have been committed in a single day, a month, a year, of omission, of commission, of childhood and of riper years ! Among the sins which will most affectingly oppress his heart, his negligence and abuse of the means of grace will especially overwhelm him. How will he now exclaim, " Oh, that my lost and squandered days might once more return, that I might again go up to the house of God. Oh, that one year, one month, one Sabbath, might be added to my wretched forfeited life ! But, ah ! the day of grace is past ; my wishes, nay, my prayers, are in vain." Such will be the natural retrospect of a dying sinner. What will be his prospects ? Before him, robed in all his terrors, stands Death, the messenger of God, now come to summon him away. To what, to whom, is he summoned ? To that final judgment, into which every work of his hands will be speedily brought, with every secret thing. To the judgment succeeds the boundless extent of eternity. Live he must : die he cannot. But where, how, with whom, is he to live ? The world of darkness, sorrow, and despair is his final habitation. Sin, endless and increasing sin, is his dreadful character ; and sinners like himself are his miserable and eternal companions. (*Christian Observer*.) *At the close of the year :—*

I. THE OCCASION. Jeremiah represents this as the cry of the captive Jews in Babylon. He contemplates them as already in captivity, although it had not yet actually taken place. He forewarns them that it would take place. At the time he wrote, the Jews did not believe his warning of a Chaldean expedition against them. They were filled with vain confidence, boasting that God was their defender and their city impregnable. It is when this doom has overtaken them that they are represented as taking up the language of the text. In the preceding verse the prophet records the tenor of their language in exile, and also God's reply : " Hark the voice of the cry of the daughter of My people from a distant land, Was not God in Zion ? Was not her King in her ? " This would be their complaint against God on finding themselves deprived of their country and overtaken with calamity. They would begin to expostulate as if they had been unfairly dealt with. Why, then, did not God defend the city and protect His people ? The Divine reply shows how groundless this charge was. " I have not forsaken you, but ye have forsaken Me. Why have ye provoked Me with your graven images and your strange vanities ? " God had, indeed, promised to dwell in Zion, and to cast His protecting shield over the descendants of Abraham, on condition that they faithfully worshipped and served Him. But they, by their carvings and foreign vanities, had polluted the holy temple, trusting more to the temple than to the God of the temple. Thus they forfeited their right to Divine protection, and are now left to take the consequences of their choice. They see their mistake when too late. The text implies an acknowledgment that their calamities were the just reward of their disobedience, and they accept their doom in desperate agony.

II. THE MEANING. 1. Opportunity acknowledged. As a nation we have received privileges greater than over the Jews enjoyed, but with all these privileges comes a corresponding responsibility. " To whom much is given, of them also shall much be required." The temple did not save the Jews, so neither will the mere institution of a religion in our midst save us from national decline without the righteousness which exalteth a nation. But our opportunities as individuals are not less conspicuous than our privileges as a nation, and a mere profession of religion will not save us. To every man on earth there comes, at some time or other, an opportunity sufficient to make him an heir of a better portion if he embraces it ; sufficient also to condemn him if he rejects it.

2. Neglect confessed. How apt are we to throw the blame of our

wrong-doing on others, to plead the force of circumstances, the pressure of business, and so forth, as reasons for neglect. Such reasons may obscure for a time the real issues, but when memory lights her flaming fires and concentrates thought on the actions of a mis-spent life, everything will then be seen in its due proportions. Forgotten acts of iniquity, secret sins, will come to light and cluster round the memory. 3. Doom incurred. "We are not saved." This is the result of neglected opportunities, the necessary consequence of continued transgression. The Jews, in putting their trust in human allies, neglected the moral defence, and therefore fell before the invader. Carnal weapons cannot be used with impunity by spiritual men. III. THE APPLICATION. The sentiment of the text may be appropriately adopted—1. By those who have been the subjects of deep religious impressions without being led to repentance. There is no greater danger than that of playing fast and loose with one's feelings. The original impression may return, but it will return with diminished force. Act while the Godward impressions are strong. 2. By an impenitent sinner at the close of life. This is the saddest application that the words can possibly have. 3. At the close of the year, by every one who continues in sin. Begin the New Year with God. When Christopher Columbus, four hundred years ago, landed on the shores of America, the first thing he did was to plant the Cross on the newly-discovered land. What Columbus did in the New World let us do in the New Year. Let us enter upon it in the name of heaven's King, and whatever may be before us, joy or sorrow, prosperity or disaster, life or death, all will be well, for God is with us. (*D. Merson.*) *Soul-restoring seasons neglected* :—I. HEAVEN VOUCHSAFES TO MEN HERE SEASONS FOR SOUL RESTORATION. Whole of life a season; day of grace. But periods and moods specially favourable; youth, leisure, association with godly men. Moods of mind too. Soul has its seasons as well as nature—pensive, thoughtful, susceptible, and impressed with moral considerations. All such specially favourable to soul restoration. Hours dawn in a man's life specially favourable for the effectuation of certain purposes. II. The departure of these seasons, leaving the soul unrestored, is LAMENTABLE BEYOND EXPRESSION. "The harvest is past." Awful wail in this language. (*Homilist.*) *Harvest time* :—I. GOD HAS SPECIAL SEASONS FOR CONVEYING SPECIAL GIFTS. 1. In nature. Must sow in spring, or season lost. Must gather in harvest time, or fruit spoilt. 2. In the spiritual kingdom. Youth. Sabbath. Days of affliction and bereavement. II. THESE SPECIAL SEASONS OUGHT TO BE IMPROVED. 1. Men improve the natural seasons. 2. Spiritual realm. God has done His part: Atonement made; Spirit given. We must repent, believe, abandon evil, fight the good fight, &c. III. THESE SPECIAL SEASONS SPEEDILY PASS. Life short. Health uncertain. Refusal of mercy to-day may be irreparable ruin. IV. SPECIAL SEASONS OF GRACE MISUSED END IN UNSPEAKABLE RUIN. Past feeling. Conscience scared. (*J. D. Davies, M.A.*) *Harvest home* :—Then there are measured opportunities in life, times of limitation, times of beginning and ending. Even now there are little circles not complete. The universe is a circle, eternity is a circle, infinity is a circle; these can never be completed; they live in continual progress towards self-completion: but there are little circles, small as wedding-rings, that can be quite finished,—the day is one, the year is one, the seasons constitute four little circles, each of which can be completed, turned off, sent forward with its gospel or its cry and confession of penitence and failure. "The harvest is past"; the barn door is shut, the granary is supplied: it is either full or empty; one or the other, there it is. We cannot get rid of these views of doom. There are those who would try to persuade the young that after all the sun is but a momentary blessing, and when he is gone there will be as good as he come up again. There is no authority for saying so; experience has nothing to say in corroboration of that wild suggestion. Scripture bases its appeals on a totally different view, saying, Work while it is called day, the night cometh wherein no man can work. The whole biblical appeal is towards immediacy of action: "Buy up the opportunity" is the Gospel appeal to the common sense of the world. "The harvest is past." Then we are or we are not provided for the winter. It is of no use repining now. Harvest finds the food, winter finds the hunger. We know this in nature: we have no difficulty about this in all practical matters, as we call them,—as if spiritual matters were not practical, whereas they are the most practical and urgent of all. Why not reason from nature to spirit, and say, If it be so in things natural, that there is a seedtime, and that the harvest depends

upon it, there may also be a corresponding truth in the spiritual universe : hear it : " Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It is his own harvest ; he must put into it his own sickle. The harvest may be very plentiful, and yet very much may depend upon the way in which it is gathered. Some people do not know when to gather the harvest in any department of life ; they have their opportunities and never see them. Others spend so much time in whetting their sickle that the corn is never cut at all. Others spend so much time in contemplating the golden fields that they forget that the fields were intended to be cut down and the fruits thereof garnered for the winter. God has given us everything we need, and all we want ; but we must find the sagacity that discerns the situation, we must find the common sense that notes the beginning, continuance, and culmination of the opportunity. A meditation of this kind brings several points before us that may be applied usefully to our whole life. For example, there is brought before us the time of vain regrets—" The harvest is past." The coach has gone on, and we have missed it ; the tide flowed, and we might have caught it, but we have waited so long that it has ebbed. We neglected our opportunities at home, we were disobedient, unfilial, hard-hearted, and now we stand at the gate-post and cry our hearts out, because we had not a chance of doing something for the father and the mother whom we neglected in their lifetime. Oh, the time of vain regrets !—that we should have spoken that cruel word ; that we should have been guilty of that base neglect ; that we should have been lured away from paths of loveliness and peace by some urgent temptation ; that we should have done a thousand things which now rise up against us as criminal memories ! They are vain regrets. You can never repair a shattered crystal, so that it shall be as it was at first ; you can never take the metal, the iron, out of the pierced wood, and really obliterate the wound. A nail cut is never cured. The old may hear these words with dismay, the young should hear them as voices of warning. Such points bring before us also the times of honest satisfaction. Blessed be God, there are times when we may be really moved to tears and to joy by contemplating the results of a lifetime. The hard-working author says, I have written all this ; God gave me strength and guided my hand, and now when I look back upon these pages it is like reading my own life over again ; I do not know how it was done, God taught my fingers this mystery of labour. And the honest merchantman has a right to say in his old age, God has been good to me, He has enabled me to lay up for what is called a rainy day, He has prospered my industry, He has blessed me in basket and in store,—praise God from whom all blessings flow ! How are we going to treat our own harvests ? We can treat them in three different ways. There are men who treat everything as a mere matter of course. They are not men to be trusted or revered : keep no company with them ; they will never elevate your thought, or expand and illuminate your mind, or give a richer bloom to your life. There is another way of receiving the harvest which our Lord Himself condemned parabolically (Luko xii. 16-20). What about the barns ? what about the stored granaries ? The man never said what he would do for the poor, the famishing, and the sad-hearted ; he never said, God has given me all these things, and to His glory I will consecrate them. We may receive our harvests gratefully, claiming no property in them beyond the right of honest labour. See the harvest-man : he says, I sowed for this ; thank God I have got it ; I meant my fields to be plentiful, I spent myself upon them, I did not work in them as a hireling, but I worked in them as a man who loved them, and here are the fruits, blessed be God : here, Lord, is Thy tithe, Thy half, here is God's dole ; He shall have a handful of this wheat, anyhow ; He won't take it, but the poor shall have it ; the harvest is only mine to use in God's interest. (J. Parker, D.D.) *The harvest past* :—I remember once passing by a bleak hillside in Scotland, when winter was already far advanced, and seeing a field of oats still green, though harvest had long since been closed. There was something most melancholy and almost weird in the aspect of that ill-starred crop. There it stood in the cold hillside, seeming as if nature and man had alike overlooked and forgotten it. You could almost have thought you heard those green ears, shrivelled with the early frost, but still unripe, sighing, as they swayed to and fro in the wintry gusts—" The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." I wonder what became of that crop ? Perhaps it may have been given to the dunghill ; perhaps it may have been eaten down and trampled under foot by the cattle where it stood ; but very sure I am the shout

of harvest-home was never heard in that field that season, as the laden cart passed to the granary with its golden freight. It had failed, for some reason or other, to answer its proper purpose; it had missed its season; and there it was, rubbish rather than treasure. Each of us has a season allotted to us in which we may bring forth "the peaceable fruits of righteousness," and with each of us this season is a period necessarily limited in extent, a period which it is possible to trifle away, so that when the time for the harvest comes there shall be nothing for God to gather, nothing that can be saved into the eternal garner and treasured among the precious things of heaven. Heaven's resources have been taxed to the uttermost to make earth spiritually fruitful; no expense has been spared, and He who is the Lord of the soil has a right to expect some adequate return. How is this living harvest to be produced, and from whence shall it spring? Christ Himself shall give us an answer, as we hear Him say, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." He was the spiritual "corn of wheat" from which the spiritual harvest is ordained to spring, and He fell to the ground and died in order that from Him, as from the true seed, we might spring up into newness of life, and grow up as the harvest-crop of living souls in a world which He hath redeemed. And "He shall see His seed." In every age of the world's history the harvest will continue to be produced, until at last the great harvest-day comes. Then, when a multitude that no man can number stands before the throne, with joyful acclamations ascribing "salvation unto our God and unto the Lamb," it will be seen at last how vast a product has sprung from that solitary Corn of wheat which fell to the ground and died eighteen hundred years ago. What and if any of you should be found left behind in that great harvest-day, like the bundles of tares that lie there waiting for the burning, while the wheat is carried into the barn? There is something strangely sad in these familiar words of our text, in whatever sense they are employed, but surely this will be the saddest sense of all. Oh, think of that moment, that terrible and tragic moment, when the gates of the heavenly granary shut, as the last sheaf passes in, and some of you, perhaps, find yourselves left behind! With what unspeakable anguish, with what dire despair, must this cry then be wrung from your sinking hearts, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" And then to have to thank yourselves for it all! For think how inevitable, how righteously inevitable, is this doom of exclusion! You have not answered the end of your existence; you have failed of the proper purpose and object of life. How can you hope to be stored amongst the precious things of eternity, and to add in your own persons to the treasures of heaven! You might as reasonably expect to see a sane farmer crowding his barn with thistles and dandelion as to see Almighty God filling heaven with those who have never been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God." But now I want to point out to you further, that with us, as with the Israelites of old, the harvest is a thing of the present as well as of the future. It is possible even now to be garnered in safety, by being brought into our proper relations with the Saviour. And just as from time to time God was pleased of old to give special seasons of visitation to His ancient people—times of religious revival, when many no doubt were gathered in, and when the nation as a whole might have been—even so now He sends from time to time a special call, and moves upon localities and individuals with special power. But, remember, no mission, no season of special visitation, can leave you as it found you. With each fresh opportunity wasted the heart necessarily becomes harder, and thus the harvest-season of your life must needs at length be lost. The time in which God might have reaped a harvest in you will at last have passed away, and then,—What then? What then! Surely such a curse as fell upon the barren fig-tree of old: "No man eat fruit of thee henceforth and for ever." What then! Then the terrible sentence: "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." But why should this be so? "Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her King in her?" Here in our very midst He is to-day, willing to enter your heart, and bring His own salvation with Him. You need not be left behind; you need not continue unsaved. "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no Physician there?" There is! There is! A thousand joyous voices can attest it—voices of those who once were wounded and stricken and dying. It seemed as if they were once like a blighted crop, too sorely diseased to be capable of any satisfactory harvest; but in their barrenness they found a Healer, and now they are themselves the harvest of the Lord. Why should not you be healed

too? Ah, think of what it has cost Him to obtain the right and the power to heal such sin-stricken souls as we! Some physicians amongst ourselves risk their lives in attending their plague-stricken patients, and who can deny to such their meed of praise; but our good Physician actually laid down His life as the preliminary condition of His being able to exercise His healing skill. Only because He has taken our diseases upon Himself, was it possible for Him to cure them. Only because He died our death, is it possible for Him to bring life and immortality to light by His Gospel. But He has borne our sicknesses, and died our death, and now He has the right to heal and to save, and He is in our midst to do it to-day. I saw an interesting inscription on the wall of a country church, not long ago, on a stone erected in memory of God's preserving mercy shown to a man who fell from half-way up the steeple in the year 1718, and yet escaped with his life, and actually lived to be seventy-three. But the inscription went on to state that he died in the year 1761, some forty-three years after the accident. As I stood there reading it, more than a hundred years after the man's death, what a small acquisition after all did it seem, those forty years added to the life that had been so nearly cut short—what were they now? Passed as a watch in the night. Yet we do not wonder at his being grateful for even such a prolongation. But here is a good Physician who offers to heal your dying soul and to impart the blessing of life for evermore—to do it freely, and to do it now. Why, then, oh why, in the name of reason, is not your health recovered? (*W. Hay Aiken, M.A.*) *The two harvests*:—The text sets nature in solemn contrast with human life,—suggesting to us for serious thought, not merely that a certain length of time has elapsed and we have been spiritually listless, not simply that an opportunity has gone by which we have not filled with duty, but that something beneficent and sacred has been going on in the outward world with which we have not been in harmony; that the elements have been doing their work while we have been misdoing ours; and that, measured against nature, at the close of one of its fruitful seasons, we seem out of order, discordant, away from God, unserviceable, and unprofitable: in a word, “we are not saved.” The harvest is past. Not a spear of wheat has grown, not a kernel of corn has hardened, not a beet has reddened in the ground, not an apple or a plum has nursed sweet juices through the tree out of the ground, that has not revealed or illustrated, in the process of its growth, a principle which ought to be carried out in nobler ways by human souls. Our dependence on God, our reception of His light and His spiritual rain, our fidelity to the duty of the circumstances in which we are set, our success in boding chilly days and gusts of adversity to usefulness in strengthening character, ought to fulfil the lessons which every vine and every tree publish in their use of sunshine and soil and dew and storm. And the bounty of the harvest is for this purpose. Think what that bounty has been. If the whole bounty of Providence during the creative season of the year should be massed by the Almighty, and our people should be obliged to go, person by person or family by family, to such a monstrous bin to receive their share of the land's exuberance, how poetic and how impressive would the munificence of God through the harvest seem, how vividly would our dependence be revealed to us, how unnatural would the taking of the heavenly gifts without gratitude appear! And if now we take the fruit of the earth, which is only the varied expression of the punctuality of Providence in the weaving of the seasons and the alternations of sunshine and shower, and if we renew our strength from it day after day with no reverence in our thought and no thankfulness in our heart to the unsparing and unwearied Giver, then the truth of the text is directly revealed in our state; the harvest stands as the background to show off the truth that “we are not saved,”—that we are out of harmony, through the coldness of our sentiment, with the boundless beneficence,—since, while every loaded ear of grain bends as if in adoration of creative liberality, we, for whom it was designed and nourished by the Infinite, receive from it no motive to reverent thanksgiving, no impulse to joyous prayer! Suppose that the human race should be turned by miracle into portions of the natural world,—should be transformed into a part of the vegetable domain, and should express there the same qualities that they exhibit now in human ways, the same passions, the same bitterness, the same impurity, the same selfishness, the same hatred, instead of the beauty and bounty that now adorn and load the valleys and the hills, what a scanty, shrivelled, sour, and ugly harvest would appear! Suppose that you, leading a life unregulated and alien from God, should be turned, just as you are, into a tree, and should act, as a tree, precisely as you now act as a man. Your

disobedience of spiritual laws would be shown in the refusal of the tree to throw out its roots to be rightly balanced in nature. Your lack of spiritual growth would be exhibited in the neglect of the tree to widen its rings, and stretch its bark, and rear its trunk, and push out its boughs every year, in order to reach its intended stature. The poverty of your spiritual sensibilities would appear in wan and shrivelled leaves; your denial of heavenly grace in the opposition of the tree to quickening sunshine, and its resistance to mellowing rains; the wrong thoughts you cherish, in foul insect-webs and broods that would net the branches with their vile and deadening threads; your lack of service, in the refusal of the tree to bear any fruit, although it was the intention of God that it should glorify His providence in branches laden with sweet benefactions to the race; your vices, in the rust, the mould, or the canker on the bark, telling of corrupt juices within. The wealth of the harvest, you know, is, in large measure, from the seed scattered or planted in the spring. And see how, in this aspect of it, the faithfulness of nature supplies a serious background to set off the poverty, the unsaved and unsafe condition, of human life. What a terrible calamity it would be to society if the readiness of the earth to receive and welcome the seeds dropped into her bosom, and protected by human watchfulness, should be broken! What a dreadful judgment upon us all, if the soil should have the power and the tendency to cast them out from its furrows, to refuse them shelter and nutriment, and, instead, to take down into its mellowed substance the germs of briars and weeds! And yet, would such a change in the disposition and forces of the soil do anything more than bring nature, which we live in, into accord with the tendencies and habits of our inward life? God is showering seed upon your soul continually. He does not leave you a day without sending a quickening lesson or a noble thought or a conviction of sinfulness or a pure motive into your soul. Another truth which the contemplation of nature in contrast with humanity suggests, and especially of the harvest in comparison with human fruitfulness in virtue, is the openness of the external world to the inflowing of as much of the Divine life as it can hold. Here we touch the deepest lesson which our subject can yield. All goodness comes from reception of the Divine Spirit. All increase of goodness comes from enlarging or multiplying the channels for the reception and absorption of the Divine life. All evil is from the shutting out of God, or the perversion of His bounty and vitality by disease or sin, in the forms which He has fashioned to receive it. We are nothing of ourselves. "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." "Our sufficiency is of God." Now nature is always open to God. The harvest is the beneficent transmutation of God's quickening vitality through vegetable veins into palpable sustenance for the children of men, the annual proof that there is no sin in the arteries of nature. But we are not in accord with it. We are not saved in this supreme sense. God is ever striving to pour Himself through humanity as freely as He does through nature. We resist Him. We beat back the infinite truth and love. We close the valves through which He must enter. Do you ever ask why there is so much evil, wretchedness, wrong, in the social world?—why God does not stay it or cripple it or annihilate it, why He suffers it under His pure and loving eye? I tell you, my troubled friend, God is trying to reach it. He can reach it only through human affection, human labour, human organisation. When He makes a perfect apple it is not by dropping one from the skies, but by effusing His Spirit through the substance of a tree made as the form for His life, and until the tree is ready the fruit must be delayed. And so God does not, perhaps we may say cannot, come immediately into society, into history, to grapple with evil. He must move against it by His charity through human hearts, the form of charity; by His justice, through human consciences; by His truth, through human intellects; by His energy, through human wills. "Behold I stand at the door and knock" is the keynote of His relations to humanity. In nature there is no sinful choice or will to stop Him. In us there is. That we have such a will is our glory, the stamp of our heavenly birth, the possibility of our sonship. That we use it so is our shame, guilt, and peril. (*T. Starr King.*) *The summer is ended*:—Nature is a school,—primary school, grammar school, high school, university, all in one. She teaches little children their alphabets, while they are at play; teaches them elementary lessons of the qualities of things, of hard and soft, heavy and light, resistance, momentum, ductile, malleable, and elastic. These are her object-lessons. Then she takes those a little older, and shows them the grammar of the world, the laws of language in sea and sky. The men who dig

and plant and mine and manufacture, who make shoes and hats, who spin and weave, manufacture glass, make watches, print books,—learn necessarily the qualities of things and the laws of nature. Children playing are in the primary school; man working is in the grammar school. But we only enter the high school and university when we go further, and take up that greatest work of life, of which the elements are conscience, liberty, and love. To this all things lead, all invite. Summer and winter, nature and society, success and failure, life and death,—all point to this highest aim of all—spiritual growth, religious progress, the salvation of the soul. If the summer has brought you only passive pleasure, only selfish indulgence, then it has been wasted. Rest is good, and joy is good, but as they lead to something higher and better. For man is so made that he can never rest contented in any merely passive joy. He can only be contented when he is making progress. There are no landing-places on the stairway of human ascent. You may give a man or woman every wish of their heart. You may give them the purse of Fortunatus, never empty; the miraculous carpet, on which they can journey through the air, from place to place, over sea and land, by a mere wish. They may have St. Leon's gift of renewed youth; they may go to the tropics, and have a perpetual summer. But all this is not heaven. All this, by itself, will not satisfy them for more than a few weeks. The soul is not made to be satisfied so. The only thing which satisfies it, and makes a perfect rest, which turns all things to gold, and earth to heaven, is a heavenly life; that is, a life in which we have plenty to know, plenty to love, and plenty to do, and are making progress to more knowledge, love, and use, all the time. It was to teach us this that Christ came; to teach us this that the Holy Spirit comes daily to our soul; that God knocks at the door of our hearts. This teaches us that we only have plenty to know, when we see God in all things; only plenty to love, when we love God in all His creatures; only plenty to do, when we serve Him by making ourselves useful to all. I have taken my text from the passage in Jeremiah which says, "The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." I also would ask, "Are we saved?" Summer-rest and joy will not save us. All the joy in the universe heaped on us would not save us. Put us into heaven, put us by the right hand of God,—that will not save us. It is to drink of the cup which Christ drinks of, and to be baptized with His baptism, that saves us. We are safe, then,—safe from the perils which belong to the great power of freedom which is in all of us,—only when we are doing what Christ did; seeing God in all things, loving God in all things, and serving God by serving all His children. He who is living in this spirit, even though he has a thousand faults, though he is stumbling and falling day by day, though he seems to himself a poor creature, and does not seem much better to any one else, is safe—safe here, safe hereafter. All things will work for his good, and he will not be afraid of any evil tidings. Evil tidings are always arriving. Danger is always near. We seem to have been living, even in this peaceful summer, in the midst of terrible dangers and fearful crimes. The sweetness of nature has not saved us. Fiends in the form of men commit awful crimes in the midst of our peaceful villages, and pollute serene nature with their brutal deeds. What shall make us safe? Not summer days, not the shield of devoted love, not all the bulwarks which civilisation and fortune place around us: nothing can make us safe but a life hid with Christ in God. And by this I mean nothing mystical, nothing extraordinary: I mean the simple purpose and habit of living with our heavenly Father wherever we are,—being in His presence; seeing Him in nature, history, life; and going, as Christ went, about His business, while we do our own. Then we are safe. Then, if we fall, struck dead by sudden accident, we fall, through death, into the arms of God outspread to receive us. We fall from love into larger love; from knowledge into deeper knowledge; from usefulness here into the uses, whatever they may be, of the great world yonder. The sun, which makes summer, seems the natural type of Deity. Astronomers tell us, indeed, that in winter the earth is nearer the sun than in summer. So sometimes we are nearer God in the chill and loneliness of our heart, than in our joy. We feel that we are wandering away into outer darkness; but God holds us near Himself, waiting till our hearts turn towards Him, and so receive their summer affluence and influence out of His radiance. Summer comes, not because the sun is any nearer to us, but because our part of the earth is turned up to it. Turn up your hearts to God. *Sursum corda*. Lift them up towards God,—the God of peace and love,—who images Himself in nature, in this magnificent orb of day. All life, movement, activity,

it is well said, come from the sun. It hides itself from us, like God, in an excess of light. The most brilliant light which man can produce, even the electric light, makes only a black spot on the surface of the sun, and so our brightest wisdom is only folly before God. As the sun marches through his twelve houses he creates the seasons—spring, summer, autumn, winter; and so God creates evermore in human life the revolving seasons of childhood, youth, manhood, and age. As the sun reaches out into the farthest depths of space with irresistible force, and yet moves all things according to a great unchanging order, so God governs the universe, not by pure will, but by will and law. Even the spots on the solar surface are now found to have their law of periodic return, and come and go in cycles of years. So the darkness which seems to hide the face of God, the total eclipse of faith which chills the heart and mind, and the doubts which pass across our belief like spots on the sun, have also their laws, which we shall one day understand, as we now understand the laws of the solar eclipse, which once terrified impious nations with fear of an eternal night. So, as we never tire of sunlight, let us rejoice in the sunshine of God. The final question is, Are we saved with a Christian salvation? Are we living with or without God in the world? Have we, with this human peace which makes our land rejoice, also the peace of God which passes all understanding? So, though summer be ended, the better part of summer need not be ended. We shall take it with us into winter. Whatever we have seen of God in nature, felt of God in our hearts, and done for God with our hands, makes a perpetual summer within. The outward summer comes and goes: the summer of the heart shall abide for evermore. (*J. Freeman Clarke.*)

Autumn thoughts:—Just now all nature is saying to us, "The summer is ended." The plashing rain and fierce winds proclaim it, the lightning writes it in fiery letters on the sky. The dying leaves lie like monuments bearing the epitaph, "The summer is ended." And now that the harvest is past, and the summer ended, and the fruit gathered, will you not think a little of yourselves, about the time that is past, about the harvest for which God looks, about the future of your souls? There are various classes among us to which the text applies. 1. "The summer is ended." This is true of the old and feeble. The winter of age has sprinkled snow on the hair, and sent a chill frost into the bones, and frozen the current of the blood. For the old the summer is ended. But though the summer be ended for the body and the mind, though it be winter with the limbs, and the eyes, and the ears, and the brain, it need not be winter for the soul. 2. For those, too, who have endured severe affliction the summer is ended. For those whose house is left unto them desolate, whose fireside shall never more be bright with happy faces, or merry with the music of children's voices, and who know that on earth they shall see their dear ones no more, except in memory, for such as these "the summer is ended." And for those who have lost their worldly property, whose savings have been swallowed up in bankruptcy when they are too old and infirm to retrieve their fortunes; for those families left destitute by the death of the bread-winner, and reduced from ease and comfort to poverty and dependence, for such as these, also, "the summer is ended." But every one of these cases is but the type and parable of the deepest meaning of all. The wise man tells us that "there is a time to get and a time to lose." You know that this is true of worldly matters. It is thus with the things of daily life, it is thus with the things of life eternal. There is a time to get a chance of repentance and amendment, a time to escape from the clutches of some bad habit or besetting sin; a time to get, and a time to lose. Shall not the gathered harvest remind you of God's goodness to you and to all men, and warn you that the Lord of the harvest is looking for fruit from you, the fruit of a holy life and the flowers of purity and meekness? You who live in the summer-time of pleasure, sitting down to eat and rising up to play, flitting through life as a summer butterfly flits from flower to flower, will you not be serious when you remember that the summer is ended, and that your gay, useless life must likewise end one day? And you who are living in the summer dream of careless indifference, who say, "To-morrow shall be as to-day," how long will you sleep before the awakening comes? Think of the death-bed of the worldling, of the indifferent, of the careless. It is related that a certain Eastern slave was once bidden by his master to go and sow barley in a certain field. The slave sowed oats instead, and when his master reproached him, he answered that he had sown oats in the hope that barley might spring from them. The master reproved the servant for his folly, but the man answered, "You yourself are ever sowing the seeds of evil in the field of the world, and yet expect to reap in the resurrection

day the fruits of virtue." You have doubtless heard of the great painter who, when asked by a brother artist why he produced so few pictures, answered, "You paint for time; I paint for eternity." We must sow for eternity, if we expect to reap the harvest of eternal joy. (*The Literary Churchman.*) *The arrival of autumn* :—The soul of the intelligent Christian reflects the natural world from all sides. The year is to him a great temple of praise, on whose altar, as an offering, spring puts its blossoms, and summer its sheaf of grain, and autumn its branch of fruits, while winter, like a white-bearded priest, stands at the altar praising God with psalm of snow, and hail, and tempest. The summer season is the perfection of the year. The trees are in full foliage. The rose—God's favourite flower, for He has made nearly five hundred varieties of it—flames with Divine beauty. Summer is the season of beauty. The world itself is only one drop from the overflowing cup of God's joy. All the sweet sounds ever heard are but one tone from the harp of God's infinite melody. But that summer wave of beauty is receding. The sap of the tree is halting in its upward current. The night is fast conquering the day. Summer, with fever heats, has perished, and to-night we twist a wreath of scarlet sage and China asters for her brow, and bury her under the scattered rose leaves, while we beat amid the woods and by the water courses this solemn dirge, "The summer is ended!" There are three or four classes of persons of whom the words of my text are descriptive. 1. They are appropriate to the aged. They stop at the top of the stairs, all out of breath, and say, "I can't walk upstairs as well as I used to." They hold the book off on the other side of the light when they read. Their eye is not so quick to catch a sight, nor their ear a sound. The bloom and verdure of their life have drooped—June has melted into July. July has fallen back into August. August has cooled into September. "The summer is ended." I congratulate those who have come to the Indian summer of their life. On sunny afternoons grandfather goes out in the churchyard, and sees on the tombstones the names—the very names—that sixty years ago he wrote on his slate at school. He looks down where his children sleep their last sleep, and before the tears have fallen, says, "So much more in heaven!" Patiently he awaits his appointed time, until his life goes out gently as a tide, and the bell tolls him to his last home under the shadow of the church that he loved so long and loved so well. Blessed old age, if it be found in the way of righteousness! 2. My text is appropriate for all those whose fortunes have perished. In 1857 it was estimated that, for many years previous to that time, annually there had been 30,000 failures in the United States. Many of those persons never recovered from the misfortune. The leaves of worldly prosperity all scattered. The day-book, and the ledger, and the money safe, and the package of broken securities, cried out, "The summer is ended." But let me give a word of comfort in passing. The sheriff may sell you out of many things, but there are some things of which he cannot sell you out. He cannot sell out your health. He cannot sell out your family. He cannot sell out your Bible. He cannot sell out your God. He cannot sell out your heaven! You have got more than you have lost. Instead of complaining how hard you have it, go home to-night, take up your Bible full of promises, get down on your knees before God, and thank Him for what you have, instead of spending so much time in complaining about what you have not. 3. The words of the text are appropriate to all those who have passed through luxuriant seasons of grace without improvement. You remember the time—many of you do, at any rate—when the engine-houses were turned into prayer-meetings; when in one day, to one of our ports, there came five vessels with sea-captains, who had been brought to God in the last voyage. Religion broke out of church into places of business and amusement. Christian songs floated into the temple of mammon, while the devotees were counting their golden beads. A company of merchants in Chambers Street, New York, at their own expense, hired Burton's old theatre, and every day, at twelve o'clock, the place was filled with men crying after God. Some of you went through all that, and are not saved. It required more resolution and determination for you not to be saved than, under God, would have made you a Christian. But all that process has hardened your soul. Through all these seasons of revival you have come, and you are to-night living without God, on the way to a death without hope. "The summer is ended!" 4. The text is appropriate to all those who expire after a wasted life. There are two things that I do not want to bother me in my last hour. The one is, my worldly affairs. I want all those affairs so plain and disentangled that the most ignorant adminis-

trator could see what was right at a glance, and there should be no standing around about the office of the surrogate, devouring widows' houses. The other thing I do not want to be bothered about in my last hour is the safety of my soul. God forbid that I should crowd into that last, feeble, languishing, delirious hour questions momentous enough to swamp an archangel! If you have ever slept in a house on the prairie, where in the morning, without rising from your pillow, you could look off on the prairie, you could see the prairie miles away, clear to the horizon: it is a very bewildering scene. But how much more intense the prospect when from the last pillow a soul looks back on life, and sees one vast reach of mercies, mercies, mercies unimproved, and then gets upon one elbow, and puts the head on the hand to see beyond all that, but seeing nothing beyond but mercies, mercies, mercies unimproved. The bells of sorrow will toll through all the past, and the years of early life and mid life wail with a great lamentation. A dying woman, after a life of frivolity, says to me, "Mr. Talmage, do you think that I can be pardoned?" I say, "Oh, yes." Then, gathering herself up in the concentrated dismay of a departing spirit, she looks at me, and says, "Sir, I know I shall not!" Then she looks up as though she hears the click of the hoofs of the pale horse, and her long locks toss on the pillow as she whispers, "The summer is ended." 5. The text is appropriate to all those who wake up in a discomfited eternity. I know there are those who say, "It don't make any difference how we live or what we believe. We will come out at the golden gate." No! No! The good must go up, and the bad must go down. I want no Bible to tell me that truth. There is something within my heart that says it is not possible that a man whose life has been all rotten can, in the future world without repentance, be associated with men who have been consecrated to Christ. What does the Bible say? It says that "as we sow we shall reap." It says, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." Does that look as though they were coming out at the same place? "And there was a great gulf fixed." "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." Now, suppose a man goes out from Brooklyn—a city in which there are as many religious advantages as in any city under the sun—and suppose he wakes up in a discomfited eternity—how will he feel? Having become a serf of darkness, how will he feel when he thinks that he might have been a prince of light! There are no words of lamentation sufficient to express that sorrow. You can take the whole group of sad words—pain, pang, convulsion, excruciation, torment, agony, woe—and they come short of the reality. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Lost opportunities deplored*.—I. THE IMPORT OF THE LAMENTATION. 1. It implies a full conviction that those who use it are not in a state of salvation. Once the aged sinner imagined his state was safe, that he was rich and increased with goods, and stood in need of nothing; yet now he sees that he is poor and miserable, wretched, blind, and naked. How immaterial does it seem to him in such a state of mind what he is in a worldly point of view. The sad reflection, I am not saved, makes him cry out, in the bitterness of his spirit, "Yet all this availeth me nothing." 2. It implies the recollection of the various opportunities of salvation with which they have been favoured, and their regret for the loss of these. Loathsome insects rioting on the blossoms of the tree are an emblem of the blasting influences of the vices of youth. 3. It implies a conviction of their folly and guilt in suffering those opportunities to pass away unimproved. The sinner uttering the lamentation in the text is like one who has gone to a rock far within the course of the sea. In vain is he reminded before he goes, that the way to it is open only while the tide has retired, and that when it swells, the rock and the surrounding sand will be covered. He despises these cautions, and amuses himself on the rock till the gathering of the waters forces him to remain and to perish; he then condemns the objects which absorbed his attention, the security which made him deaf to warning, and the presumption which rendered him insensible to the voice of passing time, and to the advance of the devouring sea. 4. There is in this lamentation a dreadful apprehension of utter perdition. I am not saved, and never may be, is the fear which the expression suggests. II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH, IN THE CASE OF THE AGED SINNER, GIVE TO THIS LAMENTATION PECULIAR BITTERNESS. 1. The length of time during which he has enjoyed these opportunities. Had there been but one offer of mercy, the disregard of it would have been felt as highly criminal; but most aggravated is the guilt and inexcusable the folly of rejecting offers of mercy without number. 2. The idea that others have been saved under these opportunities aggravates this regret. He calls to

remembrance the young who remembered their Creator in the days of their youth, and laments that the kindness of his youth was devoted to objects which he ought to have abhorred and shunned; and the sick, who rose from beds of distress, to show, by their wisdom and sobriety, that the discipline of affliction had reclaimed them completely from folly, while he returned "like the dog to his vomit," &c.

3. Despair of their renewal. With regard to the season of youth, it is as impossible to restore its simplicity, its docility, its pliability, its ardent feeling, its detachment from engrossing cares, as it is to bring back its fresh bloom to the wrinkled face of age, and its brisk movements to its palsied limbs. And with regard to other seasons of mercy, we have reason to think that God will not still vouchsafe them to those who, after His long patience with them, remain foolish and disobedient. Conclusion—1. Let the young be admonished by this text. 2. Let me address some exhortations to those who are in the situation which I have been describing. Your state is indeed awful, but do not conceive it to be desperate. 3. Let true Christians be thankful to Him who hath made them to differ. Pity the wretched sinner described in the text, and pray that he may obtain mercy. 4. Let me call on the aged, who feel no regret at the loss of religious opportunities, to consider their ways and to be wise. Amidst the words of eternal life you are dying in your sins, and amidst the dispensation of the Spirit you are ending in the flesh. (*H. Belrage, D.D.*) *Promising seasons of salvation lost* :—I. SOME FAVOURABLE SEASONS FOR THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL, WHICH IF LOST, MUST BE THE SUBJECT OF BITTER REGRET. 1. The season of youth.

Young prayers, young vows, and young services, are most acceptable in the sight of heaven—most useful to the subject of them; and most beneficial in the way of example to others. 2. The season of health. When it is not till sickness overtakes us that an attention is paid to religion, it will be regarded as forced on us; and it will be regarded with pity rather than admiration. The consequences of deferring religion to a death-bed, are equally unhappy as respects the individual himself. 3. The period of the present life. Imagination itself cannot picture the horror felt by the impenitent disembodied spirit when the dread realities of an eternal world burst upon the view. What earthly condition so dreadful, that it would not give ten thousand worlds to regain, might there be but another opportunity of listening to the Divinely commissioned messengers of mercy, and of escaping from a miserable hereafter? II. THE CAUSES WHY THESE HOPEFUL SEASONS ARE LOST. 1. Inconsideration and unbelief. It is the insensibility of the victim filleted for the sacrifice, of the mariner sleeping on the mast, or of the patient in the delirium of fever. 2. The spirit of procrastination. To defer our religious concerns while the truth of the Divine threatening is admitted, argues an aversion to that temper and conduct which form a meetness for heaven which is strong and permanent. (*R. Brodie, M.A.*)

Not saved :—I. "NOT SAVED," AND SALVATION PROVIDED SO DEARLY! Do you ask "How dearly?" Inquire of the Son of God, who, though He was the heir of all things, the outshining of the Father's glory, the equal of God, and rich—transcendently rich—in all the honours, treasures, splendours, and resources of eternity, for "your sakes became poor," ignoble, despised, and distressed, that you, "through His poverty, might be rich." Follow Him in all His travels of mercy, in all His errands of good, in all His miracles of love, in all His sayings of truth. Track Him on His walks from Jordan to Golgotha—in His sorrows, His sighs, His sufferings, His tears, His anguish, His reproach, His persecutions, His agonies, His terrible, terrible death, and you may form some faint idea of the "cost price" of that salvation for you provided, but by you despised. II. "NOT SAVED," AND SALVATION OFFERED SO FREELY! I could understand the reason of your delay if the conditions of salvation were difficult, complex, and severely exacting; if so much intelligence, or so much suffering, or so much money were demanded. Such conditions might suit the philosophic, the superstitious, or the millionaire, but not the poor, the simple-minded, and the illiterate. Whereas the terms laid down are such as admirably suit all classes, all ranks, all parties, ranging from the rustic with narrow brains and shallow mind bordering on the fool, to the giant in letters and lore, and from the beggar in his rags to the king in his robes of state and splendour. Your delay, therefore, cannot be excused on the ground of impracticable conditions; yet, perhaps, some of you may feel your paltry pride mortified by the simplicity of the means and the cheapness of the blessing; so that the conditions are a hindrance and a "stone of stumbling" to you. Like Naaman, the Syrian nobleman and leper, you feel proudly indignant because

the terms and method of the cure are so simple. But I reply to you to-night, in words analogous to those of Naaman's servants, "If you had been bidden to do some great thing, would you not have done it?" How much rather, then, when you are commanded to "wash and be clean, believe and be saved"? Would you despise the dew which gems the hedgerows, refreshes the flowers, and mirrors the sun, because it comes silent and free? Would you disdain the cooling, teeming, beautiful rain which fills the pools and wells, quickens the drooping, freshens the withering, stirs the decaying life in vegetation, and falls indiscriminately on mountain and dell, on desert waste and meadow bloom, on garden and graveyard, on cottage growths and palace rarities, because it is free? Would you refuse and despise the sunlight because it is free for all and to all? Emphatically, No. Then will you dare reject, madly refuse and despise salvation, God's greatest gift to man, because it is free to all without distinction, and for all without money and without price? III. "NOT SAVED," AND SALVATION SO NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT! Perishing amid the foaming frenzied breakers of sin, you refuse to get into the lifeboat of mercy, which hastens to your rescue. Blinded by the "god of this world," you stumble in the dangerous dark, and refuse the eyesalve and anointing of grace that you might see. Dying from the gnawings of soul-hunger, you refuse the "Bread of Life." Trembling in nakedness of spirit, and cramped by the awful chills of moral winter, you refuse "the garment of praise," and the mantle of righteousness, and the fire-baptism of the Holy Ghost. Full of "wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores," afflicted, stricken with the leprosy of evil, of necessity perishing, and it may be speedily and it must be for ever; yet, you refuse the "Balm of Gilead" and the Physician there; you won't have the healing touch, the restoring word, the saving remedy! IV. "NOT SAVED," AND TIME PASSING SO SWIFTLY! The orbs are slow in their motions, the cataract is tardy in its rush, compared with the swift on-rushing of time. What you do, then, you must do quickly. Your opportunities are fast hurrying by, your heart-beats are growing less, your circle is hourly contracting; the road behind is lengthening, but the path before is shortening; grim death is stealing marches on you, and eternity is on tramp to meet you! Soon! soon! will its heavy footfalls send a shudder through the chambers of your being, if "not saved" quickly. Time! it is either fitting you for a throne or for a dungeon; either preparing you as jewels for the diadem of Immanuel, or preparing you for perdition, according to your use or abuse of it. Time! it is increasing the volume and value of your being, or shrivelling you into a despicable dwarfism of soul; it is building for you a fortune, a mansion, a kingdom for ever and ever, or hurling you in swiftest speed to beggary, bankruptcy, and servitude to all eternity! V. "NOT SAVED," AND LIFE PENDENT ON SO GREAT UNCERTAINTY! Nothing, perhaps, is so precarious as human life, and yet nothing do men trifle more with. We are ignorant of the issues of the next hour; still we plan, and plod, and purpose for future days; or like the wealthy fool of sacred story, say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry"; not thinking that the "years" are God's property, and that at any moment the awful decree may ring like a death-knell in our ears, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" If you value your life, if you respect Christ, if you love heaven, if you dread hell, if you desire an immortality of brightness, and beauty, and bliss, then trifle not with salvation, live not without forgiveness, wait not for a more "convenient season," lest it never come. Procrastination is a wholesale destructionist. It has swung into the dark and woeful abysses multitudes of souls. Be careful! lest it allure you too far, and then recompense you by adjusting the fatal rope, and giving the fatal swing; by branding "too late" on your coffin-lid, and "not saved" on your soul. (*J. O. Keen, D.D.*) *The unavailing lamentation*:—I. GOD HAS GIVEN YOU THE GRACIOUS SEASONS OF SUMMER AND HARVEST. 1. The summer of—(1) Life. (2) Reason. (3) Opportunities. 2. The harvest of—(1) Knowledge. (2) Privileges. (3) Blessings. II. THESE MAY PASS AWAY UNIMPROVED. Many—1. Do not think. 2. Will not forsake their sins. 3. Will not believe. 4. Will procrastinate. III. THE REGRETS OF SUCH WILL BE AWFUL AND UNAVAILING. 1. Sometimes their regrets are expressed in this world. 2. They will surely be uttered in eternity. (1) Regrets of intense agony, of recollection, of self-condemnation. (2) Regrets will be unavailing. (3) Regrets of black despair. Conclusion—1. None would choose this portion. 2. Who would risk it? 3. Who will flee from it? (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Life's solemn opportunity*:—I. WHAT CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVED.

1. The object. "Harvest." 2. The opportunity. "Summer." 3. The limitation. "Past." "Ended." 4. The neglect irreparable. "We are not saved." II. TO WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES APPLICABLE. 1. Neglect of decision for God. 2. Neglect of spiritual culture. 3. Neglect of Christian service. III. LESSONS. Importance of—1. Present opportunity. 2. Present dedication. (*J. Farren.*) *Cautions and consolations*:—I. LANGUAGE OF FINAL AND ABSOLUTE DESPAIR. That, having neglected means, wasted opportunity, resisted Spirit, now no longer hope of mercy: nothing to expect but judgment and misery. II. LANGUAGE OF DEER AND HUMBLING CONVICTION. That, having abused their only opportunity for seeking salvation, for fulfilling the solemn object of life, it is gone for ever. Awakened at last to interests of souls, but too late. III. LANGUAGE OF DISTRESSING AND GLOOMY DESPONDENCY. Such despondency as the afflicted and tempted servants of Christ sometimes experience: their minds clouded, peace gone, hope perished, they take up cry of text. (*E. Cooper, M.A.*) *Too late*:—William III. made proclamation, when there was a revolution in the north of Scotland, that all who came and took the oath of allegiance by the 31st of December should be pardoned. Mac Ian, a chieftain of a prominent clan, resolved to return with the rest of the rebels, but had some pride in being the very last one that should take the oath. He consequently postponed starting for this purpose until two days before the expiration of the term. A snowstorm impeded his way, and before he got up to take the oath and receive a pardon from the throne the time was up and past. While the others were set free Mac Ian was miserably put to death. In like manner, some of you are in prospect of losing for ever the amnesty of the Gospel. He started too late and arrived too late. Many of you are going to be for ever too late. Remember the mistake of Mac Ian, and decide for God and heaven to-day. *The twelfth hour*:—Mr. Moody used to tell of a man who raised his hand in one of the meetings. The evangelist went to him and said, "I am glad you have decided to be a Christian." "No," said the man, "I have not decided, but will later on." His address was taken, and Mr. Moody visited the man when ill, and said, "Now decide." He replied, "No. If I decide now, people will say I was frightened into being a Christian." The man recovered and went into the country, and again had a severe relapse. Moody again visited him, and urged him to decide. The sick man said, "It is too late now." "But," said Mr. Moody, "there is morey at the eleventh hour." He replied, "It is too late for me; this is my twelfth hour." A few hours afterwards he died. Mr. Moody said, "We wrapped him in a Christless shroud, we put him in a Christless coffin, buried him in a Christless grave, and he went to spend a Christless eternity, outside the kingdom of God." To profess anxiety for your soul's welfare, and stop short of real conversion to God, will end in going right back into sin, and final loss. *An aged man's remorse*:—An old man took a little child into his arms and put his fingers into the abundant curls of his sunny hair, and he said, "Oh, dear child, while your mother sings to you, and tells you about Jesus, think of Him and trust Him." "Grandpa," said the little boy, "don't you trust Him?" "No, dear," he said, "I might have done so years ago, but my heart has got so hard now, nothing ever touches me now." And the old man dropped a tear as he said it. "I wish," said he, "that I had a curly head like yours, and was beginning life like you."

Ver. 22. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of My people recovered?—*Physic from heaven*:—I. The BALSAM-TREE is a little shrub, never growing past the height of two cubits, and spreading like a vine. The tree is of an ash-colour, the boughs small and tender, the leaves are like to rue. Pliny saith the tree is all medicinable: the chief virtue is in the juice, the second in the seed, the third in the rind, the last and weakest in the stock. It comforts both by tasting and smelling. This Holy Word is here called balm: and, if we may compare spiritual with natural things, they agree in many resemblances. We may call God's Word that balm-tree whereon the fruit of life grows; a tree that heals, a tree that helps; a tree of both medicament and nutriment; like the "tree of life" (Rev. xxii. 2). Neither is the fruit only nourishing, but even "the leaves of the tree were for healing of the nations." Now though the balm here, whereunto the Word is compared, is more generally taken for the juice, now fitted and ready for application; yet, I see not why it may not so be likened, both for general and particular properties. The tree itself is the Word. We find the eternal Word

so compared (John xv. 1). He is a tree, but the root of this tree is in heaven. It was once "made flesh, and dwelt among us," &c. (John i. 14). Now He is in heaven. Only this Word still speaks unto us by His Word: the Word incarnate by the Word written; made sounding in the mouth of His ministers. This Word of His is compared and expressed by many metaphors: to leaven, for seasoning; to honey, for sweetening; to the hammer, for breaking the stony heart (Jer. xxiii. 29). It is here a tree, a balm-tree, a salving, a saving-tree. Albumasar saith that the more medicinable a plant is, the less it nourisheth. But this tree makes a sick soul ound, and a whole one sounder. It is not only physic when men be sick, but meat when they be whole. It carries a seed with it, an "immortal and incorruptible seed" (1 Pet. i. 13), which concurs to the begetting of a new man, the old dying away: for it hath power of both, to mortify the flesh, to revive the spirit (Matt. xiii. 3). Happy is the good ground of the heart that receives it! The juice is no less powerful to mollify the stony heart, and make it tender and soft, as "a heart of flesh." The seed convinceth the understanding; the juice mollifieth the affections. All is excellent; but still, the root that yields this seed, this juice, is the power of God. A tree hath manifest to the eye, leaves, and flowers, and fruits; but the root, most precious, lies hidden. In all things we see the accidents, not the form, not the substance. There are but few that rightly taste the seed and the juice; but who hath comprehended the root of this balm? 1. It spreads. No sharp frosts, nor nipping blasts, nor chilling airs, nor drizzling sleet can mar the beauty or enervate the virtue of this spiritual tree. The more it is stopped, the further it groweth. The Jews would have cut down this tree at the root; the Gentiles would have lopped off the branches. They struck at Christ, these at His ministers; both struck short. If they killed the messenger, they could not reach the message. The blood of the martyrs, spilt at the root of this tree, did make it spread more largely. 2. As it gives boughs spaciouly, so fruit pregnantly, plentifully. The graces of God hang upon this tree in clusters (Cant. i. 14). No hungry soul shall go away from this tree unsatisfied. It is an effectual Word, never failing of the intended success. What God's Word affirms, His truth performs, whether it be judgment or mercy. 3. As this balm spreads patently for shadow, potently for fruit, so all this ariseth from a little seed. God's smallest springs prove at length main oceans. His least beginnings grow into great works, great wonders. Now, there is no action without motion, no motion without will, no will without knowledge, no knowledge without hearing (Rom. x. 14). God must then, by this Word, call us to Himself. Let us come when and whiles He calls us, leaving our former evil loves and evil lives. 1. The leaves of the balsam are white; the Word of God is pure and spotless. Peter saith there is sincerity in it (1 Pet. ii. 2). It is white, immaculate, and so unblemishable that the very mouth of the devil could not sully it. 2. The balsam, say the physicians, is sharp and biting in the taste, but wholesome in digestion. The Holy Word is no otherwise to the unregenerate palate, but to the sanctified soul it is sweeter than the honeycomb. The Word may relish bitter to many, but is wholesome. There cannot be sharper pills given to the usurer than to cast up his unjust gains. 3. They write of the balsamum, that the manner of getting out the juice is by wounding the tree. 1. The balsam-tree weeps out a kind of gum, like tears; the Word of God doth compassionately bemoan our sins. Christ wept not only tears for Jerusalem, but blood for the world. 2. The way to get out the juice of balm from God's Word is by cutting it, skilful division of it, "rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Tim. ii. 15). It is true that God's Word is "the bread of life"; but whiles it is in the whole loaf, many cannot help themselves: it is needful for children to have it cut to them in pieces. Though the spice unbroken be sweet and excellent, yet doth it then treble the savour in delicacy when it is pounded in a mortar. There must be wisdom both in the dispensers and hearers of God's mysteries; in the former to distribute, in the other to apportion their due and fit share of this balm. 3. The balsam-tree being wounded too deep, dies; the Word of God cannot be marred, it may be martyred, and forced to suffer injurious interpretations. 4. When the balsam is cut, they use to set vials in the dens, to receive the juice or sap; when the Word is divided by preaching, the people should bring vials with them, to gather this saving balm. How many sermons are lost whiles you bring not with you the vessels of attention! Philosophy saith that there is no vacuity, no vessel is empty; if of water or other such liquid and material substances, yet not of air. So perhaps you bring hither vials to receive this balm of grace, and carry them away full, but only full of wind; a vast, incircumscribed,

and swimming knowledge, a notion, a mere implicit and confused tenency of many things, which lie like corn, loose on the floor of their brains. How rare is it to see a vial carried from the Church full of balm, a conscience of grace! 5. The balsam-tree was granted sometimes to one only people—Judea, as Pliny (Lib. xii. cap. 17) testifies. It was thence derived to other nations. Who that is a Christian doth not confess the appropriation of this spiritual balm once to that only nation? (Psa. cxlvii. 19, 20.) Now, as their earthly balm was by their civil merchants transported to other nations; so when this heavenly balm was given to any Gentile, a merchant of their own, a prophet of Israel, carried it. Nineveh could not have it without a Jonah; nor Babylon without some Daniels; and though Paul and the apostles had a commission from Christ to preach the Gospel to all nations, yet observe how they take their leave of the Jews (Acts xiii. 46). 6. Pliny affirms, that even when the balsam-tree grew only in Jewry, yet it was not growing commonly in the land, as other trees, either for timber, fruit, or medicine; but only in the king's garden. There is but one truth, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," &c. (Eph. iv. 5). Even they that have held the greatest falsehoods, hold that there is but one truth. Nay, most will confess that this balsam-tree is only in God's garden; but they presume to temper the balm at their own pleasure, and will not minister it to the world except their own fancy hath compounded it, confounded it with their impure mixtures. 7. They write of the balsam-tree, that though it spread spaciouly as a vine, yet the boughs bear up themselves; and as you heard before that they must not be pruned, so now here, that they need not be supported: God's Word needs no undersetting. It is firmly rooted in heaven, and all the cold storms of human reluctancy and opposition cannot shake it. Nay, the more it is shaken, the faster it grows. 8. Physicians write of balsamum, that it is easy and excellent to be prepared. This spiritual balm is prepared to our hands: it is but the administration that is required of us, and the application of you. 9. Balm is good against all diseases. Catholicon is a drug, a drudge to it. It purifieth our hearts from all deflings and obstructions in them. A better cornucopia than ever nature, had she been true to their desires and wants, could have produced: the bread of heaven, by which a man lives for ever. A very supernatural stone, more precious than the Indies, if they were consolidate into one quarry; that turns all into purer gold than ever the land of Havilah boasted. A stronger armour than was Vulcan's, to shield us from a more strange and savage enemy than ever Anak begot, the devil (Eph. vi. 11). It is a pantry of wholesome food, against fenowed traditions; a physician's shop of antidotes, against the poisons of heresies and the plague of iniquities; a pandect of profitable laws, against rebellious spirits; a treasure of costly jewels, against beggarly rudiments. You have here the similitudes. Hear one or two discrepancies of these natural and supernatural balms. 1. This earthly balm cannot preserve the body of itself, but by the accession of the spiritual balm. Nature itself declines her ordinary working, when God's revocation hath chidden it. The Word without balm can cure; not the best balm without the Word. 2. So this natural balm, when the blessing of the Word is even added to it, can at utmost but keep the body living till the life's taper be burnt out; or after death, give a short and insensible preservation to it in the sarcophagal grave. But this balm gives life after death, life against death, life without death. II. THE PHYSICIANS. "Is there no balm at Gilead? is there no physician there?" The prophets are allegorically called physicians, as the Word is balm. So are the ministers of the Gospel in due measure, in their place. To speak properly and fully, Christ is our only physician, and we are but His ministers, bound to apply His saving physic to the sickly souls of His people. It is He only that cures the carcass, the conscience. 1. No physician can heal the body without Him. 2. No minister can heal the conscience where Christ hath not given a blessing to it. 1. We must administer the means of your redress which our God hath taught us, doing it with love, with alacrity. 2. The physician that lives among many patients, if he would have them tenderly and carefully preserve their healths, must himself keep a good diet among them. It is a strong argument to persuade the goodness of that he administers. This for ourselves. For you, I will contract all into these three uses, which necessarily arise from the present or precedent consideration—1. Despise not your physicians. 2. If your physician be worthy blame, yet sport not, with cursed Ham, at your father's nakedness. 3. Lastly, let this teach you to get yourselves familiar acquaintance with the Scriptures, that if you be put to it, in the absence of your physician, you may yet help yourselves. (T. Adams.) *The balm of Gilead*:—Through

fifty generations Gilead was famed for its plantations of aromatic and medicinal herbs. The balsam was a lowly tree—little better than a shrub, with scanty foliage and inconspicuous flower. Looking at it, you would scarcely have thought it profitable for any purpose,—for shade, for beauty, or for fruit. But on wounding its stem there flowed a pellucid gum, which was carefully collected, and was considered of all the substances known to pharmacy the most sovereign and wonderful. So early as the days of Joseph, this balm was an object of commerce, and was carried down from Gilead to Egypt. In the days of Solomon, the gardens where it grew were annexed to the crown, and become an item in the royal revenue. So precious were they deemed, that in the days of the Roman invasion a battle was fought for their possession; and among the other symbols of victory which Vespasian carried to Rome,—a balsam-tree was borne through the streets in triumphal procession. But being an exotic, and being from that period entirely neglected, it has perished from the face of Palestine, and there is no balm in Gilead now. (*J. Hamilton.*) *Spiritual disease and its remedy*.—I. THE MELANCHOLY FACT THAT SIN PREVAILS. Sin is here, as in other places of Scripture, represented under the figurative character of a disease. And the representation is appropriate; for sin affects the soul much in the same way as disease affects the body. It is a derangement of the spiritual frame, by which its functions are impeded, its strength enfeebled, its comfort impaired, its proper ends counteracted, and its very existence, as a creature destined to immortal felicity, endangered or destroyed. 1. It is a hereditary disease—not induced by outward or accidental circumstances, but entailed upon us as an attribute of our fallen nature, and cleaving to us with as much tenacity as if it were a part of our original being. 2. It is a pervading disease—not limited to any one portion of our constitution, but dwelling in every department of it—influencing its intellectual powers, its moral dispositions, its sensitive organs: “the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.” 3. It is a vital and inveterate disease—not touching merely the extreme or superficial parts of our system, and resisted in its progress by any inherent energies—but corrupting and preying upon our inmost soul, and so congenial to all that is within, and to all that is around us, as to grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength. 4. It is a deceitful disease—not always accompanied with those violent and decided symptoms which forbid us to mistake the nature or disregard the perils of our condition—but often assuming that gentle form which allays our apprehensions, and flatters us with the hopes of recovery. 5. It is often withal a painful and harassing disease—filling us with dissatisfaction and fear and trembling—rendering our days gloomy and our nights restless—or piercing us with agonies to which we can find neither utterance nor relief. 6. It is a mortal disease—not inflicting upon us a momentary pang, and then giving place to renovated vigour—but mocking at all human attempts to throw it off—sooner or later subduing us by its resistless power—and consigning us to the pains and the terrors of the second death. II. “IS THERE NO BALM IN GILEAD,” no remedy by which the disease of sin may be cured? “Is there no physician there,” no physician qualified to apply the remedy and able to make it effectual? Christ is set forth as the great Physician of souls. He has wisdom to devise whatever method may be necessary for rescuing the victims whom He has been sent to deliver. He has tenderness and compassion to induce Him to do, and bestow, and suffer all, whatever it may be, which their circumstances require. He has power to conquer every obstacle that would frustrate His exertions in their behalf, and to render effectual every means that may be employed for their recovery. And He has all these attributes in an indefinite degree; so that He is competent to heal those in whose instance the disease has assumed its most inveterate form, and even to call them back from the very gates of the grave. In the annals of Christianity we read of many who, though sin was preying on their very vitals as a deep-seated and mortal distemper, and though they were ready to perish, because they had no ability to stay or to withstand its progress, yet escaped from its destroying power,—felt that it had departed from them, manifested all the symptoms of renovated vigour, and rejoiced in the active exertion of those faculties which had been paralysed, and in the return of those comforts and those hopes which seemed to have fled from them for ever. And they have testified that this happy change was wrought in their condition—because there “is balm in Gilead, and because there is a Physician there.” III. SOME OF THE CAUSES OF SUCH A MELANCHOLY PHENOMENON IN THE HISTORY OF SINFUL MEN. 1. Many sinners are insensible to their need of a spiritual physician. They shut their eyes against

all the light by which they might be made aware of the perils and the horrors of their condition. They palliate or explain away all the circumstances by which we would prove that guilt does attach to them. 2. There are many who, though aware in some measure of the disease of sin, of its inveteracy and of its danger, and not unconvinced of the necessity of applying to Him who alone can save them from its power and consequences, are yet indisposed from doing so, by carelessness, or procrastination, or dislike to the remedies which they know will be prescribed. 3. Sinners are not saved, or have not their spiritual health recovered, because they will not take the remedy simply and submissively as it is administered by Christ. They put their own ignorance on a level with His wisdom—their own weakness with His power—their own depravity with His merit. And thus they defeat the purpose of all that He offers to do for them. They counteract His saving work. They render fruitless the remedies that He prescribes. (A. Thomson, D.D.) *Treacle, or like cures like* :—The word treacle is derived from the Greek word *therion*, which meant primarily a wild beast of any kind, but was afterwards more especially applied to animals which had a venomous bite. By many Greek writers the term was used to denote a serpent or viper specifically. But what connection, it may well be asked, can there be between a viper and treacle? How came such a sweet substance to have such a venomous origin? It was a popular belief at one time, that the bite of the viper could only be cured by the application to the wound of a piece of the viper's flesh, or a decoction called *viper's wine*, or *Venice treacle* made by boiling the flesh in some fluid or other. Galen, the celebrated Greek physician of Pergamos, who lived in the second century, describes the custom as very prevalent in his time. At Aquileia, under the patronage of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, he prepared a system of pharmacy, which he published under the name of *Theriaca*, in allusion to this superstition. The name given to the extraordinary electuary of viper's flesh was *theriake*, from *therion*, a viper. By the usual process of alteration which takes place in the course of a few generations in words that are commonly used, *theriake* became *theriac*. Then it was transformed into the diminutive *theriacle*, afterwards *triacle*, in which form it was used by Chaucer; and, finally, it assumed its present mode of spelling as early as the time of Milton and Waller. It changed its meaning and application with its various changes of form, signifying first the confection of the viper's flesh applied to the wound inflicted by the viper's sting; then any antidote, whatever might be its nature, or whatever might be the origin of the evil it was intended to cure. The fundamental principle that gave origin to treacle was one that was extensively adopted and acted upon in ancient times. *Similia similibus curantur*—"Like cures like"—was the motto of nearly all the medical practitioners from Galen downwards. There are traces in the Bible of the principle of treacle as applied in the cure of disease, which are exceedingly interesting and instructive. Some of the most remarkable of our Lord's miracles were based upon it. We are told by St. Mark of the healing of a man deaf and dumb in Galilee, by our Saviour putting His fingers to his ears and touching his tongue with His own spittle. *Saliva jejunata* was supposed by the ancients to possess general curative properties, and to be especially efficacious in ophthalmia and other inflammatory diseases of the eyes. We are not, however, to suppose for a moment that our Lord was misled by this popular notion, and that He was here acting merely as an ordinary physician acquainted with certain remedies in use among men. It was not for its medicinal virtue that He made use of the spittle. The application of it was entirely a symbolical action, indicating that as it was the man's tongue that was bound, so the moisture of the tongue was to be the sign of its unloosing, and the means by which it would be enabled to move freely in the mouth, and to articulate words. And the use of Christ's own saliva in the cure showed that the healing virtue resided in and came forth from Christ's own body alone, and was imparted through loss of His substance. All Christ's miracles, without exception, were in one sense illustrations of the principle. The effects of the curse in the diseases and disabilities of mankind were removed by Christ bearing the curse while performing the miracles. "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." The evil that He cured He suffered in His own soul. The sorrow that He alleviated cost Himself an equal degree of sorrow. Virtue went out of Him in proportion to the amount of healing virtue imparted. Gain to others was loss to Him. By fasting and prayer He cast out unclean spirits; by groaning in spirit and weeping He raised the dead Lazarus to life. The curse that He removed He came under Himself. In the economy of redemption we

find many remarkable examples of the principle of treacle. The rule that "like cures like" is engraved on the very forefront of our salvation. It is shadowed forth in type and symbol; it is foretold in prophecy; it is clearly seen in realised fact. The brazen serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness to heal those who were bitten by the fiery serpents, as a prophetic symbol that the Son of Man would be lifted up on the Cross to heal those who had been deceived into sin by the old serpent, the devil. And in this type there was a significant fitness. It was not an actual dead serpent that was exhibited; for that would have implied that Christ was really sinful. It was a brazen serpent, formed of the brass of which the brazen altar and the brazen laver were made, in token that though Christ was our substitute, He was yet holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Throughout the whole of our Saviour's propitiatory work, we can trace this similarity between the evil and the cure; a similarity indicated very plainly and emphatically in the first announcement of the scheme of redemption to our fallen first parents. The serpent's head could only be bruised through the heel of the woman's seed being wounded by the serpent's fang. By faithlessness and pride, man sinned and fell; by treachery, false witness, and a cross, man is redeemed. It was not as God that Christ wrought out man's salvation, but as man. It was in the likeness of sinful flesh that He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. So, also, in order that we may realise personally and individually the benefits of Christ's redemption, we must be identified with Him by faith; there must be mutual sympathy, partnership, and reciprocity of feeling—"I in you, and ye in Me." We must be partakers of His nature as He was partaker of ours. We must take up our cross and follow Him. We must know the fellowship of His sufferings. If we be planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; if we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him. In medicine, also, the same principle may be found. Homœopathy was anticipated by the ancient use of treacle. The essential character of Hahnemann's famous system is that such remedies should be employed against any disease, as in a healthy person would produce a similar, though not precisely the same disease. The method of administering remedies in infinitesimal doses is not necessarily a part of the system, and it was not originally practised, although in the end it was adopted as a vital article of the creed. The fundamental principle of homœopathy is that "like cures like"; and, to find suitable medicines against any disease, experiments are made on healthy persons, in order to determine the effect upon them. Thus whooping-cough and certain eruptions of the skin of a chronic nature are supposed to be cured by an attack of measles; inflammation of the eyes, asthma, and dysentery, are homœopathically cured by small-pox; arnica heals bruises because it produces the nervous symptoms which accompany bruises; camphor cures typhus fever because in a poisonous dose it lowers the vitality of the system; wine is a good remedy for inflammation because it inflames the constitution; quinine or Peruvian bark is the best remedy against intermittent fever or ague because, when taken in considerable quantity by a healthy person, it produces feverishness and furred tongue; and so on over a long list of medicines. There is a profound philosophy in this principle of *treacle* that applies to all the relations and interest of life. In the sweat of a man's face does he take away the curse that causes his face to sweat. Not by ease and idleness and self-indulgence does a man remove the remediable evils of the world; but by the evils of toil and trouble and care. It is the tear of sympathy that dries the tear of sorrow; the salt of the grief that springs from fellow-feeling that heals the salt spring of the grief that flows from human bereavement. We all know the relief to imprisoned feeling with which the heart is bursting—when we can find one whose susceptibilities can take it in as we outpour it all, who can understand our emotions and take interest in our disclosures. There is no earthly solace like that; and it is only a higher degree of it that we experience when we feel that we have "a brother born for adversity," who is afflicted in all our afflictions. That "Jesus wept,"—that He still sheds tears as salt and as round as ours—when He sees us sorrowing; this is the blessed homœopathy of suffering—this is the balm, the treacle to every heart wound. Then, too, why is repentance bitter? Is it not because sin is bitter? Conviction and conversion, whether on the lower levels of ordinary moral conduct and worldly well-being, or on the higher heights of spiritual life and Gospel experience, must always be attended with acute sorrow; and the measure of the pain in the loss of the soul must be the measure of the pain in its

recovery and gain. Look again at love. What does it require? Is it wealth, or rank, or fame, or any of the outward possessions and glories of life? The Song of Songs says, and the experience of every true loving heart echoes the sentiment, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned." Love can only be satisfied with love. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *Jesus Christ the Physician of His people*.—I. TO DESCRIBE YOUR SPIRITUAL DISEASE. Sin itself, and all its pernicious consequences, comprehends the whole disease of human nature. 1. This disease has infected the whole race of mankind. 2. This disease has infected the whole person of every individual. The members of the body are likewise infected with the disease of sin. 3. What especially renders this disease an object of apprehension and sorrow is, that it is mortal. It has not only entirely deprived mankind of strength but has involved them in death itself. II. TO EXPLAIN AND ILLUSTRATE THE NATURE OF THE REMEDY. 1. Though this Physician healed the most inveterate diseases of the body with a word, He could cure the distempers of the soul with no other medicine but the balm of His own blood. 2. With this precious balm our Physician heals all manner of diseases. 3. The cures which the Physician performs by the balm of His blood are all for ever perfect. 4. This wonderful Physician heals His patients without money and without price. When Zeuxis the Grecian painter presented his incomparable paintings for nothing, his vanity prompted him to give this reason for his own conduct, that they were above all price. So Jesus, our Almighty Physician, who can never be suspected of having indulged a vain-glorious pride, performed His mighty work of healing freely, and without reward, because it was impossible to propose to Him any remuneration that would either merit His favour, or claim His acceptance. The case is precisely the same to this very day. III. WHY, THEN, ARE THERE SO MANY DISEASED SOULS AMONG US? 1. Because multitudes are ignorant and insensible of their real condition. The patient who labours under the violence of a fever may, in a fit of delirium, affirm that he is completely recovered from his indisposition; but this very circumstance is one of the most unpromising symptoms of his disease. 2. Others refuse the Physician's grace, and reject His kind offers of assistance, from an opinion that it is so near and easy to be obtained, that they may have it at whatever time they choose to ask it. What greater dishonour can you offer to the Physician? What greater abuse can you make of this precious remedy? 3. A third class continue under the power of their spiritual disease on account of their contempt for the person of the Physician, and their obstinate prejudices against His prescriptions. 4. Another reason why so many remain under the power of their spiritual distemper is, that they spend their all upon other physicians. Application—1. Are you among the "whole who need not the Physician"? Awfully dangerous condition! Death approaches, and ye perceive it not! Beseech the Physician Himself to quicken you, and make you thoroughly sensible of your real condition by nature, that finding yourselves guilty, polluted, and condemned sinners, and feeling the plagues of your own deceitful and wicked hearts, you may humbly sue for mercy, and without delay repair to that all-sufficient Physician, whose blood is a balm for every wound of the sin-sick soul, who "of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." 2. Are ye among "the sick who need the Physician"? Be not discouraged. Of such sickness it may be truly said, that it is not unto death, but for the glory of God. The more heinous your guilt, the more imminent your danger, so much more reason have you to apply for relief. Oh, then, speedily have recourse to this Physician! Thankfully accept of His remedy, and you shall find to your present comfort and everlasting joy that "He is both able and willing to save to the very uttermost all who come unto God through Him." 3. Are ye now made whole? "Go, and sin no more." Rejoice in the Physician and in His salutary aid. (*T. Thomson.*) *Balm in Gilead*.—I. THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SALVATION PROVIDED FOR OUR PERISHING SOULS. 1. The glorious constitution of His person as God and Man in one Christ. He, who has undertaken the office of our great Physician, is "Lord of lords, and King of kings." "All the angels of God worship Him." He is Himself "God over all, blessed for evermore." Yet, wonderful to tell, He is also Man, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and made in all things, sin only excepted, like unto us; whom He is therefore not ashamed to call His brethren. 2. The wonderful way which He has taken to save us from sin. This way was by giving up to death this Person so gloriously constituted, that by thus dying He might atone for our sins. II. THE REASON WHY SO MANY PERSONS, NOTWITH-

STANDING, CONTINUE IN A PERISHING CONDITION. 1. Some are altogether insensible of their disease. Engrossed with worldly business, sunk in sensual pleasures, they give no thought at all, or no serious thought, to the state of their soul. As to their sin, it gives them no concern. They regard it as light and trifling. 2. Some are too proud to accept or use the proffered medicine. They think that they can heal and cure themselves. The proposition of being saved wholly through the blood and sacrifice of another is too humbling for them. They cannot submit to be thus indebted to grace. 3. Others there are who use not the remedy prescribed because of its holy tendency. They know that, while it brings them to the Cross of Christ, it requires them to take up their cross, to crucify the flesh, and to be crucified to the world. But to these things, these acts of self-denial and godliness, they have no mind; therefore they go not to the Physician to heal them. (*E. Cooper, M.A.*) *The balm of Gilead*.—Appalling as our condition may now be, the spectacle of a world abandoned to the reign of sin, without any corrective or mitigation, would be far more lawful. It is an instance of the Divine mercy for which we can never be sufficiently grateful, that “where sin abounded grace doth much more abound.” The interrogative form of this statement seems to contemplate, not so much cases of want or woe indiscriminately, as examples of peculiar and signal distress. Such examples every community might supply. There are families here and there whose afflictions have given them a sad pre-eminence among their neighbours. Stroke after stroke has fallen upon them, until their cup of bitterness seems filled to the very brim. A blessed thing it is to be allowed to go to a family in these circumstances, and say, “We will not mock you with the tender of such consolations as the world may have to bestow. But rest assured there is balm in Gilead which can soothe your wounds, and a Physician there who knows how to apply it.” It was long ago said, “the heart knoweth his own bitterness.” And the older we grow, the deeper must become the conviction of every thoughtful person, that the hearts are not few in number which have some secret sorrow. 1. Very many of these examples belong to the realm of the affections. Misplaced love, morbid sensibility, disappointed hopes, abused or unrequited confidence,—who can compute the measure of unhappiness in the world which flows from these sources? The world may sneer at the “sentimentalism” of such experiences. The essential spirit of the world is as coarse and cynical where human affections are concerned, as it is arrogant and impious in dealing with the prerogatives of the Deity. It may very well be that, in many instances, there is an ill-balanced constitution, or that a passion has been cherished in opposition to all reason, or that, in some way, the calamity has been self-imposed. But the consciousness of this only increases the bitterness of the cup; as it may also prompt to a more careful seclusion of it from every eye. It were a mission of Godlike philanthropy could one seek out all these afflicted ones, bowed down with their crushed hearts, and languishing under the weight of griefs too sacred to be shared by any earthly bosom, and say to them, “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no Physician there?” Do not repel the suggestion as either unsuited to your state of mind or as unseasonable. What you need is a Friend whose sympathy can avail to relieve you, and whose arm can keep you from sinking; a Friend upon whom you can fix your lacerated affections with a confidence that He will never betray you; and whom you can love with the conviction that your attachment to Him can never become so absorbing as to be an occasion of self-reproach or of sin. Jesus of Nazareth will not disappoint you. Such is the essential perfection of His nature,—such its boundless amplitude,—that in Him all your griefs may be assuaged and all your cravings after happiness satisfied. 2. The moment we pass from the sphere of the affections into the realm of spiritual things, new forms of suffering meet the eye, as diversified in character as they are various in intensity. And here, no less than among the tribes of sickness and sorrow and disappointment, we have but too much occasion to ask, “Is there no balm in Gilead, and no Physician there?” (1) You have seen individuals under the terrors of an awakened conscience. God has come near to them and set their sins in order before their eyes. How hopeless is it to attempt to minister relief to a soul in this condition with any mere earthly specifics! Something widely different from this you must have before that agitated breast can be tranquillised. And the boundless mercy of God proffers you all that you need. “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no Physician there?” Yes, thou heavy-laden sinner. Great as thy sins are, there is a greater Saviour. Ponderous as is thy burden, what will it be to Him whose hand holds up the firmament and guides the spheres in their

orbits? Deep as may be the crimson-dye of thy soul, the blood which cleansed Manassch, and the dying thief, and Saul of Tarsus, can cleanse thee. (2) A second glance around the realm we are now traversing reveals another class of sufferers. These are the doubting, the tempted, the desponding,—the bruised reeds and the smoking flax,—who “desire to follow Christ,” and would “give worlds” to know that He owned them as His disciples, but who walk in darkness. Long accustomed to dwell on their conscious sins and infirmities, their sense of personal unworthiness forbids them to appropriate the promises, and even restrains them from looking, with any confidence, to the Saviour. These doubts and misgivings have their rooting in unbelief, and in unworthy conceptions of the character of the Redeemer. Conscious ill-desert keeps you from going to Christ. But is there anything either in His character or in the events of His life to justify this feeling? How can you say, as you do practically say, “There is no balm in Gilead, and no Physician there”? (3) It is a dark portraiture which the Spirit has drawn of man’s moral character, when, with a single graphic touch of the pencil, he is depicted as having “a heart of stone.” The sceptic resents the great indignity. “A heart of stone! Look at the virtues which cluster around humanity! See the integrity and the truthfulness, the high-toned honour and the magnanimity, which embellish society! Let these testify how gross a libel that is upon the race, which ascribes to man ‘a heart of stone’!” Granted all. Make the flattering inventory still more flattering, and its every item shall be acknowledged. The brighter the vestments in which you fold your idol, the clearer do you bring out the demonstration that his heart is “a heart of stone.” It is of his relations Godward that the Scriptures affirm this quality of him. But we are not now dealing with sceptics. There are those who, so far from cavilling at this representation, freely concede its truth. They have reasoned with themselves on the surpassing folly and impiety of living for this world only. They are convinced that Jesus Christ ought to be in their eyes the chief among ten thousand; that they ought to enthrone Him in their hearts with a grateful and confiding devotion; that they ought to delight in prayer, and to find their happiness in doing God’s will. They long for this. They would make any earthly sacrifice to accomplish it. They have laboured and struggled to bring themselves into this state of mind. But all in vain. The wayward affections will not relax their hold of earth at the bidding of reason and conscience. Here, at least, is a class of sufferers whom no earth-born philosophy can reach. But are they therefore to be abandoned to despair? Far from it. Your case is not hopeless. That heart of stone can be broken in pieces. That proud will can be subdued. Those intractable affections can be detached from earth and lifted to the skies. The love of Christ may yet burn with seraphic ardour in that breast which has hitherto refused Him its homage. In place of the ingratitude and distrust with which you have requited Him, your joyful protestation may yet be heard, “Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee.” Be it so, that your sins are of colossal magnitude, and as the stars of heaven for multitude. That is a cogent reason for repentance and contrition; it is no reason for declining to accept “the balm in Gilead and the Physician there.” You “have no real sorrow for your sins.” Christ is “exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.” One glimpse of Him whom you have pierced, such as the Spirit can afford you, will make streams of penitential sorrow burst from that heart of stone as the waters gushed from the smitten rock. You “have no faith.” But can you not cry, “Lord, I would believe. Help thou mine unbelief”? You “have no love.” Who ever loved Him, except as he was loved by Him? “We love Him, because He first loved us.” Let Him but reveal His love to you, and that will “kindle yours” as nothing else can. (*H. A. Boardman, D.D.*) *The balm of Gilead*:—For every wrong there is a remedy. God is Almighty. The prophets of old believed this. The Church of Christ, in all ages, professes to believe this. I. “THERE IS BALM IN GILEAD.” And to Gilead we must go to seek and to find it. That is, the remedy for every wrong must be made the object of our effort to attain. Gilead—as all students of the Bible know—is the mountainous region east of Jordan, forming the frontier of the Holy Land. The name itself signifies “a hard, rocky region,” and there the fragrant, resinous gum, possessed of such famous healing properties, was to be found—found, however, not by the casual, unobservant traveller who happened to pass by that way, but by the man who clambered up the rocks, scaled the heights, diligently searched among the precious, storm-stunted shrubs, yielding the healing gum. And so, surely, is it the same

with that which the balm of Gilead symbolises. The remedy for every, or for any, wrong is not to be found in religious idleness. It must ever be a serious business—a search, requiring an effort upwards, taxing all the strength that is vouchsafed. And does it very much matter by what name they are called, who in sincerity attempt the search? or, indeed, whether the balm they find is all identical in outward appearance? For instance, “the balm of Gilead,” the remedy for wrong, comes to us in modern times, certainly in one way, in the form of scientific truth. Scientific ignorance is the fruitful cause of how vast a waste of human life!—of disease, and wretchedness, and pain, and bereavement, and idiocy, and drink, and death! God’s laws and nature’s laws are one and the same, and the high priests of science serve at the altar of the Most High God. Or, again, the balm of Gilead, the remedy for wrong, comes to us in the form of philosophic thought. Social science, based upon historical research and experience, economic problems, thought out in the light of what has been, and what men are, and need—labelled by whatever name—if they are not self-condemned by insincerity, are all possessed with some healing virtue. So, too, with politics in the true and highest sense; but, alas! not with party “politicalism,” unless indeed that balm serves the purpose of an emetic. Again, the true “balm of Gilead,” the remedy for every wrong, is to be found upon the mountain top of revelation. The balm of revealed knowledge, the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the insight into the spiritual, is within the reach of all.

II. BUT WHO IS THE PHYSICIAN QUALIFIED TO ADMINISTER THE BALM, to tell us how, and where, and in what proportion it should be applied? For, indeed, without proper knowledge, a remedy itself may become a poison; the cure may be more fatal than the disease. In matters social and spiritual we have many teachers, and some who seem to be more interested in their own nostrums than in the cures they effect. But is there no true physician, is there none whose direction and advice we may follow with absolute confidence? An answer to that question some will immediately give. “Our blessed Lord,” they say, “is the good Physician” (a title which by implication only our Lord applies to Himself), “and to follow Jesus Christ is to be healed of all that is wrong.” Nothing could be truer, and yet is this all the truth? Does not our Lord Himself point onwards, to the revelation of the Holy Ghost, as the perfect Physician, as the Teacher, and Leader, and Guide, and Comforter of men’s souls? “He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.” Every spiritual man is a physician qualified, according to the measure of the light which he enjoys, to apply the healing balm to the sorrows and distresses of others.

(A. A. Toms, M.A.) *A cure for diseased souls*.—I. **MANKIND UNIVERSALLY ARE IN A DISEASED STATE.** 1. Atheism, infidelity, or unbelief of Divine truths. 2. Ignorance of God and Gospel truths, even among those who profess to know Him (Hos. iv. 6). 3. Hardness of heart. 4. Earthly mindedness. 5. Aversion to spiritual duties. 6. Hypocrisy and formality in God’s service. 7. Trusting to our own righteousness. 8. Indwelling corruption. 9. Backsliding. II. **THERE IS A PHYSICIAN WHO CAN CURE ALL DISEASES.** 1. He is infinite in knowledge, and understands all diseases, with the proper remedies, so that He never can err (John xxi. 17). 2. He has sovereign authority and almighty power, so can command diseases to obey (Matt. ix. 2). 3. He has infinite pity, ready to help the distressed, even unasked (Luke x. 33). 4. He has wonderful patience towards the distressed; bears with their ingratitude, and works their perfect cure. III. **THE REMEDY WHICH HE APPLIES TO EFFECT THE CURE.** 1. Principally, His own blood. 2. But Scripture speaks of other subservient means. (1) The Spirit of God, with His gracious operations on the soul. (2) The Word and ordinances of Christ. (3) Afflictions. (4) Faithful ministers. (5) Prayers of pious Christians. IV. **HIS METHOD OF APPLYING THE REMEDY.** 1. He makes sinners sensible that they are sick. 2. He works faith in the soul by His Holy Spirit. 3. He accomplishes and perfects the cure by the sanctifying influences of the Spirit. V. **WHY SO FEW ARE HEALED, NOTWITHSTANDING THERE IS BALM IN GILEAD AND A PHYSICIAN THERE.** 1. Many are ignorant of their disease, and wilfully so. 2. Many are in love with their disease more than with their Physician. 3. Many neglect the season of healing (Jer. viii. 20). 4. Many will not trust Christ wholly for healing. 5. Many will not submit to the prescriptions of Christ; self-examination, repentance, godly sorrow, mortification. Conclusion—1. Let those in a diseased state see their danger, for it is great. 2. Balm of Gilead is freely offered in the Gospel. 3. Consider how long you have slighted this balm already. 4. Those whom Christ has healed, manifest their gratitude by living to His glory. (T. Hannam.) 18

there no Physician there?—*The Divine Physician*:—I. THE PHYSICIAN is Jesus Christ the Son of God, who, being the Son of God, must needs be able and skilful; since He is the Christ, He wants not a call to the office, &c.; as He is Jesus, He cannot but be ready and willing to the work,—who can desire a better, who would seek after another Physician than Him in whom skill, and will, and ability, and authority do meet? II. The PATIENTS are those who stand in need of this Physician, and they most need Him who think they have least. III. The DISEASE of these patients is sin—a disease both hereditary, as to the root of it, which together with our nature we receive from our parents, and likewise contracted by ourselves, in the daily eruption of this corruption, by thoughts, words, and works. IV. The MEDICINE or “balm” which this Physician administereth to the patient for the cure of his disease is “His own blood,” which He is content to part with for our sakes. V. The METHOD by which the cure is effected is by cleansing; no cordial like this to comfort our hearts and to rid us of the ill-humours of our sins, thereby restoring our spiritual health. (*Nath. Hardy.*) *The balm and the physician*:—A distressed father, that had just left the sick-bed of a beloved daughter, and was wandering through the streets in all the dejection of grief, may easily be supposed to have uttered himself in the language of the text. And if we may suppose that she had been long subjected to the want of a physician and a nurse, while death must now ensue as a consequence of that neglect, while there was a remedy at hand, and a physician hard by; but there was none at hand to call in that physician, or to apply that balm, by the application of which she might have been restored to health, joy, and life. One would grieve to hear the solitary moan of such a father, and haste to know if it is altogether too late to call in the kind and timely physician. I. THE DISEASE IS ONE OF UNIVERSAL APPLICATION. There has been no nation found that is not totally depraved. They all practised a gross and God-provoking idolatry. They made their idols as stupid and as devilish as they could, practising as gross a perversion of their Supreme Deity as possible, and then they practised upon man all the outrages that a perverted intellect could contrive. II. THIS DISEASE IS, OF ALL OTHERS, THE MOST CONTAGIOUS. It has been communicated through the wide world, and gone into every little ramification of every kingdom under the whole heaven. It poisons all the human relations, and mars every human compact; and, first of all, man's covenant with his God. The result of this is, that it has filled and loaded him with misery to the full, and all nature “groans and travails to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and be brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” III. WHY IS NOT THE PLAQUE HEALED? 1. Sinners are not sensible that they are the subjects of this deplorable disease. The first object of a preached Gospel is to convince them of this fact. 2. If to any extent they are conscious of their condition, they love the very disease that cleaves to them. 3. They do not love the Physician. 4. They do not love the price at which they can be healed. It must be with Christ a mere gratuitous healing. 5. Sinners do not relish the manner of the application. This deep repentance, and this being healed by faith, destroys all human agency and contrivance, and gives God all the glory. (*D. A. Clark.*) *Reasons for the irreligion of the masses*:—I. OUR MORAL AND EVANGELICAL RESOURCES. 1. No country in the world in all respects equal in privileges. 2. No age comparable to this. (1) Plenitude of God's Word. (2) Good books. (3) Evangelical ministry. (4) Rich variety of social institutions. II. THE FEARFUL EVILS WHICH STILL EXIST. 1. Avowed infidelity. 2. General neglect of Divine worship. 3. Juvenile precocity and profligacy. 5. Overwhelming intemperance. III. THE AFFECTING INQUIRY PRESENTED. “Why, then,” &c. Three classes of reasons. 1. In the Church. (1) Prevalence of spiritual indifference. (2) Sectarian contentions. (3) Fowness of workers. (4) Want of spiritual self-denial. (5) Coldness in prayer. (6) Feeble faith. 2. Reasons in the persons themselves. Feel separated from other classes; neglected, despised on account of poverty, &c. 3. Reasons in the world. Seductive temptations, dissipating scenes. Applications—1. We appeal to Church of Christ. Great responsibility. 2. Sinners are inexcusable. Every man must give account. 3. God's mercy and grace are all-sufficient. 4. The provisions of the Gospel are freely published. (*J. Burns, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 1, 2. On that my head were waters.—*Christian anguish over spiritual desolation*:—There is a solemn beauty in Jeremiah's devotion to the welfare of his fellow-countrymen. Blinded as they were by sin, they could not appreciate his anxiety, and when his loving devotion broke into the tenderest words of warning, they regarded him in the light of an enemy instead of a sincere friend. The depth of his feeling, the tenderness of his words, remind us strongly of another scene which took place more than five hundred years after these events: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets," &c. The most beautiful sight on earth is unselfish devotion to the social, mental, moral and spiritual interests of humanity. While the less thoughtful may be dazzled by the great military achievements of conquering heroes, the more thoughtful are rather charmed by that self-sacrificing devotion which, losing sight of worldly applause and worldly honour, has thought of nothing but the opportunity of doing good. As the prodigal son, in his ingratitude, profligacy, and sinful wanderings, did not check the pulsations of his father's heart, but rather intensified them and brought to light the richness of his father's love, so the unbelief, idolatry, and sinful lives of the Jewish people only served to reveal the strength, the sweetness and richness of the prophet's nature. The history of the Christian Church is history of men and women who have not counted their lives dear unto themselves, but who have bestowed their warmest affections and divinest endeavours upon those who seemed the least likely to respond to such manifestations of interest and of love. The history of Jewish backslidings, of vows solemnly taken and as readily broken, reminds us in a vivid manner of scenes which have transpired from time to time in the Christian dispensation. For the progress of the Christian Church toward a larger benevolence, a broader charity, a purer morality, and a more intelligent piety has neither been rapid nor uniform. Seasons of great revival have been followed by periods of marked decline. Into the midst of torrid heat comes a wave of arctic cold. A narrow denominationalism has often thrown its dark shadow across the pathway of Christian catholicity. Creeds, catechisms, formulas, confessions of faith have often outweighed sobriety, virtue, benevolence, and all the other graces which adorn the Christian character, while practical unbelief, clothed in the formulas of an accepted dogma, has passed for genuine Christianity without even the semblance of a challenge. As each period of Jewish history was favoured with some that were true and brave—whose words of instruction, reproof, and warning were spoken above the din of the busy multitudes—so each period of the Christian dispensation has been honoured with some John the Baptist, whose earnest words have resounded from valley to valley, from peak to peak, and from land to land, echoing the Gospel of the blessed Lord, and summoning men to self-sacrifice, to holiness, and to purity. Our interest in the human race will depend largely upon our faith in human possibilities. If we see in man simply the possibilities of an animal, possibilities, to be sure, greater than belong to any other earthly creature, but possibilities determined by material conditions, limited to threescore years and ten, possibilities that have no relation to a future world—if we see in man nothing but the ability to trace in the sands of time a few illegible characters, then our interest in his welfare and prosperity can neither be deep nor abiding. But if, on the other hand, we see in man a creature made in the Divine image, with feeling, with thought, with spirituality, with volition, with freedom, with immortal properties, created for a higher sphere and for a better world, capable of companionship with angels, capable of communion with the omnipotent Author of his existence, endowed with power to love and serve the mighty Ruler of the universe, with unlimited capacity for growth and development—if we see in him an intelligent, moral, responsible, and immortal being, then we have an object worthy of our broadest sympathies, our warmest affections and our divinest endeavours. (*Ezra Tinker, B.D.*) *Genuine philanthropy*:—**I. GENUINE PHILANTHROPY MELTING WITH EARNESTNESS.** 1. Heart intensely earnest concerning the temporal condition of men. Chaldean army among them, &c. Weeps as patriot. 2. Heart intensely earnest concerning the moral condition of men. Their carnalities, idolatries, and crimes affect his pious spirit more than physical sufferings and political disasters. Think of the soul—(1) In relation to its capacity of suffering and happiness. (2) In relation to the influences for good or evil it is capable of exerting. (3) In relation to its power of being a delight

or a grief to the heart of infinite Love. II. GENUINE PHILANTHROPY SIGHING FOR ISOLATION. 1. The sigh of a spiritually vexed soul. 2. The sigh of disappointed love. Nothing is more saddening to generous souls than the discovery of indifference, ingratitude, and growing vice in the very men they seek to bless. Conclusion—1. The vicariousness of genuine philanthropy. It inspires the possessor with the spirit that will prompt him to sacrifice his very being for the good of others. 2. The abuse of genuine philanthropy. The greatest sin in the universe is sin against love. 3. The imperfection of genuine philanthropy. Like the best of everything human, love is not perfect here. Disheartened, Jeremiah sought isolation. (*Homilist.*) *England's sorrows* :—Sometimes tears are base things ; the offspring of a cowardly spirit. Some men weep when they should knit their brows, and many a woman weepeth when she should resign herself to the will of God. But oft-times tears are the noblest things in the world. The tears of penitents are precious : a cup of them were worth a king's ransom. He that loveth much, must weep much ; much love and much sorrow must go together in this vale of tears. Jeremiah was not weak in his weeping ; the strength of his mind and the strength of his love were the parents of his sorrow. It would seem as if some men had been sent into this world for the very purpose of being the world's weepers. Men have their sorrows ; they must have their weepers ; they must have men of sorrows who have it for their avocation to be ever weeping, not so much for themselves as for the woes of others. I. To begin, then, with ACTUAL MURDER AND REAL BLOODSHED. II. But I have now a greater reason for your sorrow—a more disregarded, and yet more dreadful, source of woe. " Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night," FOR THE MORALLY SLAIN of the daughter of my people. The old adage is still true, " One half of the world knows nothing about how the other half lives." Oh, how many of our sons and daughters, of our friends and relatives, are slain by sin ! Ye weep over battlefields, ye shed tears on the plains of Balaklava ; there are worse battlefields than there, and worse deaths than those inflicted by the sword. Ah, weep ye for the drunkenness of this land ! How many thousands of our race reel from our gin-palaces into perdition ! But there are other crimes too. Alas, for that crime of debauchery ! What scenes hath the moon seen every night ! Are these the only demons that are devouring our people ? Ah, would to God it were so. Behold, throughout this land, how are men falling by every sin, disguised as it is under the shape of pleasure. O members of churches, ye may well take up the cry of Jeremiah when ye remember what multitudes of these you have in your midst—men who have a name to live and are dead : and others, who though they profess not to be Christians, are almost persuaded to obey their Lord and Master, but are yet not partakers of the Divine life of God. But now I want, if I can, to press this pathetic subject a little further upon our minds. In the day when Jeremiah wept this lamentation with an exceeding loud and bitter cry, Jerusalem was in all her mirth and merriment. Jeremiah was a sad man in the midst of a multitude of merry-makers ; he told them that Jerusalem should be destroyed, that their temple should become a heap, and Nebuchadnezzar should lay it with the ground. They laughed him to scorn ; they mocked him. Still the viol and dance were only to be seen. And now, to-day, here are many of you merry-makers in this ball of life ; ye are here merry and glad to-day, and ye marvel that I should talk of you as persons for whom we ought to weep. " Weep ye for me ! " you say ; " I am in health, I am in riches, I am enjoying life ; why weep for me ? I need none of your sentimental weeping ! " Ah, but we weep because we foresee the future. Oh, if to-day some strong archangel could unbolt the gates of hell, and for a solitary second permit the voice of wailing and weeping to come up to our ears ; oh, how should we grieve ! Remember, again, O Christian, that those for whom we ask you to weep this day are persons who have had great privileges, and consequently, if lost, must expect greater punishment. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Why the righteous should weep for the wicked* :—I. BECAUSE THEY LOSE INFINITE BLESSINGS. 1. There are many present blessings men lose by rebellion against God. There is a " peace that passeth all understanding," and a " joy " unspeakable and full of glory, attending belief in, and devotion to, His service. The having one's passions in subjection gives serenity of mind. But the enjoying of God's favour, and the light of His countenance, is the source of the richest blessings mortals possess on earth. But what peace is there for the wicked ? 2. But the eternal blessings they lose are beyond imagination. 3. And are not these things matters of just lamentation ? How must we pity him who,

when there is a rest prepared, and a supper spread for him, in heaven, provokes God to swear that he "shall not enter in," nor even taste of that supper.

II. BECAUSE OF THE INFINITE WOES THEY ENTAIL ON THEMSELVES. 1. How inexpressibly dreadful are the torments which the wicked will endure in hell. 2. And can we view sinners hastening to that place of torment and not weep over them?

III. BECAUSE OF THE AGGRAVATED GUILT UNDER WHICH THEY PERISH. Every offer of salvation aggravates the guilt of those who reject it; and every increase of guilt is followed by increase of misery. Infer—1. How little true charity is there in the world. Charity to the soul is the soul of charity. 2. How earnest should men be in seeking the salvation of their own souls. (*Evangelical Preacher.*)

Grief for sinners.—There is an anecdote told of a careless Sabbath-breaker who stumbled into Mr. Sherman's chapel one Sunday evening when he was engaged in prayer. He took his stand in the aisle, and, seeing the tears rolling down the minister's cheeks and falling on the book as he was pleading for the conversion of sinners, he was aroused, and said to himself: "This man is evidently in earnest; there must be something in the condition of sinners that I do not understand." He remained, was instructed and converted, and became a useful and steady member of the congregation. *Painful solicitude for the souls of others*.—This concern was incessant with the apostle. "I have continual sorrow in my heart." The pain was unceasing. His interest in sinners was not spasmodic; it had become blessedly chronic. There are some of us who every now and then get a passing qualm of conscience and a consequent spurt in the matter, but how long does it last? It is a mere emotion, a transient feeling, a spasm that scarcely suffices to stir us for so much as a single Sabbath. Oh, that there were in the pastor's heart, and in the hearts of all his people, a breaking, a yearning that cannot be satisfied, for the salvation of London, and of all who know not Jesus! I find myself weeping, but I weep because I weep so little. I confess myself this morning grieving, but I fear my greatest grief is that I do not grieve as I should. Well, that is a hopeful beginning. Let us all get to this at least, and we shall reach the other by and by. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 2. *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men.*—*Two prayers of Jeremiah* (with chap. xiv. 8, 9).—In all the fellowship of the prophets Jeremiah is by far the most unwilling and reluctant. If Isaiah's watchword was "Hero am I—send me," Jeremiah's might have been, "I would be anywhere else but here—let me go." It was out of this besetting mood of his that the prayer rose which I have taken as the first of my texts, "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people and go from them." That is not a prayer for solitude. It is some wayside caravanserai or hotel which Jeremiah longs for; and there he would have been far less alone than in his unshared home at Jerusalem. No, it is not a prayer for solitude, but a prayer to be set where a man can enjoy all the interest of life without having any of its responsibility. Oh, to have no other work in life than to watch the street from the balcony window, than to feel the interest and glitter of life, and achieve your duty towards your fellows, by a kindness and a courtesy that are never put to the strain of prolonged acquaintance! But our prayers often outrun themselves in the very utterance; and Jeremiah's wish, too, carried within it its own denial. Look at the words, "That I might leave my people." Emphasise the last two—"My people." They are the answer to Jeremiah's prayer. God had not sent him to earth to be as separate from the life of men as a nursing man is from the river flowing past his feet; God had sent him, not to watch life from a balcony, but leaping down to share it; not to live in an inn where a man is not even responsible for the housekeeping, but has only his way to pay. God had begotten Jeremiah into a nation. He had made him a citizen. He had given him a patriot's lot, with the patriot's conscience and heart. So he stayed on where he was in Jerusalem, and the world may have lost certain studies in human life in the great caravanserai of the Lebanon or Arabian desert roads, for wherever he went Jeremiah would not have kept his brain and pen idle. We may even have lost a book, something between Job and Ecclesiastes, but we have gained the book of Jeremiah, the book of the citizen-prophet, and who, because he was a citizen-prophet, and not a caravanserai one, was also a citizen-priest, the first man who entered into the true meaning of vicarious suffering, and therefore stands out clear from all the shadows of the Old Testament—so clear a symbol of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Look now at the main elements of Jeremiah's experience as he thus stood to his

post of prophet and priest at Jerusalem. I take these elements to be mainly three. 1. The first was the reality of sin. A prophet has got to begin there, or he had better not begin at all. And he has got to begin there not in order to satisfy some dogma or another, but because the facts are there. There is a kind of preaching about sin far too prevalent in our day, which treats of it doctrinally and not practically, which lays its strength to proving to a man that he must be a sinner, instead of touching his conscience with the knowledge that he is one. But Jeremiah laid his finger on the actual plague-spots of the people. He was very definite with these. But there was another note which Jeremiah sounded equally with that on the reality of sin. 2. It was the note of the swiftness and irretrievableness of time where character and salvation are concerned. Live with men in the city, grow old with the same individuals and groups, and learn things—how inexorable habit is; how irrecoverable are the chances of youth; how short and swift is the summer granted to each man's character to ripen in; learn how even the Gospel of the grace of God is just like the sybil of old coming back each time: you have forced him to return with less power of promise and persuasion; and how even repentance—that great freedom of man, that joy of God and the angels—has its times and its places, which, being missed, are not found again, though we seek them with tears. Upon these thoughts the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy rises every now and again with a great sob. What distinguished Jeremiah from all the prophets who had gone before him was that he did not stand on the banks while all Israel rushed rapidly past him irretrievably to ruin, but that he was with the people, taking their reproach as his reproach, and sharing the penalty of their sins. 3. This suffering for the sins of others, being the sin-bearer as well as the conscience of his people, is the third element of Jeremiah's experience. How did he come to it? It is interesting to watch, for in God's providence he was the first forerunner of Christ in this path. Well, first of all he loved his people; he had a very rich, tender heart, and he loved his people with the whole of it. And then God gave him a conscience about them, that conscience of their sin, and of the penalty to which it was leading. It was in the meeting of such a heart and such a conscience that Jeremiah knew how one man can suffer for others. Oh! it is a terrible fate to be the conscience of those you love, to be their only conscience, to feel their sins as you know they do not feel them themselves, and to be aware of the inevitable judgment to which they are so indifferent. Jeremiah often wondered at it. It perplexed him. After clearly stating the causes why God should smite Israel, he would suddenly turn round in his sympathy with the doomed people, and exclaim, like a boaten animal looking up in the face of his master, "Why hast Thou smitten me?" And again, that strange prayer of his, "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I am deceived. Thou art stronger than I." What can we answer to the perplexed prophet except this, that if a man have the Divine gift of a pure conscience and a more loving heart than his fellows, there comes with such gifts the necessary, the inevitable, obligation of suffering. The physical results of Israel's sin Jeremiah did not bear for the people. He bore these with the people in the most heroic and self-denying patience, but he did not do so for or instead of his people. But the spiritual distress, the keener conscience, the agony of estrangement from God, the knowledge of His wrath upon sin—these Jeremiah did bear instead of the dull impenitent Israel. And is it too much to say that it was for his sake that in the end Israel was saved from utter extinction? Now, with this knowledge of what Jeremiah came through, look at his second prayer. The two chief words are exactly the same as before a "wayfaring man": and "Oh that I were in a lodge of wayfaring men"; and the verb "to spend the night," is the same word as the noun "lodge" or "inn" of wayfaring men—literally a place to pass the night. Jeremiah's second prayer, therefore, is just this, that God would be to the people what Jeremiah himself had tried to be. (*Prof. G. A. Smith.*) *Jeremiah, a lesson for the disappointed*:—No prophet commenced labours with greater encouragements than Jeremiah. A king reigned who was bringing back the times of the man after God's own heart. This devout and zealous king was young. What might not therefore be effected in course of years? Schism, too, was at an end since Israel's captivity. Kings of the house of David again ruled over the whole land. Idolatry was destroyed by Josiah in all the cities. Thus, at first sight, it seemed reasonable to anticipate further and permanent improvements. I. EVERY ONE BEGINS WITH BEING SANGUINE. Jeremiah did. God's servants entered on their office with more lively hopes than their after-fortunes warranted.

Very soon the cheerful prospect was overcast for Jeremiah, and he was left to labour in the dark. 1. Huldah's message fixed the coming fortunes of Judah: she foretold the early death of the good king and a fierce destruction to the unworthy nation. This prophecy came five years after Jeremiah entered office; so early in his course were his hopes cut away. 2. Or, the express word of God came to and undecieved him. 3. Or, the hardened state of sin in which the nation lay destroyed his hopes. II. RESIGNATION A MORE BLESSED STATE OF MIND THAN SANGUINE HOPE. 1. To expect great efforts from our religious exertions is natural and innocent, but arises from inexperience of the kind of work we have to do—to change the heart and will of men. 2. Far nobler frame of mind to labour, not with hope of seeing fruit, but for conscience' sake, as matter of duty, and in faith, trusting good will be done though we see it not. 3. The Bible shows that though God's servants began with success, they ended with disappointment. Not that God's purposes or instruments fail, but because the time for reaping is not here, but hereafter. III. THE VICISSITUDE OF FEELING WHICH THIS TRANSITION FROM HOPE TO DISAPPOINTMENT PRODUCES. Affliction, fear, despondency, sometimes restlessness, even impatience under his trials, find frequent expression in Jeremiah's writings (chap. v. 3, 30, 31; xii. 1-3; xv. 10-18; xx. 7-14). IV. THE ISSUE OF THESE CHANGES AND CONFLICTS OF FEELING WAS RESIGNATION. He comes to use language which expresses that chastened spirit and weaned heart which is the termination of all agitation and anxiety in religious minds. He, who at one time could not comfort himself, was sent to comfort a brother; and in comforting Baruch he speaks in that nobler temper of resignation which takes the place of sanguine hope and harassing fear, and betokens calm and clear-sighted faith and inward peace. (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. They are not valiant for the truth.—*Valiant for the truth*:—I. INQUIRE WHAT IS THE TRUTH. It is "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." Without a knowledge of this, oh! how ignorant is the wisest in the things of time! 1. "The truth as it is in Jesus" was at first but obscurely revealed; a veil was cast over it which prophets and righteous men desired to remove. 2. "The truth as it is in Jesus" is a jewel only to be found in the casket of God's Word, not in the traditions of men; and that casket—emphatically called "the Word of truth"—must be unlocked for us by Him who is "the Spirit of truth." II. HOW WE MAY BE VALIANT FOR IT. 1. A cordial belief in it must be the first step to a valiant defence of it. 2. Love of the truth, an unalterable and unwavering attachment to it, must follow a firm belief in it. This principle gives courage to the soldier on the battlefield; patience to the wife amid scenes of sickness and misfortune. 3. Next follows an uncompromising advocacy of it. We fear not to give utterance to that in which we firmly believe, and which we ardently love. 4. Valour for Christ, who is "the truth" personified, will further display itself by noble sacrifices for Him, for the dissemination of His truth at home, for its propagation abroad. 5. Valour for the truth is most signally displayed by a consistent, prayerful, and persevering obedience to all its requirements. (*J. S. Wilkins.*) *Valiant for the truth*:—I. WHAT IS TRUTH, THAT FOR IT ONE CAN BE, SHOULD BE, VALIANT? Truth is real. Truth is accessible and may be known. Truth is precious. Truth imposes in every direction obligations that cannot be met except by the most genuine and resolute valour. The best philologists of our own generation refer the word to a root meaning "to believe," and draw upon the whole group of related languages and dialects to show that truth is "firm, strong, solid, reliable, anything that will hold." It should seem, then, that we ought not to believe anything but what is firm, established, and that truth is what we rightly believe. For this our highest powers can be summoned into action, while nothing but a poor counterfeit of our best activity can be called forth in behalf of that which is known or seriously suspected to be unreal. The sophist may be adroit, dexterous in disposition and argument, and selfishly eager for victories. The pettifogging advocate in any profession may gain brief successes by natural powers and discipline, aided by sheer audacity. This is a result and proof of the world's disorder. Man is for truth and truth for man—both real. And truth is accessible and may be known. He who gave us reason and nature, Whose they are, and Whom they should ever serve, has come in pity to the relief of our impotence and bewilderment by the disclosures that His Spirit makes. In the Gospel "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men." Here is truth that is real. Here is truth that may be known. Of all precious

truth, truth on which souls can be nourished, truth to which lives can be safely conformed, here is that which is most precious—truth that enters most deeply and permanently into character and takes hold of destiny. Of all truth worthy and suited to stimulate man's highest powers to the most sustained and most intense sufficiency, here is that which is worthiest and most suited. Of all truth that is of such kind and in such relations to us that it is not only worth our while, but in every way incumbent upon us to put forth our highest valour to gain it and to hold it, here is the most essential. We are bidden, "Buy the truth and sell it not." And this is not a mere appeal to our self-interest. Truth, especially this sacred truth, encompasses us with obligations. For this acquisition we do not merely do well to pay the price of toil and struggle; we fail grossly and widely in duty if we withhold the price. And what we have so dearly bought at the price of our humbled pride, at the price of our falling out with the fashion of this world "which passeth away," what we win by the surrender of our self-sufficiency and imaginary independence, by our resolute self-mastery, our vigorous effort, and whatever besides the attainment may cost, we are to hold against all seductions and all assaults, "valiant for the truth." II. WHAT IS THE MANLY VALOUR THAT CAN FIND ANY FAIR AND PROPER FIELD FOR ITS EXERCISE—its fairest and most proper field in connection with truth? It is not mere boldness, bravery, courage, but moves in a higher plane, and is instinct with a loftier inspiration. These may have their source chiefly in the physical and animal, that which we share with the bull-dog and the gorilla; while valour is a knightly grace, and makes account mainly of the ideal. We shall esteem that the truest valour in which there is the fullest consciousness and manifestation of manhood, with the clearest conception and the most persistent adherence to worthy ends of manly endeavour. There can then be nothing forced or unnatural in the phrase of our text, "valiant for the truth." For what should a true man be valiant rather than for the acquisition, maintenance, and service of the truth—truth known as real, judged to be important, valued as precious? And what estimate must we put upon the manhood that can be "strong in the land, but not for truth"—energetic, daring, resolved, and persistent for lower and grosser interests, but not for the truth? II. BY WHAT CALL FROM WITHOUT DOES TRUTH MOST AUTHORITATIVELY AND EFFECTIVELY SUMMON VALOUR TO ITS AID? Truth is imperial, not only in the quality of the authority which it asserts and the richness of the bounty which it dispenses, but also in the breadth of the dominion to which it lays claim. We have made our first obedience when we have yielded ourselves to the truth. We are to go on proclaiming truth's rights, and helping it to gain rule over others. We vindicate the rights of the truth, while we secure blessings to our fellow-men through truth's ascendancy over them. And this obligation and opportunity subject our manhood to some of the most searching tests by which we are ever tried. Are we capable of taking larger views of truth than those which connect it with some prospect of advantage to ourselves? Do we esteem it for what it is, and not only for what it brings us? And what is the measure of our discernment of the rights and needs of others, and what is our response? The manly and Christian spirit has large conceptions of right and duty. And then truth, while imperial in its rights, is sometimes imperilled by denial and attack, and that at the hands of the very men whose allegiance it claims. Its rights are contested; its very credentials are challenged. It encounters not merely the negative resistance of ignorance and dullness, of low tastes and sensual and earthly preoccupations; it is met by a more positive impeachment. He who is valiant for truth will no more suffer it to fight its own battles than a true knight would have resorted to any such evasion in a cause to which he was committed. And the response which we make to the summons of assailed truth gives opportunity to display some of the finest qualities that belonged to the old knighthood—unswerving loyalty, courage, endurance, self-sacrifice. But there is another call for valour in behalf of Christian truth higher than that which comes from our fellow-men and their claims upon it. What Christ is on the one side to the truth and on the other side to us, and what the truth is to Him, supply a new inspiration and strength, and add a new quality to Christian endeavour—a personal quality that was wanting before. He who is valiant for the truth because of what it is in its reality and reliability shows his discernment. He who is valiant for the truth because of what it is to manhood shows a wise self-appreciation. He who is valiant for the truth because of the claim his fellow-men have upon it, and upon him if he has it in his possession, shows that he knows his place, his obligation, his opportunity as a man among men. He who is valiant for the truth

for Christ's sake shows that he knows and honours his Lord, and would make Him indeed Lord of all. Consider what Christ is to the substance of the truth; what He is to the authority and efficiency of the truth; and what the truth is to Him in the assertion and manifestation of His Lordship. The truth is not only Christ's as its great Revealer; the truth is Christ as its great Revelation. To him who asks, What is the way? we answer, The way is Christ. To him who would know, What is the life? we make reply, The life is Christ. And we proclaim, as that which is of the highest concern to man to know, the truth is Christ. He is the great embodiment of truth—truth incarnate. What He was, over and above all that He said, teaches us what we should seek in vain to learn elsewhere. He was the chief revelation of the nature, the power, the love, the saving grace of God. (*C. A. Aitken, D.D.*) *Valour for the truth*:—I. WHAT IS COMPREHENDED IN THIS IMPORTANT WORD, "THE TRUTH"? It has been remarked that "truth is a relative term, expressing a conformity between the object and the mind, a harmony between the object and the idea we entertain of it": thus, truth becomes one of those terms, the precise meaning of which can only be ascertained by determining the subject of which it may be predicated. I propose to regard the scheme of Divine grace, for the recovery of man—the scheme of which we are ministers,—as that which alone deserves the supreme appellation of "the truth." I proceed, then, to consider—

1. Man's state as a sinner. (1) What saith the Scripture as to sin in its nature? (1 John iii. 4.) (2) What saith the Scripture as to sin in its diffusion, its extent? It everywhere, without the slightest discernible qualification, represents human nature as universally and absolutely corrupt (Gen. vi. 5; Psa. xiv. 2, 3; Jer. xvii. 9; Eph. ii. 1.) (3) What saith the Scripture as to sin in its consequences? (Rom. vi. 23; Psa. ix. 17; 2 Thess. i. 7, 8, 9.)
2. God's work as a Saviour. Justice, as one of the attributes of God, is as essentially a part of His nature, so to speak, as His Omnipresence, His Omniscience, His Truth; and, since there is more than a propriety, even a moral necessity, that all the proceedings of the Deity should be such as to bring out the full glory of His entire Name, it is manifest that He can only interpose an arrest of judgment, confer pardon, renovation, and eternal glory, on atonement being made.

II. WHAT IS REQUIRED TO CONSTITUTE THE CHARACTER DESCRIBED BY THE EXPRESSION, "VALIANT FOR THE TRUTH"? Valour is, strictly speaking, a martial term. We are made to feel and deplore that a contrariety of element exists in connection with the spiritual world. This gives rise to severe conflict. Now to be valiant, even in human estimation, requires something more than bravery; yea, more than courage. There must be a combination of both; or, at least, to be valiant, a man must be pre-eminently courageous. "Bravery," says an eminent authority, "is a mere instinct; for it depends on mere constitutional temperament." Courage is a virtue, indeed, for it lies in the mind; it depends on reflection and thought; but he only is valiant, who weighs the whole enterprise deliberately, lays his plans prudently, and follows them out systematically; whom defeat may bow, but cannot break; whilst triumph only stimulates him to renewed effort, inflames him with fresh zeal, and imparts to him a thirst for new glory—a thirst which nothing can satisfy till the last position is taken and the last trophy won! To be "valiant for the truth," then, requires—

1. That there be a serious and habitual contemplation of the truth.
2. That there be a sincere embracing of the truth, and the practical experience of its power in the heart.
3. That there be active and uniform exertion in our respective spheres, for the spread of "the truth."
4. That there be solemn and earnest prayer that the Holy Spirit may accompany, with His power, all our efforts for the diffusion of "the truth."

III. WHAT ARE THE CONSIDERATIONS, WHICH ARE CALCULATED TO STIR UP TO THE HOLY EMOTIONS, INVOLVED IN THE EXPRESSION, "VALIANT FOR THE TRUTH"? 1. Let there be serious reflection as to the value of the soul, and the danger which threatens it whilst uninfluenced by the truth. 2. Let us reflect on the awful rapidity with which souls are passing to their eternal destiny. 3. Let us reflect on the responsibility that attaches to the office to which we have been called, and the awful doom that awaits unfaithfulness in its discharge. 4. Let us reflect on the transcendent joy with which ministerial faithfulness will hereafter be crowned. (*John Gaskin, M.A.*) *Valiant for the truth*:—I. WHAT IS THAT WHICH PECULIARLY MERITS THE APPELLATION OF "THE TRUTH"? The comprehensive title of "the truth" was applied to revealed religion, alike in its principles and commandments, in order to furnish a broad and emphatic distinction between it and those habits of evil thoughts and practices which had been engendered and fostered by idolatry.

By the same appellation of "the truth," we find pure religion—whether in Patriarchal, or Levitical, or Christian times—is frequently designated in Scripture, in order to furnish a special recommendation of its character, and to illustrate its aspect and intention in the world. It is a communication respecting the being and character of God, the plan of His government, the authority and the sanction of His law—a communication with respect to the moral circumstances and character of man, the tendency by which he is actuated, and the dangers to which he is exposed—a communication respecting the method of grace, and the restoration of the favour of the Almighty, by which his apprehended miseries may be removed—and a communication respecting the high and sublime consecration of human destiny which is reserved for him in that immortality into which he is to be ushered when existence in this world is terminated. The verities which are proclaimed by the Christian system, on topics such as these, plainly possess a value that is perfectly incalculable, comprehending, as they do, the highest interests of our species. In making the assertion that Christianity is to be considered, emphatically, as "the truth," we must not omit to mention that it is confirmed in a manner that is perfectly conclusive and convincing.

II. WHAT ARE THE STATE OF MIND AND COURSE OF CONDUCT WHICH THE TRUTH, AS THUS DEFINED, EMINENTLY DESERVES? 1. To be valiant for the truth involves a firm adherence to the doctrines it propounds. We well know that many hostile influences are around us, which tempt us to the blighting influence of doubt, and even of positive infidelity; such as the fear of incurring the ridicule and the hatred of others, the personal suggestions of our own in-dwelling unbelief, and, above all, the mysterious, though potent, machinations of him who is the arch-enemy of souls. This of course, at least, requires the exercise of spiritual combat, which must be displayed by a firm and uncompromising resistance to whatever might lead us to impugn, to doubt, and to deny. 2. To be valiant for the truth upon the earth involves a holy conformity to the precepts which it enforces. What holy vigour and boldness are required in order to resist steadily and successfully the multitudinous abstractions from holiness—the accumulated adversaries to the purification of the souls—to repudiate and repel the approaches of Satan—to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, that we may live soberly, righteously, and godly, according to the commandment we have received, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts—to cultivate, with devout diligence, the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God; and, with all the surrounding faithful, to exhibit the power of the truth by the purity of life. This is to be "valiant for the truth"; this is heroism indeed! 3. To be "valiant for the truth" involves the public advocacy before other men of the claims which it possesses. How many noble examples of this spiritual valour have we met with in the annals of the Church! See them in the case of the prophets who were not afraid, though briars and thorns were with them, and though they dwelt among scorpions, and who yet spoke the word of God boldly to the rebellious people, whether they would hear, or whether they would forbear. See them in the apostles, who "counted not their lives dear," &c. See those examples again in the noble army of martyrs, and in the long and triumphant succession of confessors, and reformers, and teachers, and missionaries, who have dared ignominy, and contempt, and wrath, and murder, for the sake of the overthrow of error, and the triumph of the truth as it is in Jesus.

III. WHAT ARE THE CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH THIS STATE OF MIND, AND COURSE OF CONDUCT, ARE SPECIALLY AND POWERFULLY COMMENDED? 1. A concern for your own personal welfare. "Them that honour Me, I also will honour." On the other hand, the want of these elements of the spiritual character, which we have set before you,—to have put God away—to be reckless of the claims of the truth—and to live in a discipleship of falsehood, is, by a necessary vindication of the Divine equity and justice, to live in an exposure to evils the most fearful which man can ever endure. 2. A concern for the welfare and interests of the Church of God. When valour and boldness among the disciples of the truth is exhibited and augmented, then it is an axiom, a thing that needs no proof, in religion, that the truth which has that exercise will grow mightily, and will prevail. (*J. Parsons.*) They proceed from evil to evil.—*Evil begets evil*:—One danger of secret sin is that a man cannot commit it without being by and by betrayed into a public sin. If a man commit one sin, it is like the melting of the lower glacier upon the Alps, the others must follow in time. As certainly as you heap one stone upon the cairn to-day, the next day you will cast another, until the heap reared stone by stone shall

become a very pyramid. See the coral insect at work; you cannot decree where it shall stay its pile. It will not build its rock as high as you please; it will not stay until an island shall be created. Sin cannot be held in with bit and bridle; it must be mortified. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Progression in sin*.—In the Rabbinical books of the Jews they have a curious tradition about the growth of leprosy, that it began with the walls of a man's house, then, if he did not repent, entered his garments, till at last the tetter covered his whole body. And thus it is with the growth of sin. It begins with the neglect of duty, it may be of prayers; or the warning voice of conscience is unheeded. Habits of sin are formed; till at last the soul that lets God alone is let alone by God. (*F. G. Pilkington.*)

Ver. 5. *And weary themselves to commit iniquity.*—*The uneasiness of a sinful life*.—Though these words were spoken of the Jews more than two thousand years ago, yet I shall endeavour to show that it may be said of all wicked men; that a wicked life is full of weariness and difficulties; that virtue is more easy than vice, and piety than wickedness. 1. Vice oppresses our nature, and consequently, it must be uneasy: whereas virtue improves, exalts, and perfects our nature; therefore virtue is a more natural operation than vice; and that which is most natural must be most easy. Thus, when we would express anything to be easy to a person or nation, we say it is natural to them. Moreover, all vices are unreasonable, and what is against reason must be against nature. And why is it that laws are so severe against vice, but because it destroys and corrupts the members of the commonwealth? So that the punishments which public justice in all countries inflicts upon criminals, are a plain proof how great an enemy vice is to nature, under whose ill conduct, and for whose errors, it suffers sometimes the most inexpressible torments. Every vice also has its own peculiar disease, to which it inevitably leads. Envy brings men to leanness; the envious man, like the viper, is killed by his own offspring. Lust brings on consuming and painful diseases. Drunkenness, catarrhs and gouts, and poverty beside. Rage produces fevers and frenzies. It is owned by all, that nature is satisfied with little, and desires nothing that is superfluous; by this rule all these vices are unnatural which consist in excess, or stretch themselves to superfluity; such as oppression, injustice, luxury, drunkenness, gluttony, covetousness, and the like. 2. Vice is more unpleasant than virtue; and therefore it must be more uneasy and wearisome; for we soon weary of anything which is not attended with pleasure, even though it should bring us some advantage. Without pleasure there is no happiness or ease. There are indeed some vices which promise a great deal of pleasure in the commission of them, but then at best it is but shortlived and transient, a sudden flash presently extinguished. It perishes in the very enjoyment, and quickly passes away like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Thus sinners are like the troubled sea, tossed to and fro, and yet can find no rest or satisfaction. They ramble on in one kind of debauchery until they are obliged to try another for a sort of diversion; they go round from one sin to another, so that their whole life is a course of uneasiness, and vanity in the strictest sense. Nor is this all, the pleasure of sin being exhausted in a moment, leaves a sting behind it, that cannot be so soon plucked out; these pleasures wound the conscience, and occasion uneasy and painful reflections. A thousand instances of the unpleasantness of vice are everywhere obvious. Envy is a perfect torment; it cannot fail to make the man whom it possesses miserable, and fill him with distracting pain and grievous vexation. It never leaves off murmuring and fretting, while there is one man happier, richer, or greater than the envious man himself. It is contrary to all goodness, and consequently to pleasure. Revenge is most painful and uneasy, both in persuading us that these are affronts, which of their own nature are none, and then in involving us in more troubles and dangers than the pleasure of revenge can compensate. Hatred and malice are the most restless tormenting passions that can possess the mind of man; they keep men perpetually contriving and studying how to effect their mischievous purposes; they break their rest, and disturb their very sleep. Covetousness is a most painful and uneasy vice, it makes the covetous man sit up late and rise early, and spend all his time and pains in hoarding up worldly things. Covetousness is unsatiable, the more it gets, the more it craves; it grows faster than riches can do. From all which it is evident, that all vicious persons live the most slavish and unpleasant lives in the world, and this every vicious man acknowledges in another's case; he thinks the vice he sees another addicted to, most unpleasant and uneasy.

3. The horror of conscience makes vice uneasy. I might show you that no man sins deliberately without reluctance. But though there were no such disadvantage attending the commission of sin, yet the natural horror which is consequent upon it, is great enough to render it unaccountable, that any man should be vicious. Conscience can condemn us without witnesses; and the arm of that executioner cannot be stopped. And if we consider, that neither the attendance of friends, nor the enjoyment of all outward pleasures, can comfort those whose conscience is once awakened, and begins to accuse them, we cannot but conclude, that vice is to be pitied as well as shunned; and that this alone makes it more uneasy than virtue, which sweetens the greatest misfortunes. The greatest punishment that a wicked man can suffer in this world, is to be obliged to converse with himself. Diversion or non-attention is his only security; he fears nothing so much as reflection: for if he once begins to reflect, and fix his thoughts to the consideration of his by-past life and actions, he anticipates hell himself, he needs no infernal furies to lash him; he becomes his own tormentor.

4. Vicious persons must in many cases dissemble virtue, which is more difficult than to be really virtuous. All men who design either honour, riches, or to live happily in the world, do either propose to be virtuous, or at least pretend it. Now such pretenders and hypocrites have certainly a very difficult part to act; for they must not only be at all that pains which is requisite in being virtuous, but they must superadd to these all the troubles that dissimulation requires, which is also a new and greater task than the other. Not only so, but they must overact virtue, with a design to take off that jealousy, which because they are conscious of deserving, they therefore vex themselves to remove.

5. Vice makes the vicious man fear all men; even as many as he injures, or are witnesses to his vices. (*T. Wetherspoon.*)

The sinner's mental war.—This is a suffering world in more senses than one. We are subject to toil and labour in consequence of the apostasy, and to perpetual vexation of mind, in consequence of our opposition to the Divine will. The sinner, therefore, is compelled, if he will continue in sin, to maintain a mental war which devours and exterminates from his breast all the elements of vital joy.

I. THE SINNER MUST SUSTAIN MORALITY WITHOUT PIETY. Disgrace; loss of property; of all real friendship; of domestic affection; of the health and life; of self-respect and elevated companionship; all wait around a course of vice. The vicious man sinks deeper and deeper in the mire. He must be moral or miserable. It is hard work, however, to maintain morality without religion. The passions are strong; the world is full of temptation; the soul is liable to be beat off from its hold on morality, unless recovered by grace; its course will be tremendous, the progress of its depravity vehement, and great the fall of it.

II. HE MUST FEEL SECURE WITHOUT A PROMISE. Even the hardest incrustations of sin cannot prepare the soul to look fully at eternal wailing undaunted. There it stands, that never-ceasing view; that vivid painting of the future; that dark, shadowy, but distinct, and fearful representation of utter ruin; it is hung out before the soul by the stern truth of God, from behind every scene of guilt, and along every winding of the soul's weary path. How can he feel secure? Yet how can he bear to face that vision? If he looks to nature, it warns him; to his companions, they are falling into the arms of the monster.

III. HE MUST HOPE FOR HEAVEN, WHILE FORMING A CHARACTER FOR PERDITION. He must hope, and will hope, even if he knows his hope will do no good. Heaven is the only place of final rest; if he miss it he is lost, undone for ever. Holy as it is, and much as he hates holiness, he must enter there, or eternally be an undone man. No man can bear the idea of confessed, manifest, public, and hopeless, irrecoverable disgrace. Every man, therefore, clings to the idea of a final heaven, as long as he can. But here the sinner has a hard task.

IV. HE MUST RESIST CHRIST WITHOUT A CAUSE. The claims of Christ are not only just; but compassionate and benevolent. If he will sin, he must contend against the Saviour in the very interpositions of His astonishing, overwhelming, agonising mercy. This is hard work for the conscience; the wheels of probation drag heavily; their voice grates fearfully; their cry of retribution waxes loud.

V. HE MUST TRY TO BE HAPPY WHILE GUILTY. This he cannot accomplish, yet he must try. He will choose a thousand phantoms; he will grasp after every shadow; he will be stung a thousand times, yet will he renew the toil, till wearied, hopeless, and sullen, he lies down to die.

VI. HE MUST HAVE ENOUGH OF THE WORLD TO SUPPLY THE PLACE OF GOD IN HIS HEART. The heart must have a supreme object; God is able to fill it. On Him the intellect may dwell, and around the ever-expanding developments of His character, the

affections, like generous vines, may climb, and gather, and blossom, and hang the ripe cluster of joy for ever; but the sinner shuts out God, every vision of His character is torment, and he turns away to fill the demands of his heart with the world. VII. HE MUST ARRANGE MATTERS FOR DEATH, WHILE HE IS AFRAID TO THINK OF DYING. He must work to get property for his children when he is gone. He must put his business in a train, so that it may be settled advantageously when he is gone. He must do all this on the strength and under the impulse of an idea at which he trembles. VIII. HE MUST READ THE BIBLE, WHILST HE IS AFRAID TO THINK OR PRAY. This is especially true of the worldly-minded professor. If he keeps up the form of family worship, or attends at the house of God, the Bible, the holy and accusing book, is in his way. Its truths lie across his path. He cannot turn aside, he must trample over them, while he beholds them under his feet. He knows that his footsteps are heard around the retributive throne. If driven to console himself by the promises of error, the sinner has to pervert and wrestle with the Bible. Its denunciations catch his eye, and burn him while he tries to explain them away. Concluding thoughts—1. Have we no compassion for a suffering world? 2. Can we do nothing to relieve this miserable condition of our fellow-men? The time for God's people to pray, and awake, and endeavour mightily, is now—and with most of us, now or never. (D. A. Clark.)

Ver. 6. *Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit.—Strong indictment of Christian countries:*—Who has not felt as Jeremiah? "This is a Christian country." Why? Because the majority are as bent on self-pleasing, as careless of God, as heartlessly and systematically forgetful of the rights and claims of others, as they would have been had Christ never been heard of? 1. A Christian country? Behold its meaningless shibboleths, its two hundred forms or fashions of Christian belief! How this disunion dishonours Christ. 2. A Christian country? Behold the worship of mammon, the rage of avarice. Look at the wonderful baits which the company-monger throws out day by day to human weakness and cupidity! The lying advertisements, the countless quacks, raising hopes never to be fulfilled. 3. A Christian country, and God denied on the platform and in the press! Where atheism is mistaken for intelligence, and agnosticism for logic and reason! Where flagrant lust walks the streets, and gambling reigns! 4. A Christian country: where the rich and noble spend their time in horse-racing, hunting, and shooting innumerable birds and beasts; where thousands die of need and starvation in fever-dens, while untold sums are spent by the wealthy on whims, toys, and gaiety! 5. A Christian country: where there is more than Egyptian worship of Anubis; where a pet dog is fondled and pampered, and helpless children suffer and die! Oh yes! it is a Christian country—the name of Christ has been named in it for fifteen centuries past; and for that reason Christ will judge it. (C. J. Ball, M.A.)

Ver. 7. *Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them.—God's people melted and tried:*—Observe, here, that God represents Himself as greatly concerned to know what to do with His people. But notice, next, the Lord is so resolved to save His people, that He will use the sternest possible means rather than lose any of those whom He loves. Observe, once more, that God's concern about His people, and His resolve to use strange ways with them, spring out of His relationship to them; for He says, "How shall I do for the daughter of 'My' people?" "My people." They were His, though they were so far away from Him through their evil ways. When God has chosen a man from before the foundation of the world, and when He has given that man over to Christ to be a part of the reward of His soul's travail, He will adopt strange means to accomplish His sacred purpose, and He will carry out that purpose, let it cost Him what it may. I. First, these principles may be applied to THE MATTER OF CONVERSION. 1. There is a very simple way of being saved; it should be, I hope it is, the common way. It is the simple way of following the call of grace. Without any violence, your heart is opened, as with the picklock of grace. God puts the latch-key into the door, and steps into your heart without a word. 2. This is the way of salvation, but there are some who will not come this way. There is the Wicket Gate. They have but to knock, and it will be opened; but they prefer to go round about through the Slough of Despond, or to get under the care of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who leads them round by the house of Mr. Legality, who dwells in the village of Morality, and there they go with their burdens on

their backs, which they need not carry even for a single hour, for they would roll off directly if they would but look to Jesus, and believe in Him. But they will not do this. There are some of whom God has to say, "How shall I do for the daughter of My people?" Why is this? Well, some of them have a crooked sort of mind, they never can believe anything straight; they must go round about. But some others are obstinate in sin. They are not happy in it; but they will not give it up. Some others are unwilling to confess sin at all. They think themselves wrong; but they try to make excuses. Then there are some people who are not saved, but who are outwardly very religious. They have never omitted going to Church; they have been brought up carefully, and they have said their prayers regularly, and they have had family prayer, too. The robe of their self-righteousness clings to them, and prevents their coming to rest in Jesus. There are some others who will not come to Christ because they are so full of levity and fickleness. They are all froth, all fun. They live like butterflies; they suck in the juices from the flowers, and only flit from one to the other. They are easily impressed one way and another; but there is no heart in them. And withal, there is another class of persons that are insincere. There is no depth of earth about them. They do not really feel what they think they feel; and when they say that they believe, they do not really believe in their heart. 3. Now, having brought before you these characters, or held up the looking-glass of God's Word so that they might see themselves in it, I want you to notice how God does deal with such people very often. According to my text, they will have to feel the furnace. I have noticed, during a considerable period of time, some of the self-righteous and the outwardly-religious put into the fire and melted, by being permitted to fall into some gross and open sin. I pray God that none of you self-righteous people may be left to go into an open sin; but it may be that the Lord may leave you to yourselves, to let you see what you really are, for you probably have no idea what you are. Some, again, have been melted down by temporal calamities. Oh yes, there are some who cannot be saved as long as they have a silver spoon in their mouths; but when they are brought to poverty, it is the nearest way round to the Father's house, round by the far country where they would fain fill their bellies with the husks that the swine eat. At other times, without any overt sin, without any temporal trouble, God has ways of taking men apart from their fellows, and whipping them behind the door. They have told me that their sin haunts them day and night; they cannot hope for mercy; they cannot think that God will ever blot out their transgressions. They are ground down, and brought low. This is all meant to work for their good; they would not come to God any other way. It is by such an experience that God is fulfilling His Word, "I will melt them, and try them." 4. In all this God has one great object. It is just this, first, to hide pride from men. God will not save us, and have us proud. Grace must have the glory of it from first to last. Beside that, God means to take us out of our sin, and to do that He makes it to be a bitter and an evil thing to us. Blessed is the blow that almost crushes you if it breaks off the connection between you and sin. II. I want to say something to Christians; for, **IN THE MATTER OF CHRISTIAN LIFE**, God seems to say, "What shall I do for the daughter of My people? I will melt them, and try them." 1. Some Christians go from joy to joy. Their path, like that of the light, shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Why should not you and I be like that? 2. There are other Christians who appear to make much progress in Divine things, but it is not true progress. Whereas they say that they are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, they are all the while naked, and blind, and poor, and miserable. The worst thing about their condition is that some of them do not want to know their real state. They half suspect that it is not what they say it is; but they do not like to be told so; in fact, they get very cross when any one even hints at the truth. Now, there are such people in all our congregations, of whom God might well say, "How shall I do for the daughter of My people?" 3. This is what He will do with a great many who are now inflated with a false kind of grace: "I will melt them, and try them," says the Lord of hosts. He will put them to a test. Here is a man who has a quantity of plate, and he does not know the value of it, so he takes it to a goldsmith, and asks him what it is worth. "Well," says he, "I cannot exactly tell you; but if you give me a little time, I will melt it all down, and then I will let you know its value." Thus does the Lord deal with many of His people. They have become very good, and very great, as they fancy, and He says, "I will melt them." He that is pure gold will

lose nothing in the melting; but he that is somebody in his own opinion, will have to come down a peg or two before long. 4. Now, the result of melting is truth and humility. The result of melting is that we arrive at a true valuation of things. The result of melting is that we are poured out into a new and better fashion. And, oh, we may almost wish for the melting-pot if we may but get rid of the dross, if we may but be pure, if we may but be fashioned more completely like unto our Lord! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 13-16. **Because they have forsaken My law . . . give them water of gall to drink.**—*The wages of sin.*—A quaint preacher, addressing miners, drew a picture of two mines. He represented pay-day at one of the mines, and described the long line of men coming to the cashier's desk to receive their wages. Presently some men came up whom the cashier did not know. "Where have you been working?" he asked. "We were working in the other pit," they answered. "Then that is the place to go for your money." "No," they said, "we like your pay best; we are tired, and we want rest, and we want peace and plenty. At the pit where we have been working they are treating us cruelly, and we get no pay, but blows and hard words. Won't you pay us?" But the cashier says, "No; you chose to work in the other pit, and you must take the wages they pay; you cannot work for one employer and get your wages from another." "That was fair, was it not?" the preacher asked. His hearers answered that it was. "Then," said he, "don't you serve the devil unless you want his wages."

Ver. 21. **For death is come up into our windows.**—*Death an invading enemy.*—**I. CRUEL.** 1. Strikes at the dearest objects of our affection. 2. Robs us of our most useful men. 3. Drags us from the dearest things of the heart, occupation, social circles, cherished plans, &c. 4. Reduces our bodies to dust. **II. UNREMITTING.** Active in every—1. Man. 2. Family. 3. Community. 4. Nation. **III. SUBTLE.** Fights in ambush, steals into house, poisons food, makes air pestiferous, &c. **IV. RESISTLESS.** All that science, art, wealth, and caution can do has failed. **V. UBIQUITOUS.** In waves of air, on billows of deep, in valleys, on mountain, river, and brook, forest and flowers; whole earth his dominion. **VI. CONQUERABLE.** Christ has conquered death—1. In His own resurrection. 2. In His power on minds of disciples. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 23, 24. **Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom.**—*Glorying.*—An idea in this text to which we assign special prominence is this—There is at least so much similarity between the nature of God and the nature of man, that both can take delight in the same thing. The spirit of the text is saying, Take delight in loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, because I take delight in them; learn the Divinity of your origin, and the possible splendour of your destiny, from the fact that you have it in your power to join Me in loving mercy, righteousness, and judgment. God addresses three divisions of the human family—the wise, the powerful, the wealthy. And is there any other class which may not be placed in one of these categories? Each class is sitting at the feet of its chosen idol—science, arms, wealth; all clad in robes of royalty, if not of godhead. In the hand of each idol is the sceptre of a venerated mastery, and the temple of each shakes with the thunder of heathenish worship. Such is the picture. Now to these temples God comes, and, with the majesty of omnipotence, the authority of infinite wisdom, and the benignity of all-sustaining fatherhood, says, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches." "Glory!" That is a word which is pregnant with meaning; and it can be better explained by paraphrase than by etymology. Let not man "glory" in wisdom, might, and wealth, so as to be absorbed in their pursuit, so as to make a god of either of them, so as to regard them as the ultimate good, so as to commit to either his present happiness and endless destiny. "Wisdom!" That, too, is a word fraught with large significance. The "wisdom" referred to is not that which cometh from above—beautiful with celestial hues, and instinct with celestial life: it is a "wisdom" which is destitute of the moral element; the "wisdom" of an inquisitive, prying, restless intellect; that eyeless and nerveless "wisdom" by which the world "knew not God," and which, when looked at from above, is "foolishness"; the "wisdom" which is all brain and no heart; the "wisdom" of knowledge, not of character; the "wisdom" which dazzles man, but which, when alone, is

offensive to God. One substantial reason for not glorying in the kind of wisdom which we have attempted to depict, is the necessary littleness of man's vastest acquisitions. Science is a race after God; but can the Infinite ever be overtaken? Science, perhaps, never got so close to God as when she bound the capitals of the world together with bands of lightning, and flashed the wisdom and eloquence of parliaments from continent to continent. High day of triumph that; she was within hand-reach of the veiled Potentate—one step more, and she would be face to face with the King—was it not so? What was there between science and God in that moment of sublimest victory? Nothing, nothing, but—Infinity! "There is no searching of His understanding." Another point will show the folly of glorying in the kind of wisdom we have delineated, namely, the widest knowledge involves but partial rulership. You say you have found a law operating in the universe. Be it so: can you suspend or reverse the Divine appointment? Have you an arm like God? or can you thunder with a voice like Him? The argument is this,—however extensive may be our knowledge, knowledge can only help us to obey; it never can confer aught but the most limited rulership; and even that sovereignty is the dominion not of lord, but of servant, the rulership which is founded in humility and obedience—the rulership whose seat is beneath the shadow of the Great Throne. Is man, then, without an object in which to glory? It is as natural for man to glory as it is natural for him to breathe; and God, who so ordered his nature, has indicated the true theme of glorying: "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me." Here let us rejoin the earnest student of science, supposing now that, in addition to his being ardently scientific, he is intelligently devout. He goes to work as before; the flame of his enthusiasm is not diminished by a single spark; his hammer and his telescope are still precious to him, but now, instead of being in pursuit of cold, abstract, inexorable laws, he is in search of the wise and mighty and benevolent Lawgiver; in legislation he finds a Legislator, and in the Legislator he finds a Father. What we want, then, is personal knowledge of a Person: we would know not only the works, but the Author, for they are mutually explanatory. Know the man if you would understand his actions; know God if you would comprehend nature, providence, or grace. The devout student says he finds God's footprints everywhere; he says they are on the rocks, across the heavens, on the heaving wave, and on the flying wind; to him, therefore, keeping company with science is only another way of "walking with God." The text, however, goes still farther; it relates not only to personality, but to character: the Deist pauses at the former, the Christian advances to the latter. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth." The idea would admit of some such expression as this: Any knowledge of God, the Creator and Legislator of the physical creation, should be regarded as merely preparatory, or subordinate to an apprehension of God as the Moral Governor: that if you know God as Creator only, you can hardly be said to know Him at all; that if you tremble at His power without knowing His mercy, you are a pagan; if you seek to please Him as a God of intelligence, without recognising Him as a God of purity and justice and love, you are ignorant of Him, and your ignorance is crime. Let him that glorieth, even glorieth in God, glory in knowing God as a moral Being, as the righteous Judge, as the loving Father. There must not be adoration of mere power; we must not be satisfied with utterances of amazement at His majesty, wisdom, and dominion; we must go farther, get nearer, see deeper; we must know God morally, we must feel the pulsations of His heart—His heart!—that dread sanctuary of righteousness, that sempiternal fount of love. The whole subject, then, may be comprehended in four points. 1. God brands all false glorying. Upon the head of wisdom, power, and wealth, He writes, "Let no man glory in these." There is a wisdom which is folly; there is a power which is helplessness; there is a wealth which is poverty. God warns us of these things, so that if our boasted wisdom answer us not when we are on the Carmel of solemn encounter between light and darkness, we may not have God to blame. 2. God has revealed the proper ground of glorying. That ground is knowledge of God, not only as Creator and Monarch, but as Judge and Saviour and Father. Reason, groping her way through the thickening mysteries of creation, may exclaim, "There is a God"; but faith alone can see the Father smiling through the King. It will be in vain to say, "Lord, Lord," if we cannot add, "Saviour, Friend." 3. God, having declared moral excellence to be the true object of glorying, has revealed how

moral excellence may be attained. Is it objected that there is no mention of Jesus Christ in the text? We answer, that loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment are impossibilities apart from Christ; they are only so many names to us, until Jesus exemplifies them in His life, and makes them accessible to us by His death and resurrection. Do we require the sun to be labelled ere we confess that he shines in the heavens? 4. God has revealed the objects in which He glories Himself. "For in these things I delight, saith the Lord." Let it be propounded as a problem, "In what will the Supreme Mind most delight?" and let it be supposed that an answer is possible, it might be concluded that the attainment of that answer would for ever determine the aspirations, the resolutions, and the ambition of the world. We might consider that every other object would be infinitely beneath the pursuits, and infinitely unworthy of the affections of man. At all events, this must be true, that they who glory in the objects which delight Jehovah must be drinking at pure and perennial streams. (J. Parker, D.D.) *What do I glory in*:—What does a man glory in? At what point does his life leave the plane of indifference and rise into a boast? What is it that provides for him the river of his most exquisite delights? The answer to these questions is fruitfully significant. If we catch a man in his gloryings we take him at his height. Some men's gloryings are to be found on a purely carnal level; they are sought and proclaimed on the plane of the brute. Other men's gloryings are found in spiritual realities, among the things of the Eternal. Unworthy glorying is the minister of stagnancy, paralysis, and death. Worthy glorying is the minister of progress, liberty, and life. Let us look at the unworthy gloryings. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." That is a very surprising negative. I did not expect that "wisdom" would be banned from the circle of a legitimate boast. Is there not an apparent contradiction between the counsel of the prophet and other counsellors of the Old Testament Scriptures? "Get wisdom." "Fools despise wisdom." "A wise son maketh a glad father." We know, too, how our poets have spoken of the beautiful thing called wisdom. "Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers"; blossom comes, but the fruitage lingers! The wisdom here admired is a ripe and matured product, the ultimate issue of a prolonged process. It is not in this sense that the prophet uses the word; he employs it with quite another content. It is the wisdom of the mere philosopher; the product of speculation and theory; a wisdom devoid of reverence, and detached from practical life. Life can be divided into watertight compartments, having no relationship one with the other. We can separate our opinions from our principles, our theories from our practice. Love of the fine arts can be divorced from the practice of a pure life. Our artistic wisdom can be imprisoned as it were in an iron-bound division, and separated from our moral activities. The musically wise can be the morally discordant. The possession of musical technique does not necessarily make an agreeable man. The wisdom of music can be divorced from the other parts of a man's life just as the music room in a hydropathic establishment is shut off from the kitchen. A man can be skilled in the decrees of counsel and in traditional lore, and yet he may be morally and spiritually corrupt. The wisdom of a theologian can be a wisdom without influence upon morals. A man may preach like a seraph and live like a brute. "Let not the mighty man glory in his might." This is a reference to mere animal strength. It includes a bald athleticism in the individual, and a bald materialism in the State. But surely strength is good? Athletic strength and skill are very admirable. But here, again, the prophet is referring to strength which is devoid of reverence, and therefore strength which is detached from service. All right use of strength begins with a deep reverence for it. So it is also with the material might of the State. A sword may be good if it be reverently regarded. "The sword of Gideon"; that is always a curse! "The sword of the Lord and Gideon"; that is an instrument of benediction! "Let not the rich man glory in his riches." Do not let us relegate this warning to a few millionaires. A man with a small income may regard his money as irreverently as the man with an overflowing abundance. The prophet refers to the spirit in which possessions are esteemed. He refers to riches held without reverence, and therefore not exercised in wise philanthropy. Possessions used irreverently are used blindly, and therefore without a true humanity. But how people do glory in bare and graceless wealth! It is a false confidence. "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord." How far are we away from

the brutal, the material, and the merely opinionative ! Here is glorying which centres itself in the unseen, and fixes itself upon the Lord. "Understandeth." The relationship is reasonable and intelligent. God wants no blind discipleship. We are to be all alert in our fellowship with the Almighty. We are to worship Him with all our "mind." "In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." "Understandeth and knoweth Me." That is a profound term, suggestive of certainty and assurance. It has about it the flavour of the familiar friend. We are to intelligently use our minds to discover the thought and will of God, then we are to act upon the will, and in our obedience a deep communion will be established. This, then, is the line of individual progress. We begin in exploration ; we use our understanding in discerning the mind of God. Then we pass to experiment, and we put to the proof the findings of the mind. From experiment we shall attain unto experience ; our findings will be revealed as truth ; our knowledge will mature unto wisdom. "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." What does God want us to know about Him ? "That I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness." We sometimes say concerning a distinguished man whose presence we have met, "I rather feared him, but his first words made me feel at home." And here is the first word of the Almighty, and the word is not "law" or "statute," but "loving-kindness" ! Not only kindness, for kindness may be mechanical and devoid of feeling, but "loving-kindness" ! A dainty dish is served by affection. What else does He want me to be sure about ? "That I am the Lord that exercise loving-kindness and judgment." Do not let us interpret judgment as doom. Judgment is vindication ; it is suggestive of sure sequence. When I plant mignonette, and mignonette comes in its season, the sequence is indicative of judgment. Judgment is the opposite of caprice and chance. The Lord is a God of judgment, and all my sowings will be vindicated. All these deeper issues are in the hands of God. The Lord is a God of judgment, and of righteousness. This word is only confirmatory of the preceding word. Judgment is proceeding and the Vindicator is righteous. He cannot be bribed, He is not of uncertain temper. "He changeth not." (J. H. Jowett, M.A.)

*On the unreasonableness and folly of glorying in the possession of external privileges and advantages :—*I. THE UNREASONABLENESS AND FOLLY BOTH OF INDIVIDUALS AND OF COMMUNITIES GLORYING IN THE POSSESSION OF EXTERNAL PRIVILEGES AND ADVANTAGES. In fact, there is no passion in our nature which so effectually defeats its own end, or so completely mars the accomplishment of its object, as that of pride. Wherever respect is impudently claimed, even where there is real merit at the bottom, it is always reluctantly conferred. Our pride and self-love in turn take the alarm, and are hurt by the boldness of the claim. Competitors and rivals, envious of the merit, feel a malignant pleasure in disappointing the expectations of such candidates for fame. And as most men have a tincture of envy in their composition, it commonly happens that very few regret the disappointment. To obtain real, and, in general, unenvied praise, merit, however transcendent, must not be glaringly displayed, but in some measure exhibited under a veil ; at least, it must be so judiciously and delicately shaded, as to moderate its lustre.

II. THE KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF THE DUTIES OF RELIGION AND VIRTUE, WHILE THEY ARE THE ONLY TRUE FOUNDATION OF SELF-ESTEEM AND REAL GLORY, ARE LIKEWISE, CONSIDERED IN A NATIONAL VIEW, THE ONLY JUST OBJECTS OF PUBLIC RESPECT AND CONFIDENCE. Great intellectual endowments, and the performances to which they give birth, can only be regarded, when abstractly considered without respect to their application, as splendid monuments of human genius ; when applied to bad purposes, they justly become the objects of our detestation ; but the qualities of the heart, incorruptible integrity, for instance, disinterested benevolence, exalted generosity, and tender pity, irresistibly command the esteem, and conciliate the affection of all who have either seen or heard of such virtues being exemplified. (W. Duff, M.A.)

*Aims of life :—*Men think too much of themselves on one account or another—either on account of some external condition, or on account of some internal traits and qualities. Now, it is not to be understood from this declaration of the prophet, that a man shall take no thought of, and have no pleasure in, external relations. There is pleasure to be derived from them ; but there are a thousand secondary things in this life which we are very glad to have, and which we are glad to be known to have, though we do not put our heart chiefly on them. It is a pleasant thing for an artist to have vigorous

health; but that is not his power. It is a pleasant thing for a poet to be a musician; but that is not what he glories in. It is a pleasant thing to an orator that he is rich; but there is something that he glories in besides riches. Wealth alone affords a very small compensation of glory. Knowledge is often regarded as the chief and characteristic reason why a man should think much of himself; but here we are commanded not to glory in "knowledge." There is great excellence in knowledge; but knowledge is relative. Mathematics will exist after we are dead and gone; but knowledge of spiritual elements, knowledge of the higher realm, knowledge of right and wrong, knowledge of character, knowledge of truth—these are all related to our present condition, and are so far affected by our limitations that the apostle explicitly declares that the time will come when the universe will be revealed to us, and when our notions in respect to it will have to be changed as much as the notions of a child have to be changed when he comes to manhood. Our wisdom in this world is so partial that we cannot afford to stand on that. And when you consider what have been regarded as the treasures of knowledge, the folly of it is still greater. Many a man might just as well have been a grammar or a lexicon, dry and dusty, as the man of knowledge that he is, so useless is he. And yet men are oftentimes proud that they know so many things, without any consideration of their use. Go out and see what men know who know something. Men that have useful knowledge, and the most of it, are the men that usually are the most humble, and are conscious of the mere segment of the vast circle of the knowledge of the universe that they possess. Knowledge is a good thing; but a man is a better thing. A man in his essential nature and destiny is larger than any special element or development in this life. Therefore, let not a man glory in his "knowledge." Especially let him not glory in it in such a way as to separate himself from his fellows, and look down upon them. While it may be supposed that these views, derived from the face of Scripture, are applicable to our modern condition, it is very probable that the glorying spoken of by the prophet was that which constituted a peculiarity in the East. In Egypt, and afterwards in many Oriental kingdoms, knowledge was the prerogative of the priesthood. Those who had knowledge became a privileged class, and received honour and respect; and naturally they plumed themselves on it, as men plume themselves on titles to-day. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." In other words, let not a man because he belongs to the learned class have contempt for those who have not the privileges that he has. There are multitudes of men who have not very much to boast of in the way of kindness and humility and gentleness, but who are proud of their culture. "Neither let the mighty man glory in his might." That is, let no man glory in the attributes of strength. In the time of the athlete; in the time of the warrior; in the time when men, being head and shoulders in their stature above all others, as Saul was, gloried in their stature; in the time when men boasted, as David did, of running through a troop, and leaping over a wall; in the time when expertness and skill were in the ascendant; in the time when men were trained to all forms of physical strength and prowess—in such a time men would naturally come to make their reputation stand on these things; and the tendency to do so has not perished yet. Men glory in the fact that they are tall and symmetrical. They glory in their personal beauty. They glory in their grace. They glory in their walking and their dancing. They glory in their riding. These things are not absolutely foolish, although the men who engage in them may be. It is not to be denied that they may be useful, and that they may reflect some credit upon those who practise them. But what if nothing else can be said of a man except that he rides well? The horse is better than he! Low down, indeed, is the man who pivots himself on these inferior and often contemptible qualities. "Let not the rich man glory in his riches." We may as well shut up the Bible, then. That is too much! Yet a man has a right to glory in his riches, provided the way of his glorying is through his own integrity as well as skill. Such are the competitions of business, such are the difficulties of developing, amassing, maintaining and rightly using wealth, that a man who organises it organises a campaign, and is a general; and when a man of simplicity and honesty has come out from the haunts of poverty, and has, by his own indomitable purpose, and industry, and honourable dealing, and truthfulness, accumulated property, about no dollar of which you can say to him, "You stole it"; when a man by integrity has built up a fortune, it is a testimony better than any diploma. It

tells what he has been. The true grounds of glorying are given in the next clause of the text: "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me." The knowledge of God—a knowledge of those supreme qualities or attributes which belong to the higher nature, a knowledge of the great elements which constitute God—this may be gloried in; but men have gloried in their knowledge of gods that were contemptible. There was not a decent god in all antiquity, such that if a man were like it he could respect himself. The passions of men were the basis of their character. Therefore it is not enough that you glory in a god. "Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." It is as if He had said, "I am the Lord that exerciseth loving-kindness without any regard to return, and without any limitation. I am continually developing, through the ages, the good and the bad, the just and the unjust. I am a God of lenity, of goodness, of kindness; but the kindness is not merely superficial—it is kindness springing out from the heart of God." That is the glory of God: and who would not be known as glorying in it? Now, knowing this, being penetrated with a sense of having such a God, of living in communion with Him, of beholding Him by the inward sight—having this ideal of life constitutes a knowledge that exalts, strengthens, and purifies men. But take the qualities that make the true man, as set forth in Scripture—the man in Christ Jesus. How many men can glory in themselves because they have conformed their lives to these qualities? If a man, being a mineralogist, has a finer crystal than anybody else, he rather glories in it, and says, "You ought to see mine." If a man is a gardener, and has finer roses than anybody else, he glories in them. He may go to his neighbour's garden, and praise the flowers that he sees there; but he says, "I should like to have you come over and see my roses"; and he shows them with pride. Nobody shuts his own garden-gate when he goes to see his neighbour's garden. He carries his own with him. Men glory in such outward things; but how many glory in those diamonds, those sapphires, those precious stones which all the world recognise as the finest graces of the soul? How many men glory because they have the true, universal, Christian benevolence of love? Have you in yourself any ideal? Are you aiming for character, for condition, or for reputation—which is the poorest of them all? It is worth a man's while to be able to answer to himself the question, "What am I living for?" What is it that incites me? Is it vanity? Is it the animal instincts? Is it the external conditions of life? Or, is it the internal elements of manhood, that take hold upon God and heaven? (*H. W. Beecher.*) *On the insufficiency of human wisdom, power, and riches.*—I. THE PROHIBITIONS CONTAINED IN THE TEXT. 1. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." Men may be wise in their own conceit,—they may be wise and prudent in the opinion of others,—their measures and counsels may be, apparently, wisely devised; yet God can and frequently does frustrate their counsels, and turn the wisdom of man into foolishness. 2. "Neither let the mighty man glory in his might." What is man, the strongest man, but dust, turned into dust, crushed by the mighty power of God, as a moth is crushed between the fingers? Just consider upon how little the life of the strongest man depends,—on so trifling a thing as the respiration of a little air; that being stopped, he dies. Nor is the combined power of the many, able to stand at all against the will and the power of God. 3. "Let not the rich man glory in his riches." To hear men talk of their thousands, and to observe them pursuing wealth, one might suppose that riches bestowed every happiness and produced every safety. Yet ask the rich man if he is happy; and he will answer, if he honestly answer, "No." Is he free from the fear of evil? can he bribe death and prolong his short life? can he redeem his soul from hell? 4. It is not only folly to glory in or boast of wisdom, strength, and riches; but it is also sinful; it is idolatry; it is setting aside the Lord God as our strength and our portion. II. THE COMMAND IN THE TEXT. "But let him that glorieth, glory in this," &c. That man alone is truly wise in whose heart the knowledge of the Lord is treasured up; and who reduces that knowledge to practice; and that man alone is truly blessed who so far understands and knows the Lord, as to put his trust at all times in the Lord God of Israel. This knowledge and understanding of the Lord God in all His adorable perfections, as revealed in His holy Word, and as He is reconciled in Christ Jesus, are of immensely greater value than all the wisdom, and all the power, and all

the riches which this world can bestow. 1. The Lord exerciseth loving-kindness in the earth. They who through faith in Christ have Jehovah for their Father,—their portion,—have all that can satisfy an immortal soul throughout eternity. Of His loving-kindness they have experience; and their experience teaches them that God's "loving-kindness is better than life," and therefore their lips praise Him. 2. The Lord also exerciseth judgment in the earth. While He delights in visiting the humble soul, and the penitent soul, and the believing soul, with tokens of His loving-kindness, He also visits the impenitent, the unbelieving, the proud, with His sore judgments: and sometimes in this world He makes them lasting monuments of His awful justice. 3. The Lord also exerciseth righteousness in the earth. For the exercise of righteousness, the Lord's omniscience, hatred of sin, love of holiness, power, and faithfulness, fully qualify Him. Conclusion—1. To those who trust and glory in human wisdom, strength, and riches. Know we not that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God"? and "that power belongeth unto God"? 2. To those who in some measure know the Lord and glory in Him. Your knowledge is still but small and imperfect: for, "how little a portion is heard of Him! but the thunder of His power who can understand?" Still, enough of Him and of His ways may be known here for every necessary purpose. Walk "as children of light." Seek also an increase of light by studying the Word of God; by earnest and diligent prayer, that the Spirit of truth may open your mind to behold, to comprehend more and more, the truths which are revealed in that Word. (*E. Edwards.*) *On the grounds of pride:*—I. THE VARIOUS FORMS OF PRIDE. 1. High birth is one of those external circumstances which give rise to pride. Ever since civil society has existed, a certain respect for antiquity of descent has been maintained. But if we reflect on the origin of this deference we shall find that, so far from affording a foundation for pride, it suggests many reasons for its exclusion. Do you, proud man! look back with complacency on the illustrious merits of your ancestors? Show yourself worthy of them, by imitating their virtues, and disgrace not the name you bear by a conduct unbecoming a man. Nothing can be conceived more inconsistent than to exult in illustrious ancestry, and to do what must disgrace it; than to mention, with ostentation, the distinguished merits of progenitors, and to exhibit a melancholy contrast to them in character. After all, what is high birth? Does it bestow a nature different from that of the rest of mankind? Has not the man of ancient line human blood in his veins? Does he not experience hunger and thirst? Is he not subject to disease, to accidents, and to death; and must not his body moulder in the grave, as well as that of the beggar? 2. Perhaps the proud man is invested with a title. Remember, however, that this is an appellation of honour, and not of disgrace, and the greatest disgrace any person can incur, is the assumption of sentiments unworthy of human nature. Have you obtained your distinction by your own merit? Continue to deserve and adorn it by your exertions for the common welfare, and by a behaviour which indicates that you consider yourself as a member of society. Has your title been transmitted to you from your ancestors? I say to you, as I said to the man proud of his birth: beware lest their honours be tarnished by your contemptible enjoyment of them! 3. Some are proud of office. Were offices instituted for the general benefit, or for the private gratification of the individuals to whom they are severally assigned? This question the proud man himself will not venture to decide in favour of his own pretensions. With what appearance of justice, then, can the man, who is intrusted with the common interest, pretend to look, with a contemptuous eye, on any honest member of the community? 4. Riches, affording a more substantial and productive possession than either birth, titles, or public office, may seem to lay a better foundation for pride. The man who enjoys them is in some measure independent of others, and may command their services when he pleases. He may, therefore, have some ground for treating them with disdain. I must confess that persons who possess an opulent fortune, as well as those who are placed in the higher stations of society, have many opportunities of observing the servile obsequiousness of mankind, and may, therefore, be tempted to despise them. But this is not, in strict propriety of speech, that contempt of others which arises from external circumstances alone. It is a contempt of contemptible qualities. Are you, in reality, proud of your wealth? Show me what title that wealth gives you to deprive your fellow-men of their just portion of respect! 5. Corporeal advantages constitute the

subjects of that pride with which many are infected. They value themselves on their strength, or on their beauty. Let the strongest man consider that the horse or the ox is still his superior in point of corporeal vigour; that his individual power is of little avail against the united force of his fellow-men, whom he affects to brave; and that a fever will make him weaker than the child in the nurse's arms. When a man exults in the elegance of his person, although this folly be not uncommon, especially in youth, nothing can be conceived more ridiculous. But this source of pride is more frequent among the daughters of Eve, who seem sometimes to consider personal attractions as the chief distinction of character. Let her, whose pride centres in her beauty, consider what her figure will be in the grave! 6. Sensible of the utter insignificance of external advantages of any kind, as a ground of exultation, there are who value themselves exclusively on their genius, their erudition, their wit, or even on their religion. Such persons are most ready to laugh at the fool who is proud of anything but mind. The prophet, however, was of opinion, that even wisdom itself is no subject of glory. By the term wisdom, in the text, he understands those mental qualities which attract the admiration of the world. By converting thy abilities into sources of vain-glory, thou displayest thy ignorance of their end, contractest their utility, by limiting them to thy own narrow sphere instead of diffusing their salutary influence through the wide circle of humanity, and subvertest thy own importance by relinquishing the honourable distinction of a necessary part of the great community of mankind. Dost thou boast of thy genius and thy knowledge, abstracted from mildness and benevolence? Reflect that the most miserable and odious being in the universe is also possessed of abilities infinitely superior to those of the most sagacious of the sons of men! 7. Religious pride is, if possible, still more odious and absurd than that just now mentioned. It is a combination of shocking inconsistencies. It unites confession of sin with self-righteousness, humility before God with insolence towards men, supplication for mercy with the assumption of merit, the prospect of heaven with the temper of hell. II. THE ONLY SOLID FOUNDATION OF SELF-ESTEEM. He who understandeth God has his soul impressed with all that is grand and sublime, is capable of contemplating Deity, and beholds every terrestrial object sink in comparison. He that "knoweth" God is acquainted with infinite perfection, and has acquired the conception, though still obscure and faint, of unerring wisdom, of consummate rectitude, of inexhaustible beneficence, of irresistible power, of all that can exalt, astonish, and delight the soul. These attributes, brought to his view by frequent adoration, he must admire, and love, and imitate. This is the true dignity of human nature, restored, by grace, to that state from which it had been degraded by sin, nay, raised to higher capacities and expectations than were granted to primitive innocence. The more we aspire after this excellence, the more ambitious of this exaltation we become, the more is our nature improved and our happiness increased and extended. This is the glory of a Christian, of an immortal soul, of an expectant of heaven, of a blessed spirit! (*W. L. Brown, D.D.*) *Of false glorying*.—Such is the weakness of our nature, that if Providence hath conferred upon us any remarkable quality, either of body or mind, we are apt to boast ourselves because of it. In our more serious moments we must condemn such vanity; but pride is so natural to man, that we find it difficult to subdue. I. THE NATURAL OR ACQUIRED ENDOWMENTS OF THE MIND. A great genius, fine parts, and shining talents, are strong temptations to glorying. When a man is conscious that his understanding is more enlightened, his judgment sounder, his invention finer, his knowledge more extensive than that of the rest of mankind, he is in great danger of indulging a little vanity. Yet, still, there is no foundation for boasting. If those accomplishments are natural they are the gift of God, and call Him their Author. If they are acquired we owe them in a great measure to the attention and labour of others, who have contributed to improve them. What a poor figure would the greatest genius have made without books and a master! Like the diamond in the mine, it must have remained in its natural state, rough and unpolished. It is education and letters which enable men to make a figure in life. Besides, is it not Providence which places us in superior circumstances, and enables us to prosecute sciences and arts? After all, what is the so-much-boasted wisdom of the wise? Is it not at best, only a less degree of folly? How shallow is their understanding, and how circumscribed their knowledge! Let me add, how liable is the

greatest genius and the finest scholar to have his faculties deranged! A fall from a horse, a tile from a house, a fever in the brain, will impair the judgment and disturb the reason of the greatest philosopher. II. **THE SUPERIOR QUALITIES OF THE BODY.** A fine face and an elegant figure are engaging things, and mankind have held them in a certain degree of admiration. Hence the possessors of those properties have sometimes become proud and vain. But what is beauty? A piece of polished earth, a finer species of clay, regularly adjusted by the great Creator! Those upon whom He hath bestowed it had no hand in the workmanship, and contributed nothing to finish it. Instead of being puffed up more than others, they should be more humble, because they are greater debtors to Providence. How little reason such have to be vain, we have many striking examples; an inveterate jaundice, a malignant fever, a rapid consumption, will spoil the finest complexion and impair the stoutest constitution. It were well if the fairest of this world's children would aspire after something more durable than looks and dress; even to have the image of God drawn upon the heart, and the life of Christ formed within them. III. **THE MORE ELEVATED CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR LOT.** It is no doubt natural to prefer independence and ease, to straits and toil. Who does not wish to live in plenty, rather than in penury? Yet what is an immense quantity of gold and silver? It is no better than dust, a little more refined, upon which men have agreed to put a certain value. If it is hoarded up it is no better than stone or sand. If it is wasted and spent it is no longer ours, but the property of another; and how quickly riches change masters, we have every day striking examples. Riches are intrusted to men as stewards, and they are accountable for the use which they make of them. If they employ them for the honour of God and for the benefit of their fellow-creatures, they are a valuable talent, and shall receive an ample recompense; but if they minister to pride and vanity, to profusion and luxury, to avarice and oppression, they are to be accounted a curse. Honours and titles are no better foundation for glory than opulence. If they have been transmitted by our ancestors, we have derived them from them; if they have been conferred, directly, by the king, we are indebted to him; and we are under greater obligations for such an act of favour. At best, what are they but an empty name? They may procure a person precedence, and a little more respect; but they can contribute nothing to his dignity of character. Again, the voice of fame is a bewitching thing, and numbers have been strangely captivated with it. Hence they have courted it with the greatest servility, and by the lowest means. There is nothing so humbling to which they have not submitted, to gain this empty sound. Have not some sacrificed the principles of honour, of conscience, of integrity, to obtain applause? And what is so precarious and uncertain as the breath of a multitude? It is fickle as the wind, and variable as the weather. IV. **THE RELIGIOUS ACQUIREMENTS WHICH WE MAY HAVE ATTAINED.** It is the voice of reason, and the language of Scripture, "that every good and perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights." "In us dwelleth no good thing!" On the contrary, "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." If then a good work has been begun in us, it hath been imparted to us by the Spirit of God, "the fruit of which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Are your understandings more enlightened, your wills more submissive, your affections more spiritual, your morals more pure, you owe it to a Divine influence. There cannot be a stronger evidence that we are entire strangers to grace, than that of thinking of ourselves above what we ought to think. The very nature of grace is to give all the glory to God. The more of it we receive, the more self-denied will we become. The obvious conclusion from this subject is, "that pride was never made for man." It originated in hell, and is the offspring of guilt. Let us tear it from our bosoms as the most unwarrantable and unchristian disposition which we can possibly cherish. (*David Johnston, D.D.*) *Human glorying corrected*.—I. **THE THINGS IN WHICH NOT TO GLORY.** 1. Those which to the natural man seem most desirable—wisdom, strength, riches. 2. Those in which these Jews inclined presumptuously to boast—external, carnal advantages. II. **EVERY MAN MUST HAVE SOMETHING IN WHICH TO GLORY.** 1. That which he esteems as his highest blessing and honour. 2. God sets before us the best objects of glorying. (1) "Me"; both "understood" and "known." (2) The qualities in which God delights. Mercy, or loving-kindness, as opposed to their vaunted strength. Judgment

and righteousness, as opposed to their oppression of the weak and distressed. (*J. P. Lange.*) *A prohibited and a sanctioned glory*.—I. THE GLORIFYING WHICH IS PROHIBITED BY GOD. 1. Glorifying in wisdom is the glorification of self; therefore forbidden. The mind that knows and the subjects known are both from God. 2. Glorifying in strength is forbidden as self-glorification. History shows God's repudiation of this boast: in destruction of Sennacherib's army, decline and fall of empires founded on mere force, &c. 3. Glorifying in wealth is forbidden as self-glorification. Sad to behold a spirit entombed in a mausoleum of gold and silver. II. THE GLORIFYING WHICH IS DIVINELY SANCTIONED. To glory is an instinct in man; is right, therefore, where the object is worthy of him. God here presents Himself. There is a gradation set before us: 1. Understanding God. Early education calls this into exercise; events of life afford it discipline; profound, spiritual verities may be by it examined. 2. Knowing God. This is more than "understanding" Him. Eternity will reveal new depths of God's eternal love and being. 3. In the understanding and knowledge of God, the spirit of man glories, and may glory for ever. God glories in our glorying in Him. (*W. R. Percival.*) *False and true glory*.—I. WHAT WE ARE NOT TO GLORY IN. 1. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Neither in the largeness and compass of his knowledge and understanding, nor in his skill and dexterity in the contrivance and conduct of human affairs. (1) Because the highest pitch of human knowledge and wisdom is very imperfect. (2) Because when knowledge and wisdom are with much difficulty in any competent measure attained, how easily are they lost. 2. Neither let the mighty man glory in his might. (1) If we understand it of the natural strength of men's bodies, how little reason is there to glory in that, in which so many of the creatures below us do by so many degrees excel us! (2) Or, if by might we understand military force and power, how little likewise is that to be gloried in, considering the uncertain events of war, and how very often and remarkably the providence of God doth interpose to cast the victory on the unlikely side! 3. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. (1) Riches are things without us—the accidental ornaments of our fortune. (2) At the best, they are uncertain. (3) Many men have an evil eye upon a good estate; so that instead of being the means of our happiness, it may prove the occasion of our ruin. II. WHAT IT IS THAT IS MATTER OF TRUE GLORY. 1. The wisest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the unquestionable perfections of the Divine nature. Divine revelation itself does suppose these for its foundation, and can signify nothing to us unless these be first known and believed: for unless we be first firmly persuaded of the providence of God, and of His particular care of mankind, why should we suppose that He makes any revelation of His will to us? Unless it be first naturally known that God is a God of truth, what ground is there for the belief of His Word? 2. The nature of God is the true idea and pattern of perfection and happiness; and therefore nothing but our conformity to it can make us happy. He who is the Author and fountain of happiness cannot convey it to us by any other way than by planting in us such dispositions of mind as are in truth a kind of participation of the Divine nature; and by enduing us with such qualities as are the necessary materials of happiness: and a man may as soon be well without health as happy without goodness. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *False and true grounds of glorying*.—I. FALSE GROUNDS OF CONFIDENCE. 1. The wisdom here meant is not heavenly, but earthly wisdom; that penetration and sagacity which many naturally possess, and some to a considerable degree; or that knowledge of various kinds about the things of this world, which they acquire by study and experience. Why should not the man who has wisdom, glory in it? Because all such glorying is vain; because he has at last no real foundation for glorying; because, after all, his wisdom cannot secure success, and may prove in the end, and if gloried in certainly will prove, to have been foolishness. It is the Lord who gives success, and whose counsel alone will stand. 2. By might we may understand either strength or power; strength of body, or the power of rank, station, or influence. There is no real ground for confidence in these things. As "there is no king saved by the multitude of his host"; so "a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." The mightiest empires have been suddenly overthrown, and the most powerful monarchs destroyed in a moment. 3. How continually do we see people trusting in their wealth, and boasting themselves in the multitude of their riches! But how vain is such confidence! It is like leaning on a broken reed. II. THE TRUE GROUND OF

GLORYING. 1. The knowledge of God, here meant, is a knowledge of Him in His true character and perfections. It is a knowledge of Him as being at once a merciful Father and a righteous Judge; a just God, and yet a Saviour; abounding in mercy, love, and truth; and at the same time hating iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. The knowledge spoken of in the text is an inward, heartfelt, experimental knowledge of Him. It is such a belief of Him in our hearts, as leads us to fear and love Him, to rely on and confide in Him. It is a knowledge founded on trial and experience. 2. They who know the Lord, in the manner that has been described, have a sure ground of glorying. They glory in that which will never fail, deceive, or disappoint them. (*E. Cooper, M.A.*)

False and true glorying.—I. THERE IS A DISPOSITION IN MEN TO GLORY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE ON ACCOUNT OF THE PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS WHICH DISTINGUISH THEM IN THE EYES OF THEIR FELLOW-CREATURES. 1. Bodily strength inspires the idea of great actions in its possessors, and frequently makes them arrogant and proud. It induces them to assume what does not belong to them, to violate the properties of life, and to carry about with them a spirit of defiance and insult in their intercourse with their fellow-creatures. 2. Worldly wisdom inspires confidence more than that which is attached to the grosser qualities of the human frame; and no men are more in danger of being wise in their own eyes than those who possess this quality. 3. Nothing is so calculated to fill men with insufferable pride as the possession of extraordinary riches. It produces a semblance of homage or respect—it commands the services of mankind—it levies a contribution on all nature and society, and gives to those who possess it a sort of universal empire; and it is not at all to be wondered at that these minds are more tempted by pride and glory than those who seek to be distinguished by worldly wisdom. II. THE FALSE AND ERRONEOUS BASIS ON WHICH THESE SENTIMENTS OF GLORY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE ARE FOUNDED. 1. Neither separately taken, nor in their combined form, will they ever teach their possessors their true use; but they frequently turn to hurt, not only to society at large, but to their own possessors. 2. These things are utterly incapable, either separately or combined, of supplying some of the most pressing wants, and avoiding some of the most obvious evils to which our nature is exposed. 3. They are of a very transient duration and possession. III. THERE IS AN OBJECT WHICH IS OF SUCH A NATURE THAT IT WILL JUSTIFY THE GLORY, THE CONFIDENCE, THE SELF-SATISFACTION, WHICH IT IS DECLARED OUGHT NOT FOR A MOMENT TO BE CONNECTED WITH THOSE WHICH ARE BEFORE ENUMERATED. 1. True religion will teach us the proper regulation and employment of all these endowments. 2. There is a perpetuity and pledge of future and eternal felicity in the religion of Jesus Christ; not only that which produces present tranquillity and peace, but that which furnishes the pledge of an enduring and eternal happiness. (*R. Hall, M.A.*)

The Gospel the only security for eminent and abiding national prosperity.—The Jewish nation had come to rely on their wealth, power, and political wisdom. I. THE INEFFECTUACY OF THE COMMON GROUNDS OF CONFIDENCE. 1. Reason has been appealed to, but its impotence in the conflict with passion, ignorance, and irreligion is demonstrated on every page of history. 2. Education has been relied upon, but knowledge and virtue are not inseparable. Philosophy, culture, the arts, did not save Rome or Greece from ruin. 3. The efforts of philosophy to reform and elevate mankind have proved signal failures in the past. 4. National wealth is thought to be the perfection of prosperity. But in all ages and lands it has proved the most active and powerful cause of national corruption. 5. Nor is military genius and prowess any safer ground of confidence than wealth, as the history of nations illustrates with solemn and awful significance. 6. Political wisdom, statesmanship, the boast and confidence of nations, is inadequate to secure and perpetuate national prosperity. 7. Our boasted free institutions, bought and maintained at immense sacrifices, and the envy of the nations, are not a guarantee of the future. II. THERE IS EFFICACY IN THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD, AND NOWHERE ELSE, TO SECURE EMINENT AND ABIDING NATIONAL PROSPERITY. It was devised and bestowed upon mankind for this purpose; and in its principles, provisions, institutions, and moral tendencies, it is eminently adapted to elevate, purify, and bless nations as well as individual man. The proofs of its power to do this are not wanting. See the effect of Christianity on the laws and institutions of the old Roman Empire—on the social and political life of Germany at the Reformation—on our own history and destiny as a nation by means of our Pilgrim Fathers—on the condition of the Sandwich Islands,

and in South Africa among the Hottentots. Hence patriotism demands of the Christian Church to-day earnest prayer and the faithful application of the Gospel. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *False and true grounds of glorying*.—I. THE REASONS WHY

THE WISE MAN SHOULD NOT "GLORY IN HIS WISDOM, NOR THE MIGHTY IN HIS MIGHT, NOR THE RICH MAN IN HIS RICHES." 1. All these things are the gifts of God, and have neither power nor potency without Him. 2. They are all of uncertain continuance. As no man can call them into existence, so no man can command their stay. 3. It ought to moderate our tendency to glory in riches, to remember by what huckstering practices, by what base, material means they are usually got. 4. Further, wisdom, power, and riches are all things which we must leave at death, even if they do not before leave us. II. IN WHAT WE

MAY SAFELY GLORY. 1. The knowledge of God affords a just ground for glorying, first, because God Himself, the object of it, surpasses all created excellencies. He combines in Himself in a transcendent degree whatever is deep in wisdom, whatever is majestic in might, whatever is rich in goodness. 2. This knowledge of God as being actually all that to His believing people which they can need is worthy of being gloried in, as distinguished from human wisdom, might, or riches, because it places man's confidence on an unshaken basis; and because, moreover, it is a kind of knowledge which elevates while it humbles the mind, satisfies its desires while it invites the exercise of all its powers; fills it with pure, noble, enduring excellence, expires not, but only becomes perfected at death, and fits the soul for the permanent occupations and enjoyments of the eternal state. (*Stephen Jenner, M.A.*) *True and false complacencies*.—I. FALSE

SOURCES OF HUMAN COMPLACENCY. 1. It is a false complacency when men prefer a lower to a higher species of good, when they prefer the material to the moral, the external to the internal possessions. If a man makes the culture of his soul the supreme concern of life, a due regard to riches will not injure him, because they become, in that case, a means to a worthy end. But if, ignoring his inward life, he fixes all his trust, and finds his treasure in something external, the passion for riches must lead in the end to the corruption of his character. 2. There is the preference of the physical or natural to the spiritual attributes of being. What is force without conscience? What is will without righteousness? What is might without mercy? It is like the blind fury of the earthquake, the hurricane, or the avalanche, inspiring terror, wonder, and pity, but no true joy to the rational part of the man. 3. There is the preference of the intellectual to the spiritual. While the pursuit of wisdom is of all the noblest to which we can devote ourselves, provided it be inspired by religion, it is, perhaps, of all the most disappointing if that inspiration be wanting. Of what profit this weariness of the flesh, this aching brow, these nightly vigils, this impaired health? How bitterly have such men, from Ecclesiastes downwards, turned in satire upon the wisdom they had spent a lifetime in acquiring. But it is not wisdom, it is the untrue spirit in which wisdom has been pursued, that deserves the satire. Had they from the first yielded up their souls to intercourse with the Father of Lights, had they cultivated wisdom as a gift and emanation from Himself, to be used in the service of His creatures, these disappointments might have been avoided. II. WHAT, THEN, IS THE TRUE SOURCE OF THE SOUL'S COMPLACENCY? It is to be found in the knowledge of the eternal God. 1. We believe in His just and merciful administration of the world's affairs. He exercises loving-kindness, justice, and right in the earth. 2. We believe in the essential goodness of God. "In these things I delight," saith Jehovah. He governs the world in right and in love, because He is in Himself a righteous and a loving Being. Nowhere does the righteousness of God more impress the conscience, fill the soul with a deeper awe, than at the foot of that cross, where He was made sin for us Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. And nowhere do the beams of the eternal mercy break forth more brightly from the parting sky than above that cross. There the grace that pardons sin, that justifies the sinner, that plucks up the love of sin by the roots, that pours the balm of celestial hope and peace into our wounds, the grace that deeply humbles, yet nobly exalts us, is ever revealed. (*E. Johnson, M.A.*) *Duty of a prosperous nation*.—

I. WHAT IT IS FOR A PROSPEROUS NATION TO REJOICE IN THEMSELVES. 1. It is to rejoice in their own national prosperity because it is their own, and superior to that of other nations. 2. A people rejoice in themselves when they ascribe their national prosperity to their own self-sufficiency. II. WHAT IT IS FOR A NATION IN PROSPERITY TO REJOICE IN GOD. 1. It is to understand and know

that God is the Governor of the world. 2. For a nation in prosperity to rejoice in God implies rejoicing, not only that He governs the world, but that He displays His great and amiable perfections in governing it. (1) There is reason to rejoice in the judgment or wisdom God displays in the government of the world. (2) There is reason to rejoice in the moral rectitude and perfect righteousness which God displays in the government of the world. (3) There is reason to rejoice in the perfect benevolence which God displays in the government of the world. He is continually doing as much good as His wisdom, His justice, His power, and His goodness enable Him to do. III. THIS IS THE DUTY OF ALL MANKIND, ESPECIALLY OF EVERY NATION IN THE DAY OF PROSPERITY. 1. Because God has given them all their national prosperity. 2. Because He only, in His governing goodness, can promote and preserve their prosperity. Application—1. We have seen what it is for a people, in prosperity, to rejoice in themselves, and to rejoice in God, and that these two kinds of rejoicing are entirely opposite to each other. The one is right and the other is wrong; the one is pleasing and the other displeasing to God. 2. Have we not reason to fear that our national prosperity will be followed with national calamities and desolating judgments? (N. Emmons, D.D.) *Pride of worldly greatness*:—As that is a rebellious heart in which sin is allowed to reign, so that is not a very enlarged heart which the world can fill. Alas! what will it profit us to sail before the pleasing gales of prosperity, if we be afterwards upset by the gusts of vanity? Your bags of gold should be ballast in your vessel to keep her always steady, instead of being topsails to your masts to make your vessel giddy. Give me that distinguished person, who is rather pressed down under the weight of all his honours, than puffed up with the blast thereof. It has been observed by those who are experienced in the sport of angling, that the smallest fishes bite the fastest. Oh, how few great men do we find so much as nibbling at the Gospel hook! (T. Secker.) *Baseless pride*:—Many a man is proud of his estate or business—of the economy, order, and exact adjustment of part to part, which mark its management, who ought to be very much ashamed of the neglected state of his conscience and heart. Many a woman is proud of her diamonds, who cares little for the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. It is his conscience and heart, not his estate or business, it is her spirit, not her diamonds, which he and she will carry into the eternal world with them; and if God will only induce them to cultivate spirit, and conscience, and heart, by taking their diamonds and possessions away from them, is it not most merciful of Him to take these away, and so quicken them unto life eternal? *The true ground of glorying*:—The passage assumes that it is right to glory, and the tendency of our nature is to glory in one thing or another. The heart of man cannot remain empty. If you don't fill it with one thing, it will fill itself with another. If you don't tell man of the true God to worship, he will worship a false one. I. A SOLEMN PROHIBITION. 1. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. (1) Primarily, the reference is to the wisdom of statesmen, to political sagacity, and forethought. These are not to be gloried in, as the only way of escaping from political difficulties, or averting impending disaster and coming judgments. Political sagacity is not a thing always to be trusted. It does not always bring peace with honour. It may be another name for ambition—for the power of outwitting your neighbour, and, under some pretence or other, invading another's country, and destroying his liberty. It may have its root near low cunning, cheating, and chicanery. Let us rest assured that in all schemes of political sagacity, whatever their seeming success for a while, unless they are founded on principles of justice and righteousness, disaster and ruin will ensue. For God—who ruleth all the worlds—will do right; and He has said that, while righteousness alone exalteth a nation, sin is the reproach of any people. (2) The text refers, secondarily, to glorying in wisdom of all kinds—the wisdom of the student, the scholar, the philosopher. Men are more apt to be proud of mental gifts and intellectual acquirements than of any other thing. There is an innate splendour, an imperial dignity, about them which does not attach to such worldly possessions as riches, gold, silver, jewellery. The man of great wisdom and intellectual gifts may be inclined from his elevated place, from his eyrie heights, to look with pity, with contempt, on the traffickers in small things—the trader, the handler of tools—while he himself is occupied with thoughts big as the infinite, vast as immensity, and long as the ages. And yet his pride may be checked by the thought of his utter dependence for his thinking power on the Divine hand. No gift comes more directly from the hand of God than mental power,

A little clot of blood will paralyse the active brain, and fling reason from its throne. Then, how small after all is the sum of his knowledge and his vaunted wisdom. How men now laugh at the astrology, the chemistry, and the physical theories of other days! And so, as truth is infinite and knowledge advancing, the thought that the time will come when our philosophies shall have passed, when succeeding generations will wonder that we ever believed them, when they shall look on our advances in knowledge and wisdom as the groping of children in the darkness, and estimate our present *savants* and scientific men as the merest sciolists and drivellers, this thought may well clothe us with humility. Besides, unaided human wisdom could not find out God. Men tried the problem long, but it became the darker and deeper. Didn't Paul find the ignorance of the most enlightened nation on earth registered in the public square when he said—"Whom, therefore, you ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you"? 2. Glorifying in might is prohibited. (1) Military prowess. Other nations might, if they pleased, glory in their vast armaments, but Israel was not allowed to do so. Her strength was in the Lord. Their armaments didn't preserve those nations. Assyria is overthrown, her glory is gone, and Egypt is this day in the hands of strangers. Have the nations of Europe nothing to learn here? Napoleon I., at the head of his legions, made the world stand in awe of him. He overthrew Austria at Austerlitz, and then sprang upon the Prussian army, and smashed its power at Jena. But he in turn is worsted at Waterloo, and we see him gnawing his heart on a rock at the equator. Napoleon III., little more than twenty years ago, considered himself the arbiter of the peace of Europe. He gloried in his might. In overweening pride he attacked Germany. She turned upon him in righteous indignation, pulled the imperial crown from his head, and sent him an exile to another land. Our military prowess and scientific frontiers, our naval strength and greatness, will do little for us, if God's arm be lifted up in anger against us. Why, not long ago, the storm seized our guardship *Ajar*, one of our most powerful ironclads, and made a plaything of her at the Mull of Cantyre; and more recently the Bay of Biscay grew angry with the *Serpent* warship, and flung her a shipwrecked thing on the Spanish shore. (2) The prohibition refers also to the individual. How apt are we, in days of health and strength, when life is a joy, and the movement of our limbs a music, to put the day of sickness far from us, to fancy that the clear eye will never be dimmed, the strong arm never be palsied, and the heart, now so warm, will continue to beat and throb with unfailing vigour. We may see the sick, the frail, and the weak around, but we are inclined to look upon them as a class different from ourselves. Is there not a secret glorying in all this? How foolish is this! For who can do battle with the King of terrors? 3. Then you are not to glory in riches. Nothing is more contemptible than that a man should be proud simply because he happens to have a good account at his banker's, or a great deal of money in his purse. Why, any man, however worthless, who makes a happy hit may have that—a gambler on the Stock Exchange or a pawnbroker. How uncertain are riches as a possession! How many homes have we seen made desolate! How many households broken up and families scattered during recent years! I am not insisting on the uselessness of money. I am not inveighing against the possession of wealth. I am only cautioning you against making it the source of your happiness, or the ground of your glorying; for it cannot satisfy the deepest needs of the human heart. Didn't Queen Elizabeth, on her deathbed, say—"I would give ten thousand pounds for an hour of life"? Let not the rich man glory in his riches. II. AN EXACT DIRECTION. "Let him that glorieth," &c. Here is the subject of glorying. Understanding God, and knowing Him practically, so as to love Him and walk in His ways. To understand Him is now possible, for He has made known His ways to men. His whole dealings with His people are a revelation of Himself. To know God is now possible; for He hath revealed Himself in the person of His own dear Son, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. We may understand and know Him as thus revealed; and if we do, we may glory. If you rejoice in any other, after kindling a few sparks, you will lie down in sorrow; but if you glory in knowing God, that is a thing which, stretching into eternity, casts a shadow over the brightest sublimity splendours, and remains an everlasting possession. (*J. Macgregor, M.A.*) *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*:—There is a French proverb to the effect that to do away with one thing you must put another in its place. Men must glory in

is eternal life. Clearly there is a knowledge within knowledge. So vitally necessary is the inner illumination, that one man may possess but little knowledge of the facts through which God has revealed Himself, and yet may know Him; and another may have an exhaustive knowledge of the facts, and not know Him at all. It is not religious knowledge that saves, but knowledge of God—knowledge of His mind, which is deeper than anything coming from His mind; knowledge of His heart, as heart only can know heart, by an instinct, a sympathy, an appreciation. Here we see the infinite worth of the life of Christ as manifesting God; because the Spirit that was in Him appeared in forms which we can best appreciate, and which are best adapted to impress our minds and hearts. We show ourselves to each other in a thousand ways, consciously and unconsciously, in the tone and manner in which we speak to a child, or give instructions to a servant, or address our equals; in the way in which we cherish or sacrifice our comforts; in the presence or absence of proofs of loving thoughtfulness. So read, the life of our blessed Lord and Master was continually giving some evidence of what God is, and was shedding light all along the pathway of men; into every dark valley and gloomy forest; upon every mystery and sorrow and care. We have "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." But let us try and still further unfold the method by which men come to the knowledge of God. The beloved disciple says: "The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." Now, in what way is that understanding given? Partly by the historic Christ, partly by the Christ within. The one operation or manifestation of Christ must never exclude the other. To be with Christ is to acquire the power to know Him. To live in the Gospels is to understand Him who is their central figure, their Divine glory. Christ is the Light without; He also opens the eyes to see. He is the supreme revelation of God given for us to know; He also creates the spiritual understanding which apprehends the truth and glory and divinity of the revelation. Not by logic, then, do we attain to the knowledge of God, but by spiritual perception, by faith. And this knowledge of God is not a comprehension, but an apprehension, of Him, a seizing hold of Him by our spiritual sense, in response to the hold with which He has seized us. (*J. P. Gledstone.*) *How to learn about God:*—The knowledge of God is not a thing which can be fixed in the beginning, except in words; in its very nature, the knowledge of God among men must, to a large extent, be progressive; and it must follow the development of the race itself. There has been, and there is recognised in the Word of God from beginning to end, a steady progress in the disclosure of the Divine nature; and we see that in the thoughts respecting God among men there has been a gradual augmentation of the conception of the Divine character, arising from the process which I have already delineated. It is true that in the Bible there is much sublime portraiture representing the character of God; but, after all, no man knows God until he has personally found Him out in such a way as that he feels that God has touched him. No man can say, "I know God as a living God," except so far as he has interpreted Him out of his own living consciousness. Now, suppose you say of God, "He is just, true, righteous, pure, benevolent, lovely." Those qualities being enumerated, there will probably be a thousand different conceptions of the personality which they go to make up. What are the circumstances which will make this difference in your conceptions of the Divine nature? I will explain. Some there are who are far more sensible to physical qualities than others. The sublimity of power is to their thought one of the chief Divine attributes. God is omnipotent. That idea touches them. He is omniscient. Their eyes sparkle when they think of that. He is omnipresent. They have a sense of that. He is majestic. He has wondrous power. According to their conception He is God of all the earth. None can resist His might. That is your sense of God. If you only have such a God, you are satisfied. Another person wants a scientific God. He says, "I perceive that there is a law of light, a law of heat, a law of electricity; I see that everything is fashioned by law; and my idea of God is that He must be supreme in science; that there are to be found in Him all those qualities which science is interpreting to me." His God will be just, generous, faithful; but He will be just, generous, faithful after the fashion of some Agassiz, or some Cuvier, or some Faraday. Another man conceives of God from the domestic side. It is the mother-nature

that he thinks of—the nature that is full of gentleness ; full of kindness ; full of sympathy ; full of sweetness ; full of elevated tastes and relishes ; full of songs ; full of all manner of joy-producing qualities. Another, who is an artist, will feel after the God of the rainbow—a God of beauty. So every person will be dependent upon the most sensitive parts of his own soul for his interpretation of God. What is it that makes one flower blue and another scarlet ? No flower reflects all the light. If a flower is purple it absorbs a part and reflects the rest. If it is blue it absorbs some of the parts and reflects others. The same is true if it is red. And as it is with the colours of flowers, so it is with our conception of God. What you are susceptible of, and what you are sensitive to, in the Divine nature, largely determines what your conception of God is. Each individual puts emphasis on that part of the character of God which his own mind is best fitted to grasp. For instance, God is said to be a God of justice, of truth, and of benevolence. Now, which of those elements is first ? Which governs the others ? If God is first sternly just, and then suffers and is kind, that is one sort of God. If He is first loving, and then in the service of love is stern, and severe even, that is another kind of God. I hold that the emphasis which you put upon the Divine attributes determines the character of God in your mind ; and when you say, “ I hold that God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, just, good, true, faithful, benevolent,” you have said what this man says, what that man says, and what I say. We are all agreed, then, are we ? Oh, no ! If I could take a Daguerrean picture of the conception which each one forms of God, it would be found that one puts more emphasis on justice than love, and that another puts more emphasis on love than on justice. It would be found that one emphasises one attribute, and another its opposite ; and that the conception which each one forms of the Divine character depends upon the quality which he emphasises most. The next question which you would naturally propound to me is, “ Since these are the ways in which God is conceived of by men, how shall each fashion in himself the living God ? ” I call the Bible a picture gallery. It is an historical record which is open to all ; but it behoves us each to have some conception which we call our God, our Father’s God, the living God. I know of no other way than that which has been practised by the race from the beginning. I know of no other way than for you, in filling out the catalogue which the Word of God gives you of the elements of the Divine nature, to employ the actual perceptions and experiences of this life, in order to kindle before your mind those qualities which otherwise would be abstract to you. Suppose, then, that you have built up in your mind, by some such process as this, a personal God—a God of your own—who fills the heaven with the best things you can conceive of, to which you are perpetually adding from the stores of your daily experience ? for it seems to me that God is a name which becomes more and more by reason of the things which you add to it. Every element, every combination of elements, every development which carries with it a sweeter inspiration than it has been your wont to experience, you put inside of that name ; and you call it God. You are for ever gathering up the choicest and most beautiful phases of human life ; and with these you build your God. And then you have a living God adapted to your consciousness and personality. Now, let me ask you—for I come back to my text, whether it is not a good text to stand on ? “ Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom.” Why, he is a *savant* ! He is a philosopher ! He is world-renowned. He is bathed in people’s observation. Does not a man rejoice in that ? A great many do. “ Neither let the mighty man glory in his might.” A great many men do rejoice in their might. “ Let not the rich man glory in his riches.” If that were obeyed, it would upset New York in twenty-four hours. Now and then we are brought to the edge of the great invisible realm, and then we are made to feel that we need something besides wisdom, something besides might, and something besides riches. When a man lies sick in his house, feeling that all the world is going away from him, what can riches do for him ? It can be of but little service to him then. When a man is fifty years of age, and he has large estates, and a high reputation as a citizen, if he is going to leave the world, what can his wealth do for him ? If he knows that he is going fast toward the great invisible sphere, does he not need something to hold him up when the visible shall have broken down in this life ? The great emergencies of your life make it needful that you should have something stronger than wealth, wiser than philosophy, sweeter

than human love, mightier than time and nature: you need God. For when flesh and heart fail, then He is the strength of our soul, and our salvation for ever. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 24. **I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.**—*God and the earth:*—These words teach us—I. **THE EARTH IS THE SCENE OF GOD'S OPERATIONS.** There is a Divine intelligence, a Divine goodness, a Divine hand everywhere visible to the truly scientific eye, and deeply felt by the devout consciousness of men. Then—I. Do not be frivolous. Take your shoes from off your feet: all is "holy ground." 2. Do not be indifferent. His eye is on you. 3. Do not be slothful. Be earnest. 4. Do not be sinful. Do not break His laws in His presence. Do not profane His name, when His ears catch every sound. II. **GOD'S OPERATIONS ON THE EARTH ARE MARKED BY RECTITUDE AND MERCY.** Because righteousness is here, sufferings follow crime; because mercy is here, the world itself is kept up: the sun shines, the air breathes, &c. III. **IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS "RIGHTEOUSNESS AND MERCY" ON THIS EARTH, GOD HIMSELF HAS DELIGHT.** God's happiness is in the exercise of His moral perfections. 1. It is therefore in Himself alone. It is in His own self-activity: happiness is not in quiescence, but in action. 2. Therefore participation in His blessedness is a participation in His perfections. (*Homilist.*) *God working on the earth:*—I. **GOD IS ACTING ON THIS EARTH.** 1. He is working in natural phenomena. He is in all, the force of all forces, the impulse of all motion. 2. He is working in human history. He works with individual men, His constant visitation preserveth their lives; He works with families, communities, churches, nations. II. **GOD'S AGENCY ON THIS EARTH IS CHARACTERISED BY RECTITUDE AND LOVE.** 1. Who does not see "loving-kindness," or mercy, in the continuation and enjoyments of human life? 2. Who does not see "judgment," or "righteousness," in the miseries that follow sin on this earth? III. **IN THE EXERCISE OF THESE MORAL ATTRIBUTES THE GREAT GOD IS HAPPY.** Justice and mercy are but modifications of love; and love in action is the happiness of God as well of His intelligent creation. (*Homilist.*) *Divine government:*—I. **THE SCENE OF THE DIVINE OPERATIONS.** While there are those who, under the name of science, falsely so called, deny that God exercises any direct control over the forces and circumstances of our earth, we who believe in the Divine Word are prepared to accept this fact as settled. But, while we accept this as a theory, many of us practically deny it. We see the workings of nature around us, and observe the constant and rapid changes that take place in our own and others' history, and we speak of laws and of chance, of mechanism and of routine, until we forget God, and so leave Him out of our calculations altogether. We have need, therefore, to remind each other now and again, that there is a Divine intelligence and a Divine hand visible in all the operations that are at work in our world. 1. Let us realise that God is at hand, and that He is working around us and in us, and it would put an end to frivolity, and destroy indifference. We would then feel that earth is holy ground, and that life is a great and solemn reality. 2. If we were to realise day by day that God is near, exercising His power, and putting forth His operations around us and in us, we would feel that life is too solemn and too real to spend in any other way than with earnestness of purpose. 3. We could not live profoundly and earnestly without realising a purifying and ennobling influence. II. **THE CHARACTER OF THE DIVINE OPERATIONS.** He is here not to frown upon and denounce us, but to "exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth." In all God's dealings with men, love, justice, and fairness of the most perfect kind are blended in the truest harmony. They work one upon the other, so as to maintain the perfect balance of the Divine nature. 1. There is nothing He does, there is nothing He can do, that is not the outcome and result of His love. 2. When He sends sorrow or trial upon us, it is in order to take from us something that He knows will injure us if left in our possession, or to inflict upon us that wholesome chastisement that He sees necessary for our future well-being. 3. Retribution is manifest everywhere, but there is mercy equally, and even more, manifest in supporting the criminal, in mitigating miseries, and in the power of the Gospel to overcome crime itself. Let any one of us here this morning read his own history intelligently, and he will find in every chapter and in every verse loving-kindness and judgment blended together and displaying perfect and complete righteousness. III. **THE CAUSE OF THE DIVINE OPERATIONS.** 1. God delights in exercising these principles Himself. He is love, He is just, He is

righteous. He has not therefore to force Himself to their exercise. The spontaneous outgoing of His nature runs necessarily in these channels, and hence He delights in their display. 2. God delights in the exercise of these principles by man. Were we to gather all the teaching of the New Testament upon practical Christian life together we might fairly reduce it all to these elements of "loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness." This is to be made a partaker of the Divine nature, and to imitate Christ. But we cannot do this by our own strength. We need the inspiration and the power of Christ. On the Cross of Calvary God has shown us this most blessed combination in its fullest and most perfect light. (*W. Le Pla.*)

CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1-16. *Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you.—Hearing the Word of the Lord:—I. WHAT IS THE WORD OF THE LORD? His law and Gospel. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN HEARING THE WORD OF GOD? 1. That we attend His ordinances. 2. That we observe what we hear. 3. That we understand what we observe. 4. That we believe what we understand. 5. That we remember what we believe. 6. That we practise what we remember. 7. That we continue in what we practise. III. WHY SHOULD WE HEAR? 1. Because God has commanded it. 2. Because it is for our great interest, it being the means of repentance, faith, light, comfort, and leads to eternal happiness. IV. HOW WORTHY OF REPROOF ARE THEY—1. Who do not come to hear. 2. Who do not hear when they are come. 3. Who do not mind what they hear if they do come. 4. Who do not understand what they give attention to. 5. Who will not believe what they understand. 6. Who will not practise what they believe. V. EXHORTATION. 1. Hear God's Word with reverence. 2. Caution. 3. Attention. 4. Intention. (*W. Stevens.*)*

VERS. 3-5. *For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest (the work of the hands of the workman) with the axe.—The gods of the heathen:—*It is often said of God that He is unknowable. It would seem as if this was advanced as a kind of reason for not concerning ourselves about Him. The form into which this thought would be thrown is something like—If there is a God, He cannot be known by the human mind, and therefore we need not try to know Him. It is remarkable, however, that the Bible distinctly warns us against gods which can be known; and, indeed, the very fact that they can be known is the strong reason given for distrusting and avoiding them. The Bible even makes merry over all the gods that can be known. It takes up one, and says, with a significant tone, This is wood; another, and laughs at it as a clever contrivance in iron; another it takes up, and setting it down smiles at it as a pretty trick in goldsmithery. Concerning the false gods of his time, Isaiah says (xlv. 7), "They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth." Thus everything can be known about the false gods: we can walk round them; we can tell the very day of their manufacture; we can give their exact weight in pounds and ounces; we can set down their stature in feet and inches; we can change their complexion with a brush: because they are known they are contemptible. In opposition to all this view of heathen deities stands the glorious revelation of the personality and nature of the true God. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." A conviction of the vital difference between the God of the Hebrews and the god of the heathen seems to have forced itself into the minds even of those to whom the true revelation had not come: "Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." All human history would seem to show that men must have either a knowable or an unknowable God. Every thinking man has what to him is equivalent to a god. His thought stretched to the point of perplexity—because so much appeals to it that is beyond absorption or reconciliation—becomes to man a species of deity, or in other terms an unknown and bewildering quantity, which will not allow him to put a fullstop to his thinking, saying, Human life ends here,

and beyond it there is no field of legitimate inquiry. On the other hand, a child loved to idolatry becomes very near to occupying the position of a god. Be it what it may, either a high conception or a low, it would seem as if we must find some equivalent to God, either in the fog of chance, the temple of art, or the sanctuary of revelation. Even false gods put their devotees to great expense in their service. Take the man who gives himself up to the pursuit of an idea, chimerical or practical, but large enough to be to him a religion. He lives no idle life; he does not rise with the sluggard, or lull his brain with opiates; he sees a beckoning spirit on the high hills, and hears a voice bidding him make haste whilst the light lasts; he writhes under many an inexplicable inspiration; he dares the flood that affrights the coward; he cannot spare himself: he is not his own. Such men are not to be despised. They give life a higher meaning, and service a bolder range. I only say of them in this connection that their worship is neither easy nor inexpensive. Men have to rise early, to run great risks, to deny themselves many temporary gratifications, to say No where often they would be glad to say Yes; they have to abandon the society of wife and children, and the security and joy of home, that they may go afar to learn new languages, face new conditions, and endeavour to subdue oppositions of the most stubborn kind. The highest application of this doctrine is found in the religion of Jesus Christ. Whoever would gain immortality must hate his present life,—whoever would seize heaven in its highest interpretations and uses must hold in contempt, as to mere permanence of satisfaction, this little earth and its vain appeals. The service of the true God includes all the grandest ideas of the human mind. This is the supreme advantage which Christianity has over every phase of human thought. It keeps men back from no service that is good: on the contrary, it compels them to adopt and pursue it. Is it a question of high ideals? Then we may boldly ask what ideal can be higher, and morally completer, than that which is presented by the religion of Jesus Christ? That ideal may be expressed as peace on earth, and goodwill toward men,—an idea involving personal righteousness, international honour, the recognition of the broadest human rights, and the possibility of all nations, peoples, kindreds, and tongues being consolidated into one Christian brotherhood, not as to mere accidents, but as to supremacy of purpose and pureness of motive. The followers of Bible godliness are not mere dreamers. They do more for the world's progress than any other men in society can do. The advantage which the Christian worshipper has over all the heathen round about him is in the fact that he himself was converted from social heathenism and from trust in false gods. "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led." Although this has literally no application to us, its spiritual reference is abundantly clear: we have followed the customs of the world; we have drunk at its fountains; we have wandered in its gardens; we have bought its delights; we have sacrificed at its altars; and to-day we stand up to testify that the gods of the heathen can neither hear prayer nor answer it, can neither pity human distress nor relieve it. We know also with equal certainty, on the other hand, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ covers our whole life, answers all its deepest necessities, is a sovereign balm for every wound, and cordial for our fears. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. *Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations?—Jeremiah's study of providence.*—Even suppose this were a poetical image, it is full of the finest suggestiveness. The image is that of a man who has been going up and down the idol temples to see if he could find a god, and having failed to find what lay upon his heart with all the tenderness of kinship and appealed to his intelligence with all the vigour of omniscience, he lifted up his eyes and said, There must be something better than all this. He must needs in his imagining make a King of nations, rather than be without one. This makes plain a good deal of the theology of the ages. Men did not create it merely for the sake of showing mechanical or literary cleverness, but for the sake of expressing the only possible satisfaction to certain moral and spiritual instincts and deep religious necessities. We, therefore, should respect all honest broad-minded theologians. They were pioneers in the higher civilisation; they began to build and were not able to finish: but every age is not called to build a separate temple; enough if one age builds partly, then ceases, making room for another generation; all the while the living temple, often invisible and mystic, is rising solidly and eternally to the skies. A bold

title is this to give to the living God, namely, "King of nations." There should be no other king but God. Israel never wanted a king until Israel forgot to pray. The king was granted, for God does answer some imperfect and almost vicious prayers. He has no other way of teaching us. As education advances kings will go down; the Son of Man will come, the glorious Humanity. Meanwhile, even kings may serve great purposes, but only so far as they are great men. Kings are only good, and all men are only to be tolerated and to be honoured, in proportion as they are higher than their office, better and more than their function—in proportion as they live capably for the good of others. Nothing is to be hurried in any direction. We gain rather by growth than by violence. He puts his watch right instantly who puts it right by the hands; but he is much mistaken if he thinks the whole process is over and done by that manipulation. There is an interior work to be done. So with all civilisation, and all its functions and offices. We do nothing by merely smiting, striking; but we do everything by concession, by conciliation, by generous trust, by large education, by magnanimous hopefulness of one another. The prophet acquires the greater confidence in God in proportion as he sees the utter weakness and worthlessness of all the gods which men have made. Thus by experience men are brought to the true religion. Let men shed their gods, as they shed some infantile disease. Do not hurry them in this matter. Let them really have time to know how little their gods are. The prophet, having seen what the gods could do, turned with a new cry and with a profounder adoration to the King of kings, the King of nations. A beautiful expression is that,—*"King of nations,"* an expression which takes up the whole nation as if it were a unit, as if it were one line, and that blesses the national life. There is an ideality in that conception which is worthy of the finest imagination. Why should there not be a national unit as well as an individual unit? Christianity alone can take the sting out of geography, and make the whole human family one in sympathy and trust and love. If ever Christianity has appeared to do the contrary, it was by travesty and blasphemy, not by fair honest enlightened interpretation of principle and duty. Jeremiah turns once more to the worthless gods, and from verses 11-15 he shows the relation of the false to the true, and the true to the false. "Man is brutish in his knowledge"—that is to say, when left to himself he goes very little beyond the line of instinct, animal impulse, and convenience; very clever in his inventions, but never able to touch the heavens; all he does is based upon the earth, and does not rise to the blue sky, but by some wind or hand invisible his tower is thrown down in the night-time. This being the case, is man to turn to himself? Ashamed of the gods, is man to take up with the idea of self-idolatry or self-instruction? The prophet replies to that inquiry, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (ver. 23). Now, that is most true; for we have tried to direct our way, and we have failed, we have made more mistakes than we have ever confessed; sometimes with a modesty that is difficult to distinguish from self-conceit, we have owned that we have fallen into occasional error; but who has ever taken out the tablet of his heart, held it up within reading distance, that others might peruse the record of miscarriage, misadventure, and mistake? On the other hand, how many are there who would hesitate to stand forth and say, In proportion to trustfulness, docility, obedience, has real prosperity come? How many are there who would confess that they had been stronger after prayer than they were before it, readier to deal with rough life after they have had long communion with God? Christians should be more definite in their statements upon these matters. They should not hesitate to use such words as "inspired by God," "guided by heaven," directed by the loving Father of creation. Were we more frank, definite, and fearless about these matters, we should make a deeper impression upon the age in which we live. The prophet recognises the need of another ministry which for the present is never joyous, but grievous. "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing" (ver. 24). He would have judgment with measure; he would have chastisement apportioned to him, not indiscriminately inflicted upon him. Here we have philosophy, forethought, the economy of strength, the wise outlay of ministerial and penal activity. But who prays to be corrected? Who prays to be judged? We should get great advantage if we could begin at that point. Correction that is prayed for becomes a means of grace; it is received in the right spirit because asked for in the right spirit; but to accept it dumbly, sullenly, or in the spirit

of fatefulness, is to lose the advantage of chastisement. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God the only object of fear* :—To fear God is generally used in three senses in Scripture.

1. Fear sometimes signifies terror ; a disposition that makes the soul consider itself only as sinful, and God chiefly as a being who hateth and avengeth sin. There are various degrees of this fear, and it deserves either praise, or blame, according to the different degree to which it is carried. A man whose heart is so void of the knowledge of the perfections of God, that he cannot rise above the little idols which worldlings adore ; whose notions are so gross that he cannot adhere to the purity of religion for purity's sake ; whose taste is so vitiated that he hath no relish for the delightful union of a faithful soul with its God ; such a man deserves to be praised, when he endeavoureth to restrain his sensuality by the idea of an avenging God. The fear of God, taken in this first sense, is a laudable disposition. But it ceaseth to be laudable, it becomes detestable, when it goeth so far as to deprive a sinner of a sight of all the gracious remedies which God hath reserved for sinners. It should be left to the devils to believe and tremble (*James ii. 19*). Fear is no less odious, when it giveth us tragical descriptions of the rights of God, and of His designs on His creatures : when it maketh a tyrant of Him. Away with that fear of God which is so injurious to His majesty, and so unworthy of that throne which is founded on equity ! 2. To fear God is a phrase still more equivocal, and it is put for that disposition of mind which inclines us to render to Him all the worship that He requires, to submit to all the laws that He imposeth, to conceive all the emotions of admiration, devotedness, and love, which the eminence of His perfections demands. This is the usual meaning of the phrase. By this *Jonah* described himself, even while he was acting contrary to it, " I am an Hebrew, and I fear the Lord the God of heaven " (*Jonah i. 9*). In this sence the phrase is to be understood when we are told that " the fear of the Lord prolongeth days, is a fountain of life, and preserveth from the snares of death " (*Prov. x. 27, xiv. 27*). And it is to be taken in the same sense where " the fear of the Lord " is said to be " the beginning of wisdom " (*Psa. cxi. 10*). The fear of the Lord in all these passages includes all the duties of religion. It seems needless to remark what idea we ought to form of this fear : for, it is plain, the more a soul is penetrated with it, the nearer it approacheth to perfection. 3. But, beside these two notions of fear, there is a third, which is more nearly allied to our text, a notion that is neither so general as the last, nor so particular as the first. Fear, in this third sense, is a disposition which considers Him who is the object of it as alone possessing all that can contribute to our happiness or misery. Distinguish here a particular from a general happiness. It often happens that, all things being considered, a particular happiness, considered in the whole of our felicity is a general misery : and, on the contrary, it often happens that, all things being considered, a particular misery, in the whole of our felicity is a general happiness. It was a particular misfortune in the life of a man to be forced to bear the amputation of a mortified arm : but weighing the whole felicity of the life of the man, this particular misfortune became a good, because had he not consented to the amputation of the mortified limb, the mortification would have been fatal to his life, and would have deprived him of all felicity here. It was a particular calamity, that a believer should be called to suffer martyrdom : but in the whole felicity of that believer, martyrdom was a happiness, yea, an inestimable happiness ; by suffering the pain of a few moments he hath escaped those eternal torments which would have attended his apostasy. To consider a being as capable of rendering us happy or miserable, in the general sense that we have given of the words happiness and misery, is to fear that being, in the third sense which we have given to the term fear. This is the sense of the word fear, in the text, and in many other passages of the Holy Scriptures. Thus *Isaiah* useth it, " Say ye not a confederacy," &c. (*chap. viii. 12, 13*). So again, " Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid," &c. (*chap. li. 12*). And again in these words of our Saviour, " Fear not them which kill the body," &c. (*Matt. x. 28*). To kill the body is to cause a particular evil ; and to fear them which kill the body is to regard the death of the body as a general evil, determining the whole of our felicity. To fear Him which is able to destroy the soul, is to consider the loss of the soul as the general evil, and Him who is able to destroy the soul as alone able to determine the whole of our felicity or misery. In this sense we understand the text, and this sense seems most agreeable to the scope of the place. I. GOD IS A BEING WHOSE WILL IS SELF-EFFICIENT. We call that will self-efficient which infallibly produceth its effect. By this efficiency of will

we distinguish God from every other being, either real, or possible. No one but God hath a self-efficient will. There is no one but God of whom the argument from the will to the act is demonstrative. Of none but God can we reason in this manner: He willeth, therefore He doth. Every intelligent being hath some degree of efficiency in his will: my will hath an efficiency on my arm; I will to move my arm, my arm instantly moves. But there is as great a difference between the efficiency of the will of a creature, and the efficiency of the will of the Creator, as there is between a finite and an infinite being. The will of a created intelligence, properly speaking, is not self-efficient, for it hath only a borrowed efficiency. When He, from whom it is derived, restrains it, this created intelligence will have only a vain, weak, inefficient will. I have to-day a will efficient to move my arm: but if that Being from whom I derive this will, should contract or relax the fibres of this arm, my will to move it would become vain, weak, and inefficient. Further, the efficiency of a creature's will is finite. My will is efficient in regard to the portion of matter to which I am united: but how contracted is my empire! how limited is my sovereignty! It extends no farther than the mass of my body extends; and the mass of my body is only a few inches broad, and a few cubits high. II. GOD IS THE ONLY BEING WHO HATH A SUPREME DOMINION OVER THE OPERATIONS OF A SPIRITUAL AND IMMORTAL SOUL. From this principle we conclude that God alone hath the happiness and misery of man in His power. God alone merits the supreme homage of fear. God alone not only in opposition to all the imaginary gods of paganism, but also in opposition to every being that really exists, is worthy of this part of the adoration of a spiritual and immortal creature. "Who would not fear Thee, O King of nations?" God alone can act immediately on a spiritual creature. He needs neither the fragrance of flowers, nor the savour of foods, nor any of the mediums of matter, to communicate agreeable sensations to the soul. He needs neither the action of fire, the rigour of racks, nor the galling of chains, to produce sensations of pain. He acts immediately on the soul. It is He, human soul! It is He who, by leaving thee to revolve in the dark void of thine unenlightened mind, can deliver thee up to all the torments that usually follow ignorance, uncertainty, and doubt. But the same God can expand thine intelligence just when He pleaseth, and enable it to lay down principles, to infer consequences, to establish conclusions. It is He who can impart new ideas to thee, teach thee to combine those which thou hast already acquired, enable thee to multiply numbers, show thee how to conceive the infinitely various arrangements of matter, acquaint thee with the essence of thy thought, its different modifications and its endless operations. It is He who can grant thee new revelations, develop those which He hath already given thee, but which have hitherto lain in obscurity; He can inform thee of His purposes, His counsels and decrees, and lay before thee, if I may venture to say so, the whole history of time and eternity. For nothing either hath subsisted in time, or will subsist in eternity, but what was preconceived in the counsels of His infinite intelligence. III. If the idea of a Being, whose will is self-efficient and who can act immediately on a spiritual soul, were not sufficient to incline you to render the homage of fear to God, I would represent Him as MAKING ALL CREATURES FULFIL HIS WILL. If tyrants, executioners, prisons, dungeons, racks, tortures, pincers, caldrons of boiling oil, gibbets, stakes, were necessary; if all nature, and all the elements were wanted to inspire that soul with fear, which is so far elevated above the elements, and all the powers of nature: I would prove to you that tyrants and executioners, prisons and dungeons, racks and tortures, and pincers, caldrons of boiling oil, gibbets and stakes, all nature and all the elements fulfil the designs of the King of nations; and that, when they seem the least under His direction, they are invariably accomplishing His will. These are not imaginary ideas of mine; but they are taken from the same Scriptures that establish the first ideas, which we have been explaining. What do our prophets and apostles say of tyrants, executioners, and persecutors? In what colours do they paint them? Behold, how God contemns the proudest potentates; see how He mortifies and abases them (Isa. x. 5, 7, xiv. 5, 11-15, xxxvii. 29). Oh, how capable were our sacred authors of considering the grandees of the earth in their true point of light! Oh, how well they knew how to teach us what a king or a tyrant is in the presence of Him by whose command kings decree justice (Prov. viii. 15), and by whose permission, and even direction, tyrants decree injustice! (J. Saurin.) *A royal confession of faith*:—At Aix-la-Chapelle, on June 20, 1902, the Emperor of Germany spoke with great earnestness in favour

of faith in God. "The foundations of the empire," said he, "are laid on the fear of God. I look to all to strengthen the hold of religion on the people. Who-soever does not base his life on faith is lost. My empire and army, and I myself, have chosen the protection of Him who said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away.'"

Ver. 10. He is the living God, and an everlasting King.—*The personality of the Deity* :—In treating the doctrine respecting God, the mind is deeply impressed with the sense of its importance in its bearing on human duty and happiness. It is the doctrine of a Creator, the Governor and Father of man. The discussion relates not merely to the laws of the universe, and the principles by which its affairs are directed, but to the character and dispositions of the Being who presides over those laws, and by whose will those affairs are determined. The importance of this consideration to a true and happy virtue cannot be overestimated. The difference between conformity to a statute and obedience to a father is a difference not to be measured in words, but to be realised in the experience of the soul. It is slightly represented in the difference between the condition of a little child that lives in the presence of a judicious and devoted mother, an object of perpetual affection, and of another that is placed under the charge of a public institution, which knows nothing but a set of rules. The idea of personality must be added to that of natural and moral perfection, in order to the full definition of the Deity. Without this, He is but a set of principles or a code of laws. I begin with stating what is meant by the personality of the Deity. A person is an intelligent, conscious agent ; one who thinks, perceives, understands, wills, and acts. What we assert is, that God is such. It is not implied that any distinct form or shape is necessary to personality. In the case of man, the bodily form is not the person. That form remains after death ; but we no longer call it a person, because consciousness and the power of will and of action are gone. The evidence of this fact is found in the works of design with which the universe is filled. They imply forethought, plan, wisdom, a designing mind ; in other words, an Intelligent Being, who devised and executed them. If we suppose that there is no conscious intelligent person, we may say that there is no plan, no purpose, no design ; there is nothing but a set of abstract and unconscious principles. And strange as it may seem to Christian ears, which have been accustomed to far other expressions of the Divinity, there have been those who maintain this idea ; who hold, that the principles which govern the universe constitute the Deity ; that power, wisdom, veracity, justice, benevolence, are God ; that gravitation, light, electricity, are God. 1. One of the most observable and least questionable principles, drawn from our observation of man and nature, is, that the person, the conscious being, is the chief thing, for the sake of which all else is, and subservient to which all principles operate. The person, the conscious, intelligent, active, enjoying, suffering being, is foremost in importance and honour ; principles and laws operate for its support, guidance, and well-being, and therefore are secondary. Some of these principles and laws have their origin in the relations which exist amongst intelligent, moral agents ; most of them come into action in consequence of the previous existence of those relations. If there were no such agents, there either would be no such principles, or they would have no operation. Thus, for example, veracity, justice, love, are sentiments or obligations which spring up from the relations subsisting between different beings, and can exist only where there are persons. We may say, indeed, that they exist abstractly, in the nature of things ; but, if there be no beings to recognise them, no agents to conform to or violate them, they would be as if they were not. They are qualities of being, and, like all qualities, have no actual existence independent of the substances in which they inhere. They have relation to acts,—voluntary acts of truth, justice, goodness ; and acts belong to persons. If there existed no persons in the universe, but only things, there could be neither the act nor the sentiment of justice, goodness, truth ; these are qualities of persons, not of things ; of actions, not of substances. Suppose the Deity to exist alone in the universe which He has made. Then, from the conscious enjoyment of His own perfections, and the exercise of His power in the physical creation, He must dwell in bliss ; but, as He has no relations to other conscious existences, He cannot exercise justice, or truth, or love ; they lie in the infinite bosom as if they were not ; they have only a contingent existence. Or make another supposition. Upon the newly created earth one man is placed alone. He knows no other conscious existence but

himself. What are truth, justice, charity to him? They are nothing to him. He cannot have ideas of them. They are sentiments that belong to certain relations between beings, which relations he does not stand in, and knows nothing of. To him, therefore, they do not exist. Now, send him companions, and the relations begin, which give those sentiments birth and make their expression possible. He is in society; and those principles, which make the strength and order of society, immediately come into action. The necessities of conscious being call them forth. Thus what is chiefest in the universe is conscious, active mind; abstract principles are but the laws of its various relations. This may be illustrated, if necessary, from the analogies of the physical universe. Which is chief, the law of gravitation, or the universe which it sustains? The one is but means, the other is end; and the end is always greater than the means. If you say, "No; gravitation is the superior, because it is the universal power of God"; then I reply, "You thereby assent to the superiority of the person over the principle; for, as His power, it is His servant; He controls and directs it." But if you take the other ground, and speak of gravitation as a power independent of any being, then you cannot deny that it exists and is active for the sake of the systems and their inhabitants; operating for their sake, it is their servant and inferior; without them, it would be inert and non-existent. Thus the analogy of the physical universe corroborates the position. If there were no material masses, there could be no gravitation; if there were no persons there could be no truth, or justice, or love. There is another way of considering this point. What is it that, in the whole history and progress of man, has proved most interesting to man? What has been the favourite study, the chief subject of contemplation and care? Has it not been men, persons? Have not their character, fortunes, words, deeds, been the chief themes of thought, of conversation, of letters, of arts? Is it not the interest which the soul takes in persons that is the foundation of society, of its activity, its inventions, its advancement in civilisation, its institutions, its laws? Thus the doctrine which denies personality to God is in opposition to the general economy of nature, which sets peculiar honour on persons. In all the other relations of its being, the soul is concerned with nothing so much. Why should it be less so in its highest relation? 2. It also amounts to a virtual denial of God. Indeed, this is the only sense in which it seems possible to make that denial. No one thinks of denying the existence of principles and laws. Gravitation, order, cause and effect, truth, benevolence,—no one denies that these exist; and, if these constitute the Deity, He has not been, and cannot be, denied. The only denial possible is by this exclusion of a personal existence. There can be no atheism but this; and this is atheism. If the material universe rests on the laws of attraction, affinity, heat, motion, still all of them together are no Deity; if the moral universe is founded on the principles of righteousness, truth, love, neither are these the Deity. There must be some Being to put in action these principles, to exercise these attributes. There is a personal God, or there is none. 3. Further, to exclude personality from the idea of God, is, in effect, to destroy the object of worship, and thus to annihilate that essential duty of religion. The sentiment of reverence may, undoubtedly, be felt for a principle, for a code of laws, for an institution of government. But worship, which is the expression of that sentiment, is applicable only to a conscious being, as all the language and customs of men signify. It is praise, thanks, honour, and petition, addressed to one who can hear and reply. If there be no such one,—if the government of the world be at the disposal of unconscious power and self-executing law,—then there can be no such thing as worship. Let this be seriously considered. What a desolation is wrought in society, and in the soul, when the foundation of worship is thus taken away! It is the suppression of a chief instinct; it is the overthrow of a system which has always made an inseparable part of the social order, and in which human character and happiness are intimately concerned. The relation of man, in his weakness and wants, to a kindred spirit infinitely ready to aid him, of the insufficient child of earth to a watchful Father in heaven, is destroyed. There remains no mind, higher than my own, which is knowing to my desires; there is no Parent above, to whom my affections can rise and find peace. I am left to myself, and to men as weak as myself. We must not consent to the injustice which is thus done to the affections. What an instinct is in them, and how they yearn for something to love and trust, is taught us in all the religious history of the race. 4. In the next place, this notion removes the sense of responsibility, and so puts in jeopardy the virtue of man, as we have just seen that it trifles

with his happiness. The idea of responsibility implies some one to whom we are responsible, and who has a right to treat us according to our fidelity. We, indeed, sometimes use the word with a little different application; we say that a man is responsible to his country, to posterity, to the cause of truth; but this is plainly employing the word in a secondary sense; it is not the original, literal signification. We hear it said, also, that a man is responsible to his own conscience; and this is sometimes spoken of as the most solemn responsibility. In one point of view, justly; since it is responsibility to that person, whose disapprobation is nearest to us, and whose awards are of the highest consequence to our peace. But why is it terrible? Because it is thought to represent and foreshadow the decisions of the higher tribunal of God. It is the thought of the living Lawgiver and Judge which affects men,—of one whose displeasure they can dread, whose good opinion they can value, whose favour they perceive to be life. And herein is perceived the wisdom of the Gospel of Christ, herein is found its efficacy,—that, casting aside all such abstractions, it appeals wholly to the relations of conscious beings, and subdues, and reforms, and blesses, by drawing the human soul to the soul of its Saviour and its God. 5. If, now, we pass to the declarations of the Divine Word, we find that the doctrine we are opposing stands in direct contradiction to the whole language and teaching of the Old and the New Testaments. Those volumes speak of God, uniformly and distinctly, as possessed of personal attributes. They so describe His perfections and His government, they so recite His words and His acts, they so assign to Him the relations and titles of the Creator, King, Lawgiver, Father. Until language changes its meaning, and all description is falsified, the doctrine of the Divine impersonality is a direct contradiction of the doctrine of revelation. 6. Further still, it destroys the possibility of a revelation, in any intelligible sense of the word. A revelation is a message, or a direct communication, from the infinite mind to the human mind. But, in order to this, there is required a conscious and individual action on the part of the communicator; and this implies personality. So that this doctrine virtually accuses the Scriptures of imposture, since they purport to contain a revelation from God, which, in the nature of things, is impossible. Nay, let us see the worst of it;—it accuses the apostles of Christ, and the blessed Saviour Himself, of deliberate fraud and imposition. (*H. Ware, D.D.*) *One true and living God excludes all possibility of another:—God never did, and never will receive the homage of a divided heart.* Alexander, when Darius proposed that the two great monarchs should divide the world, replied that there was only room for one sun in the heavens. What his ambition affirmed that God declareth from the necessity of the case. Since one God fills all things, there is no room for another. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 11, 12. **Thus shall ye say, &c.**—*A Christian's office to bring others to the knowledge of God:*—These words are written in the Chaldee tongue, whereas the rest of the prophecy is in the Hebrew: the reason whereof you shall then have, when we have first seen the occasion, coherence, and sum of the words, which is as followeth: The prophet having in the end of the last chapter threatened the Jews, and all the neighbour nations with captivity, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and the Arabians of the wilderness: in this chapter leaving out the rest he singles out the Jews, to instruct them for their demeanour and carriage in their captivity; to wit, that they should not learn the way of the heathen whither they should be carried, that they should not worship the signs of heaven, nor regard their gods of gold and silver, which could do neither evil nor good. But lest they should think that they had acquit themselves well, if they abstained from what they should see the heathen do, he tells them they must yet do more than this, they must make open profession against their gods; they must proclaim against their idolatry and false worship; and therefore in the middle of the exhortation, he interlaceth these words in the Chaldee tongue, "Thus shall ye say," &c. These words then contain a proclamation, which the Jews are enjoined from God to make against the gods of the Gentiles, when they should be carried captive to Babylon, wherein are to be considered two things—**I. THE PROCLAIMING ITSELF.** **II. THE SUM OF THE PROCLAMATION.** The proclaiming in these words, "Thus shall ye say unto them." Here are three things—1. The persons who, namely, Ye Jews, who are the worshippers of the living God; ye captive Jews, carried out of your own land, and living as slaves and vassals under your proud lords the Babylonians; "Ye shall say unto them." 2. The persons to whom,

namely, your lordly masters of Babylon. 3. The manner how ; " thus," that is, not in cryptic, or mystical terms, or in your own Hebrew mutterings, a language which they understand not, but in the vulgar tongue of Babylon. 4. In the sum of the proclamation are two things contained—(1) A description of false gods in these words, " The gods which made not the heavens and the earth." (2) Their doom in these words, " They shall perish from the earth and from these heavens." (*J. Mede, B.D.*)

The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish.—*The destruction of idolatry.* :—I. THE NECESSARY AND UNIFORM EFFECTS OF IDOLATRY, of the worship of " the gods who have not made the heavens and the earth " ; and if the fact is granted, which I believe not to be questioned, that this has been the universal practice of pagans, I ask no other principle to enable me to spread before you a scene of dark and pitiable wretchedness, which must excite our commiseration. 1. Where there is idolatry there is no God. All the wants you feel, and which God only can supply, they feel too. You take your wants to God ; they take theirs to an idol ; and an idol is nothing. You go to the fountain of living water ; they, to broken cisterns. They apply parched lips to an empty vessel ; they are hungry, and they dream they eat ; they awake, and are not satisfied. 2. Where there is idolatry, there are no morals. The true foundation of morals is the will of God. That will is holy, because He is holy ; and a holy God being known, His will is known also to be such. There is no knowledge of morals but where there is a knowledge of God ; and there is no sanction of them. It is true, that in countries where God is known we may find morals without immediate reference to God and His will. The conduct may be correct out of regard to public opinion and character ; but this public opinion as to morals is created by the acknowledged fact, that there is a God that hateth iniquity ; and this acknowledgment is produced by the knowledge of His will. From idolatry no morality can issue, because there is no superior will in its favour. Vice meets no check from conscience, none from fear, none from a superior Being watching every act of man, and registering it for judgment. To be like the " gods who have not made the heavens and the earth," is to be unfit for the society of men. The worshippers of idols " are filled with all unrighteousness." This is the language of inspiration and of history. 3. Where there is idolatry there is a fatal mistake on the subject of religion. True religion, indeed, there is not, nor indeed can be. Idolatry and superstition are not, therefore, as they have sometimes been represented, only different means of accomplishing the same end, giving men the control and benefits of religion, though by a different process. This, I fear, has been a too common notion : The same principles of piety have been supposed to be expressed by the worship of God and of idols ; and he who has returned from an idol-temple has been regarded as bearing away with him to his home and to his business, a conscience as satisfied, a spirit as refreshed and comforted, as he who departs from beholding the power and glory of God in the sanctuary. What corrective control can be expected except that which results from the presence of a God of purity, of one who hateth iniquity, and who will everlastingly punish it ? 4. Idolatry is inconsistent with religious comfort. For polytheism admits no providence. It peoples heaven with gods who war with each other, and each other's worshippers. There is no superintending mind in that heaven, no common plan, no regular discipline ; and there can be no trust. 5. Where there is idolatry, there is no hope. II. IN WHAT ITS REMEDY LIES. 1. Consider the means which human wisdom, resting only upon human resources, has proposed to adopt in order to raise the condition of the barbarous or semi-civilised pagan nations of the earth. Hope has rested—(1) On forms of government. As these improve, and the principles of right and power are better understood, the moral and civil condition of nations is expected to advance. The best forms are vain, where public virtue is wanting ; public virtue is the sum of private virtue ; and that is the product only of a true and efficient religion. But good government supposes laws ; and—(2) From laws the effect has been hoped. Consider then the operation of laws without religion. Allow that you introduce principles of right and wrong between men, restrain violence, correct fraud, establish order. Suppose all this to be done : Can the institutions of law reach the thought ? Can the security of law give peace to the conscience ? Can human judicature absolve from guilt ? (3) But these evils have been traced to ignorance ; and the revival and diffusion of science have been depended upon as the means of improving the moral condition of the pagan world. There is no moral influence in science, merely as such : It may be an instrument either of good or of evil ;

but is in itself, and that from its very nature, indifferent. It is an instrument, however, which, if a good agent does not seize, an evil one will; and he who sends the light of knowledge, and consequently power, among the heathen, is bound to send with it that higher science, and those principles of religious fear and hope, by which only it can be employed to moral and beneficial purposes.

2. Where, then, is the remedy? It is in the Gospel of the grace of God. There the deep and pressing want of the world is met.

III. CONSIDER HOW FAR IT LIES WITH US TO APPLY IT. It will not be difficult to show, both that it is laid upon us to contribute with all our power to the moral improvement of the world; and that Christian missions are the means appointed for this purpose, which have the authentication of Divine authority.

1. They unquestionably accord with the standing rule of the Divine government, to help man by man.

2. This is still farther confirmed, by a fact of no small importance in determining our duties on this subject. No nation, lapsed from the light and knowledge of religion, has ever regained it, while left to itself. On the contrary, we see a constant sinking.

3. The Christian ministry is the means Divinely appointed for this purpose. (*R. Watson.*) *False gods shall perish*:—We have heard and read of the admired Oracles of the Gentiles, of Apollo at Delphos, of Jupiter Ammon in Egypt, and many more, too long to be named: but all of them are long since “perished from the earth, and from under these heavens”; we have heard of the names of many gods in former times, of great renown in these islands of the Gentiles, Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, Neptune, Juno, Vesta, Venus, Minerva, Diana, &c. All Europe swarmed with their temples and ceremonies, and yet now are they perished from the earth. Where is now Bel the god of Babylon, Nisroch, the god of Assyria, Baal and Ashtaroth, the gods of the Sidonians, Rimmon, the god of the Aramites? Where is now Dagon of the Philistines, Milcom of the Ammonites, Chemosh of Moab, and Tammuz of the Egyptians? Even these also, whose names we hear so frequently in Scripture, are perished with their very names, “from this earth, and under these heavens.” (*J. Mede, B.D.*)

True religion and idolatry:—I. GOD EXPECTS FROM US THAT WE SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE BEFORE MEN OUR FAITH AND BELIEF IN HIM UPON ALL PROPER OCCASIONS; and that upon no pretence, and for the fear of no inconvenience and danger, we should deny Him, and act against our conscience.

II. IT IS THE DUTY OF EVERY ONE TO PROMOTE VIRTUE AND RELIGION IN OTHERS TO THE UTMOST OF HIS POWER. If our desires to do this be earnest, and our behaviour be upright, we shall in some measure succeed; for goodness is of its own nature communicative, and it commands love and respect, and on both accounts it will have some weight and influence.

III. THE WORDS OF THE TEXT ARE DIRECTED TO AN UNHAPPY PEOPLE, stripped of their possessions, surviving the destruction of their fellow-citizens, cast out of their own land, carried into captivity by their proud conquerors, and seemingly forsaken of God. These persons are exhorted to make profession of their faith, and to hold fast their religion. If we apply this direction to ourselves, we may learn that we ought in time of affliction to honour God, and submit to the dispensations of His providence. By this behaviour we both recommend ourselves to God's favour, and do signal service to religion.

IV. The next observation arising from the text is, THAT GOD MAY BE KNOWN BY HIS WORKS, and that the human understanding may discover, upon a serious and careful examination, that there is one God, Maker and Governor of the universe; that all other gods beside Him are gods which made not the heavens and the earth, that is, no gods in reality.

V. The words of the text are a most illustrious and remarkable prophecy, THAT THE GODS OF THE GENTILES WHO WERE THEN ADORED SHOULD ENTIRELY PERISH, AND CONSEQUENTLY THAT THE HONOUR WHICH HAD BEEN PAID TO THEM SHOULD BE GIVEN TO GOD ALONE.

1. It was a time when the knowledge of the true God was confined to very narrow bounds, and His dominion was almost become invisible. Upon many accounts, then, and according to human probability, it seemed more to be expected that the Jews together with their religion should perish, than that the Gentiles should forsake their idolatry.

2. Concerning the accomplishment of the prophecy, we may observe that it hath been in a great measure manifested. For the gods of the Gentiles so often mentioned in sacred and profane history, the gods of Europe and Asia, of Greece and Italy, the gods of Babylon, and of all the nations surrounding the Jews, and with which the Jews were so often concerned, have entirely perished. This great event hath been produced by the Gospel: (1) By the preaching of the apostles; (2) At the time of Constantine; and, (3) A few ages afterwards.

3. But the descriptions which the prophets have made of this revolution are so magnificent, that they seem not yet to have received a total completion. It is generally and justly supposed that a more glorious age shall come; when the Jews shall be converted, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall flow into the Church, and the kingdoms of the earth shall be the kingdom of Christ. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *Creation, a proof of Divinity* :—Wearied out by the ingratitude and impenitence of the Jews, God was about to deliver them into the hands of their enemies. They were to pass many years in a country of idolaters; and the danger was considerable, that they would forget the true God, and join themselves to the worshippers of a false. It is to guard them against this danger that they are thus addressed by the Lord, in the beginning of the chapter—"Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them." The prophet then proceeds to show the utter vanity of idolatry, by exposing what we may call the manufacture of the worshipped images. But it was not enough that the Jews should be fortified in the true religion, and thus prepared to remain faithful when cast amongst idolaters; God would not be satisfied with the silent testimony against error which would thus be borne by their conduct, if they steadfastly adhered to what He had revealed and required. Associated with those who knew not God, and who gave to idols the honour due unto His name, it would behove them to be preachers of truth, and to endeavour to win the heathen from their debasing superstitions. Accordingly, in our text, God puts into their mouths the message they should deliver. Now, if ever peculiar circumstances might have been pleaded in apology for not striving to expose error, and instruct the ignorant, those of a captive people might, we think, have presented the excuse. The Jews might have reasoned that, dependent as they were upon imperious conquerors, whom it would be easy to provoke to oppression and to violence, they should not act with the wisdom which they were bound to exhibit, if they in the least degree interfered with the national religion. It would be a great thing, they might have said, if the Babylonians allowed them to worship God after the manner of their fathers, and did not require them to conform to idolatry; but if, not satisfied with this, they were to denounce the reigning superstitions, and strive to overthrow the religion of the State, what was to be expected, but that persecution would be substituted for toleration, and that in endeavouring to show others their errors they should altogether lose their own religious privileges? And yet such excuses, however specious, would not have been valid. We seem bound to gather from this, that whatever our circumstances, we should consider ourselves charged with a message from God. But we go on to observe in respect of the proclamation with which the Jews are thus charged, that though its delivery, under their circumstances, demanded great boldness, the terms in which it is expressed are those least likely to give offence. We are as much taught to use circumspection in our mode of reproof, as to avoid finching from the duty because of the difficulties which may attend its performance. There is nothing of invective, nothing of bitter declamation, in the words whose utterance God enjoins. They undeniably condemn the superstitions of the Chaldeans, but only indirectly, by way of inference rather than of assertion. And it is very observable, as furnishing a guide to ourselves when dealing with men in error, that the attack on the Babylonians is to be made through principles acknowledged by themselves, and not through others which might not be admitted. The Babylonians would be supposed to concede that the creation proved Divinity; and it was with the principle thus conceded, and not with one which they would be likely to dispute, that the Jews were to strive to win them from idolatry. If the Babylonians once allowed its due weight to the principle, that the true God must be the Creator, it would be easy to prove to them that their idols had no claim to the being Divine, and then gradually to conduct them to the truth, that the Jehovah of Israel ought alone to be worshipped; and therefore are the captives commissioned to utter a proclamation involving no principles, so to speak, but those of natural religion; just as Paul, when preaching at Athens, employed the Grecian altars as his weapons of assault upon Grecian superstitions. But now we must look a little at the truth involved in the proclamation—the truth that Divinity was to be proved from creation. The true God, you observe, is "the God that made the heavens and the earth." The stress is laid on the fact of creation; and we will endeavour to show you why it is laid there. How came matter into existence? Who made the matter out of which all other things are made? Here is the Divine act; and this is the act of creation. No power short of infinite could have made

the material, if any could have afterwards wrought it into the worlds. Give an angel the material, and, for anything I know, he might work it into the wing or the flower; but to make the material, and then work it into the exquisite forms, this is beyond any angel; before Him who can do this, I fall prostrate as God. But we have still, in conclusion, to consider our text in the light of a prophecy, and to examine what grounds we have for expecting its literal accomplishment. It was a bold prophecy, as originally uttered, and there seemed no likelihood of its ever being fulfilled. With the exception of a solitary people, and that people now exiles and captives, all the inhabitants of the earth then worshipped false gods. Who could have expected so stupendous a revolution as was predicted by our text—the downfall of heathenism over the whole habitable globe? Yet already a vast advance has been made towards so glorious a consummation. Where now is Bel, the god of Babylon, and Nisroch the god of Assyria? Where now are Baal and Ashtaroth, the gods of the Zidonians? Where now is the Dagon of the Philistines, the Chemosh of the Moabites, the Milcom of the Ammonites? Or if you pass from scriptural records to profane, where now are the thousand deities of Greece and of Rome—those whose praises were hymned by the most melodious of poets, whose praise was renowned on continents and islands, to whom the great and the mean, kings and warriors, sages and servants, conspired to do honour? Hath it not come true of all these, that they have perished from the earth and from under the heavens? They made not the earth, neither were the heavens the work of their hands; and wanting the distinguishing mark of Divinity, creative energy, it mattered nothing that millions were their worshippers, that philosophers were ready to uphold their pretensions, and armies to defend their temples. The true God rose in His jealousy, and with the breath of His indignation He scattered the idols, so that their very names have vanished from the territories once crowded with their shrines. And what has been thus already done, is our warrant that the text shall be accomplished to the letter. False gods, they shall perish; false principles, they shall perish. False gods, they may have been honoured in the fairest provinces of this globe, where the sky is the most brilliant, and the foliage the richest, and the waters the most sparkling; but they spread not out that sky, and they pencilled not that foliage, and they poured not forth those waters; and therefore shall they make their grave with the Jupiter, and the Apollo, and the Minerva—known now only in classic story, and swept from classic land. “They shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.” False principles of a vain philosophy—principles which would substitute reason for revelation, and ascribe to man independence and moral strength—these may have their admirers and defenders; but these cannot conduct to immortality, these cannot effect a new creation, these cannot build us a home beyond the grave, and throw open to us new heavens and a new earth; and, therefore, unable to create, they too shall perish, and the world be willing to take salvation without money and without price. I require you to try principles as the Babylonians were to try deities—by their power of creating. If there be nothing in a religious system to renew human nature, to remould the dispositions, and so to alter a man that old things shall pass away, the system is inadequate to our necessities, and that too, because void of creative energy, and therefore leaving us in our feebleness and in our corruption; and every such system shall consequently perish (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Vers. 12. He hath made the earth by His power.—*Wisdom the source and sovereign of worlds*.—These words give us two ideas concerning the universe. I. It is ORGANISED BY WISDOM. 1. This stands opposed to the idea of—(1) The eternity of the universe. The universe is not eternal in its elements, or combinations. There was a period far back in the abysses of eternity, when there was nothing,—when the Absolute One lived alone. (2) The contingent origin of the universe. It sprang from no fortuitous concourse of atoms: “By wisdom hath He founded the earth,” &c. God has hollowed out the oceans, and arranged the systems of clouds. 2. The scientific student of nature sees design and exquisite adaptations in every part of nature: “By His knowledge the depths are broken up.” “We are raised by science,” says Lord Brougham, “to an understanding of the infinite wisdom and goodness which the Creator has displayed in all His works. Not a step can we take in any direction without perceiving the most extraordinary traces of design; and the skill, everywhere conspicuous, is calculated in so vast a proportion of instances to promote the happiness of living

creatures, and especially ourselves, that we feel no hesitation in concluding that if we knew the whole scheme of Providence, every part would appear in harmony with a plan of absolute benevolence." II. It is organised by the wisdom of ONE BEING. "He"—the Lord God. It is not the outcome of many intelligences. One intellect drafted the whole. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Vers. 19, 20. *Woe is me for my hurt.*—*The collapses of life* (with *Psa. xxvii. 5*):—**I. THE LAMENT OF THE PROPHET.** "Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is grievous: Truly this is a grief." It was not merely an irritation, or an inconvenience, or an annoyance, a disagreeable and disappointing incident, it was a grief—a bitter, crushing overthrow. 1. The overthrow is total. "My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken." Victor Hugo tells of a wonderful tent that was given to Napoleon by the Sultan Selim: "From the outside it appeared like an ordinary tent, remarkable only for having in the canvas little windows, of which the frames were of rope; three windows on each side. The inside was superb. The visitor found himself inside a great chest of gold brocade; upon this brocade were flowers and a thousand fancy devices. On looking closely into the cords of the windows one discovered that they were of the most magnificent gold and silver lace; each window had its awning of gold brocade; the lining of the tent was of silk, with large red-and-blue stripes. If I had been Napoleon, I should have liked to place my iron bed in this tent of gold and flowers, and to sleep in it on the eve of Wagram, Jena, and Friedland." Now, metaphorically speaking, Napoleon did dwell in a magnificent tabernacle, but at length he slept in it for the last time on the eve of Waterloo, for the whole thing fell into awful ruin. Napoleon III. shared the same fortune. He slept long in his glorious imperial tent, but on the eve of Sedan he slept in it for the last time, for the splendid fabric vanished as a dream. Within comparatively few years we have seen many rich and illustrious men like General Grant in New York, Secretan in Paris, the Gurneys and Barings in London, reduced to poverty at a stroke—their heirlooms scattered, their estates alienated, their pictures knocked down by auction, their splendid palaces dismantled and sold. And this kind of thing is ever going on. Crops are spoiled, ships founder, property deteriorates, tariffs close mills and factories, fires destroy, clerks embezzle, stocks and shares fall, and lovely tents are brought to the ground. We see these reverses startlingly in fallen conquerors, in exiled kings, in bankrupt millionaires; there the thing is writ large; but in a humbler way financial loss and embarrassment overtake thousands, and bury their delightful, cosy tents in the sand. Sometimes melancholy accidents bereave us and break up our homes. 2. The overthrow is sudden. A tent in the wilderness is suddenly broken, and just as suddenly are the hopes of men laid in the dust. We cannot guarantee anything. Our happy home may be smitten; our children gone forth; our health impaired; our days over. Science has invented a whole system of warning touching the calamities of nature. The seismograph is an alarm announcing the stealthy steps of the earthquake and volcano. Weather charts teach much concerning cyclonic disturbances. Various subtle barometers indicate atmospheric variations, and the mariner on the sea, the miner in the depths, is warned of impending peril. But there are no instruments fine enough to detect the approaching tempests and earthquakes which wreck human fortunes and hopes, no storm-drum to warn us into safe harbours. 3. The overthrow is irreparable. "There is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains. The prophet saw that there was no prince, no warrior, no statesman, no patriot with the requisite capacity and strength, to save the State, to retrieve its shattered fortunes, and to recall its children. The blow was so crushing that the nation was beyond recovery. It is frequently thus in private life. Physical afflictions prove incurable. The earthly tabernacle receives a mortal wound; we may linger, but the result is inevitable. Some financial disasters are absolutely irremediable. Some domestic bereavements are without compensation or hope. There are no compensations or substitutes. 4. The overthrow is personal. "Truly this is my grief, and I must bear it" (R.V.). As Miss McKenny writes in her suggestive book, *A Piece of an Honeycomb*: "The story of human life is ever the same, though told in new versions and in differing climes. Things go on smoothly with us for years, and we never can believe that the 'trouble' we are 'born to' will some day overtake us. But the hour strikes, and the bounds are removed; the flood-gates are opened, and in upon us pours the full, devastating tide of sorrow. Not

a new experience in this world of sin and suffering ; yet strangely new and terrible to us. We sit in dumb desolation in the midst of our 'spoiled tabernacle.' Hearts which were one with ours are severed from us. It may be by death, or by something which is worse than that. We stand for the time in darkness 'upon the shadow side of God,' and see no light of comfort or of restoration. 'I must bear it,' says the stricken heart, with a wail." II. THE REFUGE OF THE PSALMIST. "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me." 1. Fly to the living God. Grand dwelling-place ! Storms and earthquakes it defies ; time does not sap its strength ; the topmost wave of the deluge fell short of its threshold ; burning worlds will not scorch it. Happy thing in the dark day to fall back on the eternal justice, love, and promise. Someone said to Luther : "When Frederic the Elector forsakes you, where will you find shelter ?" "Under heaven," said the heroic saint. And when everything else has gone—the blue, calm, smiling heaven of the all-encompassing God shall be our refuge. 2. Rest in the loving Saviour. We are desolate, weak, our tent dissolved, our strength, our righteousness, our friendships, our hopes are gone ; but the merit and love of Christ, like the strong, silken, embroidered curtains of a royal tent, wrap us round and keep us from the fear of evil. 3. Prepare for the heavenly home. Not long since, walking in a church, I observed this epitaph : "And now, Lord, what wait I for ? My hope is in Thee !" "And now, Lord." Now, when everything is absolutely gone. "In days past," seemed to say the dead man, "I had something to trust to that was tangible and ascertainable. I had the members of the body—eyes to behold, feet to run, hands to fight ; but all are now paralysed ; I had some gold and silver, but this shroud has no pockets ; I had companions and helpers, but lover and friend is put far from me." "Now, Lord, what wait I for ?" Not a rag left of all the tent, not a plank of the broken ship ; it is absolute ruin and despair, or absolute faith and victory. "My hope is in Thee." And God will not confound us. (W. L. Watkinson.)

Ver. 23. O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. — *The seat and source of authority in religion* :—We cannot but admire the marvellous precision with which instinct works. The lower animals make no progress, because their work, as the fruit of unerring instinct, is perfect. Their wants are few and limited, and they are endowed with the power perfectly to satisfy those wants. But that is what is here denied as belonging to man. With the greatest wants of any creature, he has the fewest instincts ; and therefore at the beginning of his existence he is the most dependent of all creatures. Made to think, he is made to go out of himself, to separate himself from all his surroundings, to know himself as a lonely, isolated individual, and to rise above himself to the eternal source of all existence. As so constituted, he cannot find the way of his life within himself. His way is like that of a ship as it crosses the sea. The chart and compass are there, and the captain too, with his intelligence to regulate the whole ; and yet it cannot be said that her way is within herself, or that she has within herself all that is needful to direct her over the billows ; for, not to speak of the winds of the free heavens required to fill the sails, there are two points without the vessel, above and beyond her altogether, by which her course is absolutely determined. These are the pole star and the destination of the ship : a point in the high heavens, and a point on the other side of the sea. By those two points is her course determined across the dark and treacherous deep. The mariner has to be looking out of himself continually in two directions. His eye has to be now looking at the heavens, and anon to be swooping the horizon. And so it is with man. He has the chart of conscience and the compass of reason ; but these have no meaning at all, save as they imply that which is above and beyond man himself, even the revealed will of God—that word that is settled as a pole star in the heavens ; and the true destination of man as a voyager across the sea of time to the eternal shore. Suppose, for a moment, that you have a ship at sea, but there are no clear heavens above it, and no definite destination before it. What a strange and anomalous thing it would be, blown about by every wind, without meaning or purpose, and certain to founder at last ! Now that is what the life of every man is, who has no belief in a God above him, and an eternity before him. There are millions of men in that condition to-day. But there are others who have found both of these in Christ. He is above them, and He is before them. He is that One, therefore, by whom their whole course is fixed—their pole star, and their eternal haven. I. FORMS OF AUTHORITY SUMMED UP

IN CHRIST. 1. The authority of Nature. Wherever we have law we have authority—a something that either enforces itself, and is obeyed by us in spite of ourselves; or a something that ought to be obeyed, whether we obey it or not. The laws of Nature are so many principles that for the most part enforce themselves. We have the power to violate them, but they enforce themselves not the less. The law-breaker does not break the law in the way of setting it aside, or of rendering it non-effective. Strictly speaking, he only breaks himself; as when, ignoring the law of gravitation, he steps over the brink of a precipice. The laws of Nature are universal. They determine the circulation of the planets and the circulation of the blood. They form a constellation and they shape a tear. They are uniform in their operation. The same causes, in like circumstances, are always producing the same results. The laws of health are those we are bound to respect if we would prolong our days upon the earth as far as possible. Now, there is clearly an authority here of a certain external character. 2. The authority of conscience. If now we turn away from that outer authority, and consider what we ourselves are, as having a nature of our own, we find that we are not merely creatures of sensation, capable of bodily pain and pleasure, but that we have a moral nature, capable of feelings of another kind; emotions of joy and sorrow, satisfaction and chagrin, self-approbation and shame, springing out of perceptions of moral good and evil, right and wrong, a something that ought to have been done, and a something that ought not to be done. Who can deny that there is a form of authority here, stamped upon our very being; and that there are laws and rules of moral conduct, which no time can change, to which the most earnest and thoughtful are keenly alive, and to which only the most degraded are insensible. 3. The real authority is not in the impersonal whole of nature without us, which, as impersonal, is inferior to ourselves; nor is it in the conscience within us, which may be very dimly sensible as to what right and wrong really are, but it is in the God above us, of Whose will all that is good in nature and man is the expression; and of whose word, the ideal man, Jesus Christ, is the one realised embodiment. As the eye is made for the light, so is the conscience made for God. A conscience without God is an eye in darkness, or a function without its legitimate object. Man's life attains to perfection, as it consciously approximates to God, and it moves in its legitimate orbit, as the centre of its gravity is in Christ. II. FORMS OF AUTHORITY DERIVED FROM CHRIST. 1. The authority of the Bible. This is derived from Him. The method is an entirely mistaken one that begins by searching out all the seeming contradictions, and arguing from these as to the worth of the book as a whole. The true method is to take one's stand upon the undeniable truth of the book; and from that point, look at the supposed errors, which will then appear to be utterly fractional, in their relation to the whole, and comparatively non-essential in respect of the exclusive claim of the whole. If that is allowed to be the true method, the question arises:—"In what does the substantial unity of the Bible consist?" We understand it to consist in this, that it testifies in all its parts, when spiritually understood, to Christ. Jesus says: "Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." All the saints and prophets of the old time were looking in this direction; and their inspiration lay in the extent to which they were elevated to see that vision. In like manner, the New Testament finds its unity as pointing in all its parts to the living and incarnate Christ. 2. The authority of the Church. We all know how much this is discounted in our time; and how much there is to justify this disparagement of the Church. There are its divisions, its animosities, and what, in some respects, may be called its failures. But no one whose ideas have been formed along the line of the Divine purpose is much affected by all that, in the way of being shaken in his faith. Faith is just the cultivation of ideals, as opposed to a life that is always buried in what it calls practical affairs. The idea of the Church is that of a body formed and filled by the Word and Spirit of God. Surely a body of that description has some authority? The Spirit of truth is promised to lead us into all truth. The common convictions of the sanctified thinkers of all ages have the authority of all the truth they contain. 3. The authority of the State. This, too, is derived from Christ. When Pilate, speaking in the name of imperial Rome, declared that he had power to dispose of Jesus, the Master said: "Thou hast no power over Me at all, except it were given thee from above." The State, as empowered to enforce its decisions by physical force, is clearly separate from the Church, which has no right to lift the sword. It is no part of the function of the one of those great forms of authority to supersede the other.

But there are questions with which both have to deal. There is the question of education, the question of the social condition of the people, the Sabbath question. Questions of this kind cannot be solved apart from the co-operation of both the spiritual and the secular functions. (*F. Ferguson, D.D.*)

Progression and direction.—I. NATURAL ACTION. Man's action in life complex, involving two distinct parts, of which he has only one in himself—the power of natural action.

1. Its ease. Just the simple putting forth of the power of life; going on, without thinking if right or wrong. Danger of forgetting a deficiency in this part—progression: mistake a part for the whole. We think we can act aright, simply because we have the power of action at all. It is as if the ship could reach the port just because she has undoubted capacities for sailing, though no helmsman or compass.

2. This mere power of natural action has a tendency to mislead. It makes a man unreflective. Proneness to slight the invisible, because it does not intrude itself upon us, although the things of this life have inseparable association with those hidden from sight in another world. Thus man's "walk" may do much as regards this life, but alas! how little effect for the world beyond. Leads to a waste of strength; for toil where nothing can be taken, and inaction where much might be won.

II. NEEDFUL DIRECTION.

1. Take care to go out of ourselves for direction. Shall not remedy the matter by taking more thought. When we have done much in that way, it will only be "man that walketh," directing his own steps; doing it more carefully, but still doing it himself. Thus going out of self may be humiliating.

2. The advantages of this going out of self. There will flow in upon us wisdom from above.

3. But we must yield ourselves to God to be ordered. Content to be led by ways we know not.

4. Ways are not really open, because apparently so. Nor because we can do this thing or that, is it therefore right. Because of this error, we have often gone into spheres where God is not, and where we should not have been.

5. Success before the world is not, therefore, a proof of our being right, nor of success in our relationship towards God. Failure here leaves our work but as "wood, hay, stubble." Danger of being too eager for success.

6. Learn not to put implicit confidence in energy or action. It is likely to mislead; may make the "man" prominent in us, and not God. (*P. B. Power, M.A.*)

The need of a guide.—I. IT IS OF IMMENSE IMPORTANCE THAT MAN'S "STEPS" IN LIFE SHOULD BE RIGHTLY DIRECTED. Human life is but a succession of "steps," and every step is important. You may step into a bye-path where serpents lurk and savage beasts are in quest of prey. You may step over a precipice from which you will fall to rise no more. One false step may ruin you for ever; every step you give you touch a chord which will send its vibrations along the awful future. See then you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise men. The path of life is labyrinthian, cloudy, rugged, perilous, on every hand beset with dangers.

II. A RIGHT DIRECTION OF HIS "STEPS" MUST COME FROM A SOURCE OUTSIDE OF HIMSELF. "It is not in man." What blunders the greatest sages of all times and lands have made, both in religion and morals! "The world by wisdom knew not God." Instinct rightly directs the brute in his path of life; but man's reason has failed to direct him. Through depravity the eye of reason has become so dim that it cannot see the right path. "We are of yesterday, and know nothing." The right guide, then, must be sought without, and where? In the written word? It is there, but men, through difficulties of interpretation, often fail to find it. Where then? In the biography of Christ. His example is the guide: "Follow Me." What St. Augustine said let us all feel. "I am a little child, but my Father is my sufficient Guardian." (*Homilist.*)

The plan of God.—A creature intelligent and responsible, I know how to propose an end to myself, and to take means towards its accomplishment. It is thus I make a plan for the development of my faculties, for the selection of my career, for the education of my family, and for the government of my household. But though capable of willing and of acting, I cannot arrange at my own discretion either things, events, or myself; and if sometimes my plans succeed, much more frequently do they fail. This weakness is so inherent in my movements, and entails so much failure, that my real life contrasts painfully with my ideal. It is at this moment that Jeremiah interposes to show me, in the derangement of my plan, a law directing me to a higher plan—namely, the plan of God for me—a perfect plan, which is far better than mine, both as it regards my general interests, and probably my personal advantage; a powerful plan, which infallibly accomplishes itself, whatever may be the destinies and vicissitudes of mine; and an all-controlling plan which reigus

supremely over mine, and is intended to rectify it. From this time, that which calls itself overturned in my plan takes the name of success in that of God : as in those pictures of tapestry that are worked from behind, the coloured threads, which the workman weaves with a skilful hand, present an appearance of inextricable confusion, until they are seen on their true side, which is that not of the workman, but of the artist ; so the plan of man is on the wrong side of life—that of God is on the right. Regarded thus, my action is never without law, nor without result, for I am always accomplishing the plan of God, knowing it or not, let us rather say, willing it or not. The history of peoples, of great men, and even of every day, discovers alike, to an attentive observer, God's plan, deciding all others without interfering with the free operations of man. The people, of all others, who can furnish me with the best illustration are the Israelites. If anywhere there had ever been the appearance of a plan exclusively belonging to man, it was in heathen Rome, spreading from people to people the network of that political ascendancy, which appears, for a long time, to be endowed with the singular prerogative of strengthening itself by extension ; or in Christian Rome, spreading from church to church the more subtle network of religious ascendancy, which we see by turns, or rather which we see at the same time, and in the same places, energetically repulsed, and tamely submitted to, if not courted. But when we observe this more closely, we discover at a glance, in all that has happened to one and to the other Rome, the marks of a plan which has not originated in the judgment of man, but which takes from a higher region its period of departure and approach. But let us approach our subject nearer : let us come to everyday life, and to that life considered in all that is most allied to our own being, and to our own doing ; even there, what real part belongs to you in the arrangement of your domestic life ? To begin at the beginning, does not a popular proverb teach us in how many ways the best-contrived conjugal relationships escape not only the control, but even the anticipations, of man ? Life, health, family, property ; yes, more—sympathy and mutual affection ; on how many things do all these depend, which depend so little on you ! “ The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is of the Lord.” But let us consider that which depends upon us most of all—the education of our children. Here is a son born unto me : I exert over him, after God, the greatest power, material, intellectual, and spiritual, in the whole universe. One says, this child will become what I wish him to be, apart from that which is unforeseen—yes, the unforeseen ; but then how much does that one word include ! Oh ! where is the man so blind as to imagine that he can determine the future of his son ? What are we to say of those educations that break all our arrangements ?—those arrangements which sometimes fail after every possible precaution, and others which succeed when the precautions have been omitted, but where this omission appears to have favoured a truer and better development ? Are we to say that, because our plan fails, everything is to be abandoned to circumstances, under pretence of leaving everything to God ? No ; by no means. There must be no occasion for self-reproach : there must rather be redoubled diligence and wisdom, along with the deep conviction that we are working for a plan which is wholly of God. But still, after all, education, this largest sphere of man's power, is also the scene of his greatest weakness : and there is no person on the face of the earth more fitted to repeat the lesson of Jeremiah than the father of a numerous family, entering, like Moses, into his rest, in sight of that unknown Canaan, into which the generation following enter. “ O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself : it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” No one but Jesus Christ has ever completely realised the idea of my text ; no one has ever been so completely ruled by a plan Divine. Jesus does nothing, can do nothing, of Himself. He does not proclaim His doctrine, but the doctrine of the Father Who sent Him ; He seeks not His own glory, but the glory of the Father Who sent Him ; He fulfils not His own will, but the will of the Father Who sent Him ; He says only the things which the Father has told Him, and does only the things which the Father has commanded Him. And yet by no one else has the will of man and his freedom ever been more fully demonstrated than by Jesus Christ. The same plan which appears to us as belonging only to the Father, who devised it, appears equally to belong to the Son, who accomplished it. There is but one solution possible to this problem :—If the Son realises, at the same time, the plan of the Father, and His own personal plan, it is because the two plans are one ; it is because the Son has so fully adopted the plan of the Father that He has made it His own ; even that plan which He

appears alternately to accept and choose—according as we regard it in His obedience, or in His freedom—by which means He accomplished the great law of human nature which Jeremiah has revealed in my text, but depriving it of all appearance of weakness or of necessity, being so much the more obedient as He was perfectly free, and so much the more free as He was perfectly obedient. Behold the mystery we are seeking. “Go and do likewise.” Of the two plans that are before you—that of God and your own—attempt only one of them; and not being able to impose your own plan on God, adopt His; not in the spirit of slavish constraint, but in that of filial submission. Thus, like Jesus, you will accomplish fully the plan of God, which is now become yours, whilst yours is one with His; and this will be for you, as it was for Jesus, the principle of perfect reconciliation between interests apparently opposed; for, on the one hand, accomplishing God’s plan, you will feel yourself to be in order; and, on the other hand, accomplishing your own, you will feel yourself at liberty. (*A. Monod.*)

Dependence upon God.—I. Consider the conviction here expressed, in its SOURCES. 1. The nature of our condition. It is a dependent one; we are not our own, and therefore we are not at our own disposal. 2. The limitation of our powers. “Vain man,” says Zophar, “would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt.” When he grows up, even when he comes to what is called years of maturity, of discretion, even then how liable is he to be deceived and deluded! How narrow then is his horizon of vision; and how foggy and cloudy is it! How unable is he to distinguish, in a thousand instances, between appearances and realities! 3. History. You have heard of Robespierre—so famous, or rather so infamous—and the torrents of blood which he shed. Yet he originally seemed an amiable character; so he was deemed in all his neighbourhood. He was a civilian; he published two books, one on electricity, the other on the code of criminal jurisprudence, lamenting that it was so sanguinary, and endeavouring to ameliorate it. But the current of the Revolution laid hold of him, and the flood hurried him away; and he became the reverse of all he had appeared to be before. 4. Experience. Franklin says, “Experience is a dear school,” but adds, “Fool will learn in no other.” The fact is, that they will never even in this. We ascribe always too much to experience: it is not so influential a teacher as many imagine. “I never,” says Mr. Burke, “knew a man who was not wise before, who grew wiser by his troubles.” No; things operate upon us according to the qualities which they find in us: they are mistaken, who suppose they can bring these qualities. 5. Scripture is another source of this conviction. In all such cases as these “to the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them.” II. Consider it in its USES. It is not information that we commonly need. We all feel what a difference there is between our creed and our conduct—what a difference there is between our speculative and our practical religion. The certainty of a thing is not that by which we are principally influenced; but the frequent presentation of it to the mind, and the realisation of it by meditation. There is nothing so sure as that you shall die; and yet, by pushing this aside continually, you can live less under the influence of it than perhaps anything else. 1. If “a man’s way is not in himself,” and “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” this should produce gratitude. Your advantages and your indulgences, whatever they have been, are wanting in their firmest support, their loveliest ornament, and their sweetest relish, unless you acknowledge the agency of God in them. 2. This should produce submission. You may, indeed, always pray, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,” if you can add, as our Saviour did, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” 3. You are to use the conviction as a check to presumption with regard to futurity. “Boast not thyself of to-morrow.” 4. You should apply this conviction to induce you to repair to God in humble and earnest prayer. Are any of you in perplexity? Wait upon Him; and let integrity and uprightness preserve you the while. And not only wait upon Him, but also wait for Him. Do not act while your mind is in a state of uncertainty: secure the approbation of your conscience by erring, if you do err, unintentionally and conscientiously. III. THE ENCOURAGEMENTS of this conviction. Though “man’s way is not in himself,” and “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”—1. God is able to direct your steps. 2. God is willing to direct your steps. 3. God is engaged to direct them. (*W. Jay.*) *The craving of mind and heart for light and leading.*—The Israelites usually asked counsel of God by the Ephod, the Grecians by their Oracles, the Persians by their

Magi, the Egyptians by their Hierophants, the Indians by their Gymno-sophistæ, the ancient Gauls and Britons by their Druids, the Romans by their Augurs and Soothsayers. It was not lawful to propose any matter of moment in the senate before their wizards had made observations from the heavens. That which they did superstitiously, we may, nay, we ought to do in another sense religiously, conscientiously, *i.e.*, not to embark ourselves into any action of great importance and consequence before we have observed from heaven, not the flight of birds, nor the houses of planets, or their aspects or conjunctions, but the countenance of God, whether it shineth upon our enterprises or not, whether He approves of our designs or not. (*J. Spencer.*)

Ver. 24. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in Thine anger.—*Prayer for correction.* :—I. THE CHRISTIAN'S NEED OF DIVINE CORRECTION. 1. To keep down pride. 2. To overcome sloth. 3. To chastise sin. 4. To quicken grace. II. THE CHRISTIAN'S PRAYER FOR DIVINE CORRECTION. 1. How he would have God correct him. (1) Not in anger. (2) In love. (3) In judgment. 2. Methods of correction. (1) Outward afflictions. Loss of property. Loss of friends. Death of relatives. Personal affliction. (2) Inward afflictions. Hiding of God's face. Discomfort in ordinances. Inability to pray. 3. Blessedness of affliction (*Psa.* xciv. 12, cxix. 71, 75). Lessons—1. To those who are in a declining state. Expect chastisement. 2. To those who are under the rod. Do not repine. Look inward. (*John D. Lane, M.A.*) *Correction in judgment.* :—I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD MUST EXPECT TO BE CORRECTED FOR THEIR SINS. 1. For the good of the soul. It has compelled many to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; for before I was afflicted I went astray." 2. For the conversion of the soul. But why does the rod of correction fall upon Christians? 3. To wean the heart from self-righteousness. 4. To make the backslider sensible of his guilt. 5. Moreover, the corrections of Christians are designed to prepare them for greater mercies, and for future glory. II. SHOULD THE LORD CORRECT HIS PEOPLE IN ANGER, THEY MUST PERISH BEFORE HIM. "The Lord Most High is terrible." If His wrath be kindled, yea, but a little, who can abide the day of His coming? Hence both David and Jeremiah, "Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger," &c., were persuaded, that, if the righteous Governor of the world should visit them in His wrath, their spirits would fail before Him. The stoutest heart must tremble at His reproof. The most fearless must be filled with dismay if they fall into the hands of the living God. III. The text contains THE PRAYER OF AN AWAKENED AND CONTRITE SOUL, that God would correct him with judgment, and not in anger. The word judgment is here used in the sense of discernment, in the same manner as in the seventh Psalm. "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day": that is, He observes and regards the way of His servants, but His indignation burns against the ungodly and the sinner. When the prophet cries, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment," he prays that the Lord would correct him with discernment; that is, that He would remember that he was but dust, and so temper the chastisement with wisdom, love, and mercy, that instead of crushing him it may make him a more humble and dutiful child, and a more faithful and devoted servant. There are certain seasons when this prayer is peculiarly suitable and proper. 1. When the mind is deeply humbled before God under a sense of guilt and misery. 2. The supplication in the text is suitable to every returning backslider. True, I deserve to perish, but Thy dear Son is the Saviour of sinners. For His sake, "pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." I crave Thy mercy in His name; and entreat Thee to restore my soul to the paths of righteousness and peace. 3. In the prospect or under the pressure of any temporal calamity we shall need this prayer. (*R. W. Alton.*) *The beneficent design of discipline.* :—Men think God is destroying them because He is tuning them. The violinist screws up the key till the tense cord sounds the concert pitch; but it is not to break it, but to use it tunelessly, that he stretches the string upon the musical rack. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VER. 4. *Obey My voice, and do them.—Obedience of primary import:—* Much is said about the demoralising effects of army life. Perhaps there is a tendency to moral decline in the army, but one thing about army life is good. It is a good thing to learn the lesson of implicit obedience to properly constituted authority. A Christian must learn this lesson. No man can be a Christian who does not obey God. And why should this be thought a difficult thing? Soldiers do not complain because they are required to obey. The hard thing about a soldier's life is to be required to obey an unreasonable and incompetent leader. Many officers are superior to the men in the ranks only in official position. In all other respects they are inferior. But the Christian is never subjected to this sort of humiliation. He has but one Leader. The pastor is not the Master. Christians are all comrades, all brethren, all equal before one Lord. One is your Master. What He says, we will do. Where He sends, we will go. (*Christian Age.*)

Ver. 5. *Then answered I, and said, So be it, O Lord.—The soul's "Amen":—* Jeremiah was naturally gentle, yielding, and pitiful for the sins and sorrows of his people. Nothing was further from his heart than to "desire the evil day." Nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to have played the part of Isaiah in this decadent period of his people's history. But what was possible to the great evangelic prophet in the days of Hezekiah was impossible now. In Isaiah's case the noblest traditions of the past, the patriotic pride of his people, and the promises of God all pointed in the same direction. But for Jeremiah there was an inevitable divorce between the trend of popular feeling led by the false prophets, and his clear conviction of the Word of God. It must, indeed, have been hard to prove that the prophets were wrong, and he was right; they simply reiterated what Isaiah had said a hundred times. And yet, as he utters the terrible curses and threatenings of Divine justice, and predicts the inevitable fate of his people, he is so possessed with the sense of the Divine rectitude that his soul rises up, and though he must pronounce the doom of Israel, he is forced to answer and say, "Amen, O Lord!" I. THE SOUL'S AFFIRMATION. 1. In Providence. It is not possible at first to say "Amen" in tones of triumph and ecstasy. Nay, the word is often choked with sobs that cannot be stifled, and soaked with tears that cannot be repressed. And as these words are read by those who lie year after year on beds of constant pain; or by those whose earthly life is tossed upon the sea of anxiety, over which billows of care and turmoil perpetually roll—it is not improbable that they will protest as to the possibility of saying "Amen" to God's providential dealings. In reply, let all such remember that our blessed Lord in the garden was content to put His will upon the side of God. Dare to say "Amen" to God's providential dealings. Say it, though heart and flesh fail; say it, amid a storm of tumultuous feeling, and a rain of tears. "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter." 2. In revelation there are mysteries which baffle the clearest thinkers. It must be so whilst God is God. There is no fathoming line long enough, no parallax fine enough, no standard of mensuration, though the universe itself be taken as our unit, by which to measure God. But though we cannot comprehend, we may affirm the thoughts of God. That we cannot understand is due to the immaturity of our faculties. But when He who has come straight from the realms of eternal day steadfastly affirms that which He knows, and bears witness to what He has seen, we receive His witness and say reverently, "Amen, Lord!" 3. In judgment. God's judgments on the wicked are a great deep. Did we know more of sin, of holiness, of the love of God, of the yearning pleadings of His Spirit with men, we should probably understand better how Jeremiah was able to say, "Amen, Lord!" II. THE GROUND OF THE SOUL'S PEACE. "Yea, Father!" When face to face with the mysteries of the atonement, of substitution and sacrifice, of predestination and election, of the unequal distribution of Gospel light, be sure to turn to God as the Father of light, in whom is no darkness, no shadow of unkindness, no note inconsistent with the music of perfect benevolence. III. THE TRIUMPH OF THE AFFIRMING SOUL. "Amen, Hallelujah!" Mark the addition of "Hallelujah" to the "Amen." Here the Amen, and not often the Hallelujah; there the two—the assent and the consent; the acquiescence

and the acclaim; the submission to the will of God, and the triumphant outburst of praise and adoration (Rev. xv. 3, R.V.). (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 8. They obeyed not . . . they did them not. — *Sins of omission* : — I. THE GREAT COMMONNESS OF SINS OF OMISSION. 1. In a certain sense all offences against the law of God come under the head of sins of omission. Every sin is a breach of the all-comprehensive law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." How multitudinous our omissions in respect to this command! Too often we have had other gods beside Him. So, too, in regard to our "neighbour." What sins of omission daily occur in our various relationships—our neighbours, our children, our household. 2. Sins of omission are seen in all who neglect to perform the first and all-essential Gospel command: "Repent and be converted"; "Repent and be baptized"; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." 3. Sins of omission in religious duties. Multitudes neglect the outward worship of God. But others show religious regard; yet what omissions as to prayer; how lax in devotion are the most of us! As to the Bible: left unread! As to service: talents wrapped up in napkin! Our omissions lie upon the horizon of memory like masses of storm-clouds accumulating for a horrible tempest. II. THE CAUSE OF THIS EXCESSIVE MULTIPLICITY OF SINS OF OMISSION. 1. The great cause lies in our evil hearts. Absence of clean heart and right spirit is at the root: "Ye must be born again." 2. The conscience of man is not well alive to sins of omission. While conscience will chastise men for direct acts of wrong, not awake to sins of neglect. 3. These sins are multiplied through indolence. In the face of eternity, life, death, heaven, and hell, multitudes are simply ruined because they neglect the great salvation, and are absolutely too idle to concern themselves. 4. Ignorance. With many ignorance is wilful; have Bible, conscience; yet sin against light and knowledge. 5. Men excuse themselves so readily about these sins of omission. A more convenient season is anticipated for repentance, faith, prayer. 6. Many neglect because of the prevalence of the like conduct. To omit to love and serve the Lord is the custom. But enlightened conscience warns us that custom is no excuse for sin: it will be no plea at the bar of God. III. THE SINFULNESS OF SINS OF OMISSION. They cannot be trivial, for—1. Consider what would be the consequences if God were to omit His mercies to us for one moment! Suppose Jesus had left an omission in His plan of salvation; the whole would have failed, and humanity left without remedy or hope. 2. Reflect what an influence they would have upon an ordinary commonwealth. If one person has a right to omit his duty, another has, and all have—watchman, judge, merchant, husbandman; society soon collapse, kingdom break to pieces. 3. Think how you would judge of omissions towards yourselves. In the case of your servant, you instantly resent it. So in a soldier. Even in your child: to neglect your command is regarded as equally criminal as to commit offence. 4. Consider what God thinks of omissions. Saul was ordered to kill the Amalekites—not one to escape: he saved Agag and best of the cattle; therefore the Lord said, "I have put thee away from being king over Israel!" Ahab was commanded to kill Benhadad on account of great criminality: Ahab only captured him; therefore, "Because thou hast let this man go, thy life shall be for his life!" The man with one talent was condemned because he neglected to use it. IV. THE RESULT AND PUNISHMENT OF SINS OF OMISSION. 1. They will condemn us. "The King shall say, I was hungered and ye gave Me no meat," &c. The absence of virtue rather than the presence of vice condemned them. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." 2. If persevered in, they will effectually shut against us the possibilities of pardon. "He that believeth not"—is there pardon, rescue for him? No; he "is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God." Will the mercy of God blot out sins unrepented of? Nay; sins will cling to us as the leprosy to the house of Gehazi. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 9. And the Lord said unto me, A conspiracy is found—*A sad relapse*:—1. The prophet calls the people's relapse a plot or conspiracy; thereby suggesting, perhaps, the secrecy with which the prohibited worshipers were at first revived, and the intrigues of the unfaithful nobles and priests and prophets, in order to bring about a reversal of the policy of reform. 2. The word further means a *bond*, which is the exact antithesis of the covenant with Jehovah, and it implies that this bond has about it a fatal

strength and permanence, involving as its necessary consequence the ruin of the nation. Breaking covenant with Jehovah meant making a covenant with other gods. If you have broken faith with God in Christ, it is because you have entered into an agreement with another; it is because you have surrendered to the proposals of the tempter, and preferred his promises to the promises of God. (*C. J. Ball, M.A.*)

Ver. 14. **Therefore pray not thou for this people.**—*Futile prayers*:—It is futile to pray for those who have deliberately cast off the covenant of Jehovah and made a covenant with His adversary. Prayer cannot save, nothing can save, the impenitent; and there is a state of mind, in which one's own prayer is turned into sin; the state of mind in which a man prays, merely to appease God, and escape the fire, but without a thought of forsaking sin, without the faintest aspiration after holiness. There is a degree of guilt upon which sentence is already passed, which is "unto death," and for which prayer is interdicted alike by the prophet of the new and of the old covenant. (*C. J. Ball, M.A.*)

Ver. 21. **Prophecy not in the name of the Lord, that thou die not by our hand.**—*Intimidating the prophet*:—Think of Bunyan when he is brought before the judge, and the judge says, "You! a tinker! to go about preaching! Hold your tongue, sit!" "I cannot hold my tongue," says Bunyan. "Then I must send you back to prison unless you promise never to preach again." "If you put me in prison till the moss grows on my eyelids, I will preach again the first moment I get out, by the help of God." (*Life of John Bunyan.*) *Intimidators put to silence*:—There is the story of a conversation between the burgomaster in Hamburg and holy Dr. Ducken when he first began to preach. The burgomaster said to him, "Do you see that little finger, sir? While I can move that little finger, I will put the Baptists down." Mr. Ducken said, "With all respect to your little finger, Mr. Burgomaster, I would ask you another question. Do you see that arm?" "No, I do not see it." "Just so," said Mr. Ducken, "but I do; and while that great arm moves, you cannot put us down, and if it comes to a conflict between your little finger and that great arm, I know how it will end." It was my great joy to see the burgomaster sitting in the chapel at Hamburg, among the audience that listened to my sermon at the opening of the new chapel. The little finger had willingly given up its opposition, and the great arm was made bare. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VERS. 1-6. **Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee.**—*Communion with God in affliction*:—I. **WHY GOD SEES FIT TO AFFLICT HIS CHILDREN BY THE DISPENSATIONS OF HIS PROVIDENCE.** 1. God sometimes afflicts His children to reclaim them from their delusions in religion. They are naturally bent to backsliding. 2. God sometimes afflicts His children to try their sincerity, and give them an opportunity of knowing their own hearts. 3. God sometimes afflicts His children for the purpose of displaying the beauty and excellence of true religion before the eyes of the world. In some cases, at least, we can hardly discover any other important end to be answered by afflicting His peculiar friends, than this, of displaying their superior virtue and piety. II. **WHY THEY ARE DISPOSED TO CONVERSE WITH HIM UNDER HIS AFFLICTING HAND.** 1. Because they want to know why He afflicts them. 2. They wish to know how they should feel and conduct themselves in their afflicted state. 3. They desire to obtain Divine support and consolation. III. **WHAT METHODS THEY TAKE TO CONVERSE WITH GOD IN TIME OF TROUBLE.** 1. By meditating upon the history of His providence. 2. By reviewing the course of His conduct towards themselves through all the past scenes and stages of their lives. 3. By prayer, while they are suffering His fatherly chastisements. For this they are greatly prepared, by musing on His past and present dispensations towards themselves and others. These fill their mouths with arguments, and constrain

them to draw near to God, and make known their wants and desires, their hopes and fears. This subject may teach the children of God—(1) to restrain their unreasonable expectations of outward prosperity in the present life. (2) That adversity may be much more beneficial to them than prosperity. (3) This subject exhibits a peculiar and distinguishing mark of grace, by which every one may determine whether he is or is not a real child of God. It is the habitual disposition of the true children of God to converse with Him from day to day, under all the various dispensations of His providence. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) **Let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments.**—*The judgments of God a lawful subject of human study and consideration* :—1. It is lawful for the saints to enter into the mystery of Divine providence. Providence is the work of God. In its movement we may discern the actings of the Almighty, and if we are properly attentive to it, we may trace the marks of His power, wisdom, faithfulness, goodness, and holiness. 2. The saints are permitted to use familiarity with God in these inquiries. He permits them to state their objections, and to make replies to His answers, to plead with Him, in the language of our text. “Let us plead together,” says He, “put Me in remembrance,” state your objections to any part of My conduct, “declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.” Wonderful condescension! 3. It is of the first importance in the inquiries into the dispensations of Providence, that we retain on our spirits an abiding sense of the essential moral attributes of the Disposer of events. (*T. M'Crie, D.D.*) **Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?**—*The reasons why the wicked are permitted to prosper* :—I. IT DISCOVERS THE INGRATITUDE OF THE HUMAN HEART, and shows the monstrous abuse which men often make of the Divine goodness. Wealth and influence, power and dominion, are the gifts of God, and if suitably improved, are valuable talents. They give individuals many opportunities of being extensively useful, and of doing much good. But, when influence and power are made subservient to gratify the pride, the vanity, and ambition of the sons of men, they are to be accounted the greatest evil. Yet, it will not be denied, that these are sometimes the sad effects which they have produced upon particular individuals. Have not some been guilty of oppression and tyranny, of plunder and robbery, of cruelty and murder? I acknowledge that it is natural enough to wish for prosperity and affluence, power and influence; but, if these blessings were to have the same effect upon us which they have produced in others, would we not account them the greatest curse with which we could be visited? But, though prosperity may not have so shocking an influence upon us as upon some others, if it should minister to covetousness, is it not to be dreaded? Are not these the dispositions which it sometimes excites? Instead of enlarging the heart, and making it more liberal, does it not render men sometimes narrow and contracted? Is not this defeating the end of providence, and perverting its gifts? II. TO BE THE MEANS OF CHASTISING THE REST OF MANKIND. They are allowed to gratify their own bad passions, that they may inflict that punishment upon their fellow-creatures which their irreligion and wickedness deserve. Though we may flatter ourselves that we do not merit correction at the hands of men, none will maintain that we do not deserve it at the hand of God. Have we not been froward and undutiful children? God hath told us, in His Word, that He doth not willingly grieve the children of men; but, when correction becomes necessary, a principle of affection leads Him to inflict it. He hath often made wicked men the instruments of His vengeance, to bring His people back to their duty, and to make them learn righteousness. III. TO AGGRAVATE THEIR GUILT AND TO HEIGHTEN THEIR CONDEMNATION. God often setteth the wicked on high and slippery places, that He may bring them down suddenly, and make their fall the greater. They may move heaven and earth with their ambition, and think that their mountain standeth strong; when, lo! their feet are made to stumble upon the dark mountains, and they go down to the silent grave, where there is neither work, wisdom, knowledge, nor device. IV. THAT WE MAY HOLD HIGHER IN ESTEEM THOSE GOOD MEN WHO MAKE THEIR WEALTH AND INFLUENCE SUBSERVIENT TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND TO THE HAPPINESS OF MANKIND. Blessed be God, there are not a few, who, instead of abusing their prosperity, employ it for the benefit of their fellow-creatures! So far from gratifying their pride, and indulging in luxury, they exert themselves to promote works of industry and charity. They are ready to deny themselves particular enjoyments, that they may contribute to the comfort of those around them. Instead of being selfish and worldly, they are humane and generous. What a blessing is prosperity, when

it is the means of doing good ! Our goodness, it is true, cannot extend to God, and He can receive no benefit from it ; but it may be exercised towards His necessitous creatures, and He considers a kind office done to them as done to Himself. V. THAT THOSE IN INFERIOR CIRCUMSTANCES MAY BE THANKFUL AND CONTENTED WITH THE SITUATION IN WHICH GOD HATH PLACED THEM. Perhaps you are apt to envy those who live in ease and plenty. But are you aware of the temptations to which prosperous and rich men are exposed, and into which they are too apt to fall ? What if affluence should lead you to indulge in pride and vanity, and make you think of yourselves above what you ought to think ? What if it should attach you so much to the world, as in a great measure to overlook eternity altogether ? Oh, never appear dissatisfied with your condition, or give way to discontent. The very meanest have cause for gratitude, because they have still more than they deserve. Let all of us aspire after being poor in spirit and heirs of the kingdom of God ! This is the true riches, of which none can possibly deprive us. (*D. Johnston, D.D.*) *The prosperity of bad men and adversity of good men accounted for :—*I. WICKED MEN, HOW PROSPEROUS SOEVER THEIR OUTWARD CONDITION IN THIS LIFE, ARE NOT IN REALITY SO HAPPY AS WE ARE APT TO IMAGINE. The reason why those wicked men that prosper in the world are reckoned happy is, because the generality of men entertain a wrong notion of happiness. They fancy it consists in having abundance of riches. Whatever real satisfaction or comfort riches can afford, we are bound by the frame of our nature to seek after that satisfaction. But in reality do we not often see health of body, tranquillity of mind, dwelling in a cottage, whilst bodily pains and restless anxieties fly daily about the palaces of kings ? Which shows that happiness is something distinct from riches, something which riches alone can never give us. II. Supposing the wicked men are more happy, and meet with less trouble than other men, let us inquire UPON WHAT ACCOUNTS GOD ALMIGHTY MAY PERMIT THIS, CONSISTENTLY WITH THE CHARACTER OF A WISE, JUST, AND GOOD GOVERNOR OF THE WORLD. Besides the moral enjoyment which springs from virtue only, there are other delights accruing to us from the possession of riches, honour, and secular power. Of these, many wicked men have a greater portion than the virtuous. 1. And the reason is, because some good men are weak in their judgments, and imprudent or indolent in managing their secular affairs ; which exposes them to many inconveniences, and hinders their rising in the world. Now, if we ask why the Almighty permits this to the disadvantage of good men, it is the same as if we should ask why He made men free-agents. The disadvantages virtuous men labour under at present, will doubtless be recompensed, one day or other, by the just and merciful Governor of the world. In the meantime, the solid pleasure they enjoy as the immediate consequence of their goodness, is surely preferable to any external advantages the wicked may procure themselves by their superior cunning and sagacity. 2. Another reason why God may permit wicked men to prosper in the world seems to be the natural effect of His over-flowing goodness. He would give them more time for repentance. 3. Perhaps another reason why the Supreme Being withholds some temporal benefits from good men, which the wicked possess, may be, because He foresees they will prove hurtful to them. Alteration of circumstances often creates a change of manners. And there are some tempers which, I believe, would keep steady to virtue in a scene of adversity, and yet run into open and extreme degrees of vice in a scene of prosperity. II. THE OBJECTION IN THE TEXT SHOULD NOT IN REASON MAKE US ENTERTAIN ANY DISHONOURABLE THOUGHT OF THE DIVINE DISPENSATIONS, BUT RATHER TEACH US TO INFER THE REASONABLENESS AND NECESSITY OF A FUTURE STATE. To know the justness of any scheme, it is necessary to be acquainted with all its parts, and all their mutual relations. How, then, can we determine every particular in the scheme of Providence, of which we must confess ourselves utterly ignorant ? Should a man take upon him to condemn a well-wrought tragedy by only reading one of its scenes, without considering how it was interwoven with the main plot and contrivance of the work, would he not be justly blamed for his partiality ? And is not he more inexcusably partial, who censures the beautiful drama of the Divine government, without knowing the secret contrivance by which it is carried on ? I shall only add one observation more to justify Providence against the objection in the text, which is, that we are frequently mistaken who are really good, and who otherwise ; and, consequently, are very incompetent judges when men are equitably dealt by. (*N. Ball.*) *The prosperity of the wicked :—*I. When you are repining at the prosperity of the wicked,

and feel a consequent inclination to relax from your faith in Christ, remember that, IN THE REVELATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, WE ARE NOWHERE LED TO EXPECT THAT THE WICKED SHALL NOT BE PROSPEROUS HERE. "Ye will not come to Me that ye may have life," was the remonstrance of our Saviour. "This do, and thou shalt live," the injunction everywhere implied:—live,—not amidst the joys of this transitory scene, but at the right hand of God for ever! The treasures of earth were never mentioned by Him to the faithful, but to guard them against their danger, and remind them of a "treasure in heaven." Christ knew the natural opposition of worldly prosperity to the lowly virtues of the Gospel; and, earnest for the everlasting interests of men, guarded them against the desire of things, the possession of which might be fatal:—and, if men would, by ways unwarranted by God, seek what God had forbidden, it was at the double peril of disobeying His commands, and disregarding His counsels. II. THE GOSPEL HAS NOT ONLY FORBIDDEN US TO BE SURPRISED, OR ENVOUS, AT THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED, BUT HAS POSITIVELY SHOWN US THAT A LIFE OF TRIBULATION FOR JESUS' SAKE IS THE PROPER PASSPORT TO HEAVEN. Nothing can be so glorious as the scenes which the Gospel has opened to our faith; but nothing so solemn as those through which we must pass to reach them. We are, in this life, in a state of dangerous apostasy from God: and the glare of prosperity is a light but very ill suited for us to behold. The sufferings of our Lord are held out to our view, that, "looking unto Jesus," who "left us an example, that we should follow His steps," we might take up our cross to do it. Why, then, do you ask, does the way of the wicked prosper? Why, rather ought ye to ask, should the believer in Christ repine at it? Why should he sigh for a state the very opposite to that in which His Saviour walked, and, if gained by sin, gained by means which brought that Saviour to the Cross, and would now open His wounds afresh? III. Another argument which I would use, to check repining at the outward prosperity of sin, is, that IT IS, AT BEST, EXTREMELY OVERRATED, AND ITS NATURE VERY ILL UNDERSTOOD. It is by no means true that prosperity is confined to "the treacherous dealer and the wicked." God has indeed told us, that, to enter into His kingdom, we must meet with opposition, wrestle with contending evils, and pass the time of our sojourning here in fear. But the path, even to temporal blessings, is open to the believer in Christ, though He commands us not to make them the object of our ambition, nor expect them as the consequences of our faith. But, even were this not so, were prosperity confined to sin alone, we surely mistake its nature if its attractions dazzle us, and think but imperfectly of God if we mistrust His goodness. He has not so balanced the good and evil of this life as to make every attraction and every joy lie on the side of sin. "There is no peace to the wicked." "They may live in affluence,—but it is not peace. They may live in indolence,—but it is not peace. They may live in thoughtlessness,—but it is not peace. It is not that peace which a God of everlasting mercy can bestow, of which the soul of man, that was made for God, is capable, and for which it unceasingly longs. In talking of that peace of God, we talk of what it is impossible for those who have not experienced it to conceive. IV. But the comprehensive argument, which closes at once all discussion and all doubts, is THE DISCLOSURE AND ADJUSTMENT OF ALL THE WAYS OF GOD IN THE GREAT DAY OF GENERAL RETRIBUTION. If there be a subject of contemplation sublimer than another, or completely interesting to the soul of reasonable man, it is surely the thought of being led hereafter to behold all the glorious works of the great and eternal God:—to see how, through all the amazing vicissitudes of time, He has conducted the affairs of worlds on worlds; and kept distinct, through all the crossings and confusions of myriads of foes, the strait and narrow path to heaven:—how from the jarring elements He reared the goodly frame of nature, and settled it in peace; and, uniting the still more jarring passions and infidel contentions of mankind, made all conspire to His eternal glory, and co-operate for the universal good! (*G. Mather, M.A.*)

Ver. 2. *Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.*—*God comes nearer to the hearts of His people in their duties than He doth to any hypocritical or formal professor.*—By God's nearness we understand not His omnipresence (that neither comes nor goes), nor His love to His people (that abides), but the sensible, sweet manifestations and outlets of it to their souls (*Psa. cxlv. 18*). Note the limitation of this glorious privilege; it is the peculiar enjoyment of sincere and upright-hearted worshippers. 1. Sincere souls are sensible of God's access to them in

their duties, they feel His approaches to their spirits (Lam. iii. 57). The heart fills apace, the empty thoughts swell with a fullness of spiritual things, which strive for vent. 2. They are sensible of God's withdrawal from their spirits; they feel how the ebb follows the flood, and how the waters abate (Cant. v. 6). 3. The Lord's nearness to the hearts and reins of His people in their duties is evident to them from the effects that it leaves upon their spirits. For look, as it is with the earth and plants, with respect to the approach or remove of the sun in the spring and autumn, so it is here as Christ speaks (Luke xxi. 29). (1) A real taste of the joy of the Lord is here given to men, the fullness whereof is in heaven; hence called (2 Cor. i. 22), "The earnest of His Spirit." And in 1 Peter i. 8, glorified joy, or a short salvation. (2) A mighty strength and power coming into their soul, and actuating all its faculties and graces. When God comes near, new powers enter the soul; the feeble is as David (Psa. cxxxviii. 3.). (3) A remarkable transformation and change of spirit follows it. The sight of God, the felt presence of God, is as fire, which quickly assimilates what is put into it to its own likeness (2 Cor. iii. 18). (4) A vigorous working of the heart heavenward; a mounting of the soul upward. Infer—1. Then certainly there is a heaven and a state of glory for the saints. 2. But, oh! what is heaven? And what that state of glory reserved for the saints? Doth a glimpse of God's presence in a duty go down to the heart and reins? Oh, how unutterable, then, must that be which is seen and felt above, where God comes as near to man as can be! (Rev. xxii. 3, 4.) 3. See hence the necessity of casting these very bodies into a new mould by their resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. xv. 41). 4. Is God so near to His people above all others in the world? How good is it to be near to them that are so near to God! 5. If God be so near to the heart and reins of His people in their duties, oh, how assiduous should they be in their duties! 6. What steady Christians should all real Christians be! For lo, what a seal and witness hath religion in the breast of every sincere professor of it! (*John Flavel*.)

Ver. 5. If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?—*The heroism of endurance*:—Jeremiah had to pay the price of singularity. He had to learn not only to do without the sweet incense of popular favour, but also to stand unflinching even when it turned into the hot breath of hatred. He had to submit not only to be without friends, but to see friends become foes. This experience through which the prophet passed is a cruel one. It either makes a man or mars him, and nearly always hardens him. It creates an indignation, a holy anger sometimes against men, sometimes against the strange, untoward state of affairs, sometimes against God. Jeremiah here is kicking against the pricks which have wounded the feet of men for centuries: how to account for the fact that in a world governed by a righteous God righteousness should often have to suffer so much. His indignant soul, on fire for justice, cries out that it ought not to be so. Jeremiah's wherefore about the wicked is really a why about himself. Why am I bared to the blast in following Thy will and performing Thy command? why are tears and strife my portion? why am I wearied out and left desolate, though I am fighting the Lord's battle? That is the prophet's real complaint. Notice the answer, surely the strangest and most inconsequent ever given. The complaint is answered by a counter-complaint. Jeremiah's charge against God of injustice is met by God's charge against Jeremiah of weakness. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? Though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do (O faint-hearted one!) in the pride of Jordan?" The "pride of Jordan" means the dangerous ground by the river, where the heat is almost tropical and the vegetation is rank. It is jungle, tangled bush wherein wild beasts lurk, leopards and wolves and (at that time also) lions. The answer to the complaint against the hardness of his lot is just the assertion that it shall be harder still. Does it seem an unfeeling answer? It was the answer Jeremiah needed. He needed to be braced, not pampered. He is taught the need of endurance. Only a heroic soul could do the heroic work needed by Israel and by God; and it was the greatest heroism of all which was needed, the heroism of endurance. Nothing worth doing can be done in this world without something of that iron resolution. It is the spirit which never knows defeat, which cannot be worn out, which has taken its stand and refuses to move. This is the "patience" about which the Bible is full; not the sickly counterfeit which so often passes for patience, but

the power to bear, to suffer, to sacrifice, to endure all things, to die, harder still, sometimes, to continue to live. The whole world teaches that patience. Inch by inch each advance has to be gained, fought for, paid for, kept. It is the lesson of all history also, both for the individual and for a body of men who have espoused any cause. Christ's Church has survived through her power to endure. The mustard seed, planted with tears and watered with blood, stood the hazard of every storm, gripped tenaciously the soil, twining its roots round the rocks, reared its head ever a little higher, and spread out its branches ever a little fuller, and when the tempest came held on for very life; and then, never hasting, never resting, went on in the Divine task of growing; and at last became the greatest of trees, giving shelter to the birds of the air in its wide-spreading branches. It is the same secret of success for the individual spiritual life. "In your patience ye shall win your souls." This method is utterly opposed to the world's method of insuring success, which is by self-assertion, aggressive action, force for force, blow for blow. Patience, not violence, is the Christian's safety. Even if all else be lost, it saves the soul, the true life. It gives fibre to the character. It purifies the heart, as gold in the furnace. What do we know of this heroic endurance? In our fight with temptation, in our warfare against all forms of evil, have we used our Master's watchword, and practised our Master's scheme? Think of our temptation in the matter of foreign missions, for example. We are easily made faint-hearted about it. We say that results are disproportionate to the effort; or rather (for that is not true) we are overpowered by the vastness of the work. If we find our small attempt a burden, how can we face the vaster problem of making the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of God and His Christ? If we are wearied in our race with footmen, how can we contend with horses? We are so easily dispirited, not only in Christian enterprise, but also in personal Christian endeavour. We are so soon tempted to give up. We need some iron in our blood. We need to be braced to the conflict again. We need the noble scorn of consequence. What have we done, the best of us, for God or for man? (*Hugh Black.*)

Testing questions.—The text may be applied to—I. DUTIES. If in the ordinary duties of life you have been wearied, how will you be able to meet the higher and special duties to which you may be called? Manfully and courageously face these, and then you may hope to meet the others with strength equal to their performance.

II. TRIALS. If the trials which are common to man tax your patience, how will you do when called to pass through extraordinary? Do not give way under these, but endure them without shrinking, then when the Job-like trials come, you may bear them as he did.

III. TEMPTATIONS. If those, common to man, have taxed your strength, and led you to complain of their severity, how will you do when special and more than ordinary temptations come upon you? Resist the devil in the first temptation, and you will be better able to resist him in the second, and so on.

IV. TROUBLES. Do the ripples on the waters of the sea of life affect you, then how will you do when the surges of the tempest come upon you? Do the dark clouds of the sky frighten you, then how will you feel when the lurid lightning and terrible thunders fill the heavens? (*J. Bate.*)

Comparative estimate of trials.—I. THE UNHAPPY DISPOSITION WHICH SHOWS ITSELF IN MANY PERSONS TO DISQUIET THEMSELVES UNDULY ON ACCOUNT OF COMPARATIVELY SMALL TRIALS. That man should, under any circumstances, seek to become his own tormentor is a singular anomaly, and strikingly proves how sin infatuates the human mind. The desire of happiness is a native and universal feeling in the breast. We do not assert that men are required to stifle all natural feeling, and to maintain a stoical apathy in reference to what we term "inferior trials." The inconveniences and lighter evils of life must be felt. One person is seen to brood over what is called "the badness of the times": another is in trouble, because his mercantile or household affairs are disarranged through the unfaithfulness of servants or dependants: a third is unhappy because the tongue of slander has gone forth against him: and a fourth is out of sorts because he had ardently aspired at something which he has failed to obtain. It is observable, moreover, that persons are often wont to complain in connection with those very points where they have the least possible ground for complaint. This man makes a trial of a bad speculation in trade, though his barns are filled with plenty, and his presses burst out with new wine; and that man makes a trial of certain domestic irregularities, while, in the main, he is thickly encompassed with domestic mercies.

II. THE BEARING WHICH THE DISPOSITION OR PROPENSITY OF WHICH WE HAVE SPOKEN, HAS UPON THE REAL AFFLICTIONS OF LIFE, AS WELL AS UPON THE SOUL'S

SPIRITUAL CONFLICT. 1. In the natural course of things we may expect that man to be ill prepared for a season of sorrow, who is wont to fret and disquiet himself on common and frequently recurring occasions. The mind which is not inured to salutary discipline will, sooner or later, be found an enemy to its own peace. 2. But let us take higher ground, and view the subject in a spiritual light. In the case of the true believer, we cannot, for a moment, doubt that God designs every circumstance which befalls him, however minute, and every trial which comes upon him, however slight, to work for his good. Neither can we doubt that this gracious design is answered or defeated, according to the disposition of mind in which either comforts or crosses are received. 3. All the crosses and inconveniences of life should have the effect of sending the Christian to a throne of grace. No circumstance which threatens to harass the mind is too trivial to be carried to God in prayer, with a view to the obtaining of that assistance which is promised for every time of need. It will seldom, however, be found that persons who yield to the habit of magnifying inferior evils, and discomposing their minds with comparatively trifling occurrences, will see fit to pray for a right spirit in connection with these things, and for grace suited to the occasion. The consequence of the omission can hardly fail to be experienced in the darker day of adversity, when large supplies of strength are needed, and when increased exertion is called for. 4. In spiritual as well as in providential dispensations, the lesser has its bearing upon the greater. A propensity to be discouraged or alarmed, if perchance an envenomed dart is, now and then, hurled from Satan's quiver, or if a cloud occasionally overcasts the soul's experience, is by no means a desirable preparative for that severer discipline of the life of grace, with which few of the Lord's people are entirely unacquainted. **Lessons**—1. The language of Divine reproof should put every Christian upon serious and faithful self-examination. 2. It is well, in a certain way, to anticipate seasons of heavy affliction. Think how soon health may be interrupted, friends removed, schemes defeated, and hopes for ever blasted! Such thoughts, if sanctified in answer to prayer, will have a happy effect upon the general character of your experience. 3. Seasons of intense suffering are often made occasions of signal interpositions in behalf of God's people. Your emergency shall prove your Heavenly Father's opportunity; your heaviest trials shall be made the marked occasions of your realising the greatness of His power, and the intensity of His love. 4. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which imparts to the gloomy foliage of this wilderness world every particle of the radiance with which it is tinged. To see in Christ Jesus, the foundation of our every hope, the source of our strength, the channel of our consolations, the vitality of every spiritual principle and movement in our souls,—this is truly to know Him as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (*W. Knight, M.A.*) *The Christian's triumph*:—One of the greatest battles on record was fought and won, seven hundred years ago, by the merchants and artisans of Brussels against the arms of France. Reduced by famine to the greatest straits, the city one evening opened her beleaguered gates, not to admit the enemy, but that such as were able to carry arms might march out—to make their last throw in the bloody game of war. The night, which was falling down when they came in sight of the banners and tents of France, was spent by their enemies in riot and carousings. It was spent by these wise, brave burghers in seeking rest for to-morrow's fight; and by their leaders, in making the most skillful arrangements. The men of Brussels rose with the dawn, and took what was to some, and might be to all, their last earthly meal. Knowing that they, a few rude townsmen, had no chance against the magnificent host of France unless God helped the fight for home, and wife, and children, and liberty, they cried to heaven for help. Every man made confession, and received the rites administered to the dying. The solemn service concluded, they rose from their knees; closed their ranks; levelled their pikes; and wheeling round so as to throw the glare of the sun in the eyes of the enemy, came down on their lines an avalanche of steel. The charge was irresistible. They bore cuirass and knightly lance before them; and these base-born traders scattered the chivalry of France, like smoke before the wind, and chaff before the whirlwind. This story illustrates a remarkable saying of one who fought many battles, and seldom, if ever, lost any. Asked to what he attributed his remarkable success, he replied, I owe it, under God, to this, that I made it a rule never to despise an enemy. To what warfare is this rule so applicable as to the Christian's; to the battles of the faith; to those conflicts which the believer is called to wage with Satan, the world, and the flesh? In spiritual

matters we are, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and of the Word of God, to steer right between the two; and, to help you forward in this safe and blessed course, let me explain and answer the question of the text. I. MAN IS LESS A MATCH FOR SATAN NOW THAN WHEN SATAN, AT THEIR FIRST ENCOUNTER, PROVED HIMSELF MORE THAN A MATCH FOR MAN. The bravest soldiers hang back from the breach, where, as it belches forth fire and smoke, they have seen the flower of the army fall; mowed down like grass. The bravest seamen dread the storm which has wrecked, with the stout ship, the gallant lifeboat that had gone to save its crew; men saying, If with her brave hands and buoyant power she, whelmed among the waves, could not live in such a sea, what chance for common craft? And what chance for us where our first parents perished? how can guilt stand where innocence fell? Hope there is none for us out of Christ. II. IF WE WERE OVERCOME BY SIN ERE IT HAD GROWN INTO STRENGTH, WE ARE NOW LESS ABLE TO RESIST IT. Fallen though we are, there remains a purity, modesty, ingenuousness, and tenderness of conscience, about childhood, that looks as if the glory of Eden yet lingered over it, like the light of day on hilltops at even, when the sun is down. It has wrung our heart, as we looked on some lost and loathsome creature—the pest of society, and the shame of her sex—to think of the days when she was a smiling infant in a mother's happy arms, or, ignorant of evil, lisped long-forgotten prayers at a mother's knee; when her voice rose in the psalms of family worship, or of the house of God, like the song of a seraph in the skies. Alas! "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" Justifying this sad description, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies,"—alas, how soon does sin cloud life's brightest dawn! If we were no match for the cub, how shall we conquer the grown lion? If we had not strength to pull out the sapling, how are we to root up the tree? Every new act of sin casts up an additional impediment in our way of return to virtue, and to God; until that which was once only a molehill swells into a mountain that nothing can remove, but the faith at whose bidding mountains are removed, and cast into the depths of the sea. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me. III. SHOW HOW THESE DIFFICULTIES ARE TO BE OVERCOME. The Spirit and the flesh, grace and nature, heavenly and earthly influences, are sometimes so fairly balanced, that like a ship with wind and tide acting on her with equal power, but in opposite directions, the believer makes no progress in the Divine life. He loses headway. He does not become worse, but he grows no better; and it is all he can do to hold his own. Sometimes, indeed, he loses ground; falling into old sins. Temptation comes like a roaring sea squall, and, finding him asleep at his post, drives him backward on his course; and farther now from heaven than once he was, he has to pray, Heal my backsliding, renew me graciously, love me freely—For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great. Are we never to grow fit for heaven? is our hope of it but a pious dream, a beautiful delusion? Daily called to contend with temptation, the battle often goes against us; in these passions, and tempers, and old habits, the sons of Zeruiah are too strong for us. Not that we do not fight. That startling cry, "The Philistines are on thee, Samson!" rouses us; we make some little fight; but too often resisting only to be conquered, we are ready to give up the struggle, saying, It is useless; and like Saul in Gilboa's battle, to throw away sword and shield. We would; but that, cheered by a voice from above, and sustained by hope in God's grace and mercy, we can turn to our souls to say, Why art thou cast down, my soul; why is my spirit disquieted within me?—rise; resume thy arms; renew the combat; never surrender—Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Fearful odds*:—I. The troubles of the MIND in this life are often sharp and bitter, enough to tax its powers to the seeming limit of endurance. When the mind looks back upon its past history, views its present state, and anticipates its future destiny, and finds in them respectively occasions of regret, shame, and alarm, it is filled with acute suffering. And if this survey is directed to its moral condition and relations, if it is led to view itself as endowed with a capacity to know and choose good and evil, as having its being under the government of God, bound to obey His laws, and liable to answer at His throne for all its faults and offences, it tastes the bitterness of an accusing conscience, and is stung with keen remorse, and agitated with horrible dread. Yet, in such moments of unwonted moral illumination, we do but guess of that which shortly shall be. What the eye then sees, it sees, after all, but "through a glass darkly." And

oh ! if the glimpse be so horrible, what shall be the naked vision ? If such periods be so rich in suffering, what shall be the eternity they foreshadow ? For memory is now exceedingly imperfect, and self-knowledge partial, and the horrors of the prospect before us mitigated by the medium of future opportunity and preparation, through which they are seen. Time covers up much of our wickedness from ourselves ; and self-love and the "deceitfulness of sin" soften the ugliness of our faults ; and futurity presents a thousand avenues of escape, and "convenient seasons" of reformation. Thus we, now have resorts and refuges whither we can betake ourselves from the arrows of conscience. Then, oh ! "if in this land of peace wherein we trust,"—wherein there is so much in which the soul may confide, so much to stay it up, and give it quietness in reference to its controversy and reckoning with God,—we find the sense of our sinfulness and the apprehensions of wrath too much for us, a wearisome "burden too heavy to be borne," what, oh ! what "shall we do in the swelling of Jordan," when "the waters shall overflow our hiding-places" ? And if "a wounded spirit we cannot bear," now, while there are so many nostrums of our own to soothe its pains, while there is a sovereign balm at hand to heal it, and a good Physician near to bind it up ; how, oh ! how shall we endure its smart, when "indignation shall vex it as a thing that is raw" beneath its own eye ; and the eye of God, shining into it with an insufferable brightness, shall give it a keen sense of what it has been, is, and shall be, and all the universe cannot afford it a covert, or a balsam to assuage its agony ? II. THE BODY has its pains, too, in this life, and they are many and exquisite. We are "fearfully" as well as "wonderfully made," compacted of an infinite number of frail, delicate, and sensitive fibres, which are broken and lacerated by very trivial causes and accidents. What, then, may be the sufferings of which an immortal and "spiritual body" may be capable ? And how intolerable the anguish, of which the refined and exquisite texture of that indestructible and everlasting organisation which awaits us at the resurrection, may be susceptible ! III. We are here forced to endure distresses of estate, of OUTWARD AND RELATIVE SITUATION. Here is one who wears the outward paraphernalia of consequence and prosperity, but there is a worm gnawing at the heart of his happiness. There is some hidden mischief that spoils all ; some vicious, or sickly, or idiot child, it may be, some wayward spirit in his family, some "root of bitterness" in his domestic circumstances, which men either do not see, or justly estimate, that poisons all his good things. Yonder is a man who might be happy, if there were not so many above him in society, whose level he cannot reach. A little matter will suffice to destroy the sweetness of a thousand blessings. Now, if we find it so hard to bear the inconveniences and annoyances of this life, where is the strength to endure the discomforts of a situation in a world, where all the society is vile and malignant, "hateful, and hating one another," and all the circumstances fraught with nothing but mortification, disgrace, restraint, impotent desire, ineffectual effort, and hopeless resistance ? Oh ! then, let the exhaustion and vexation wherewith our Omnipotent Antagonist makes known His power in the milder visitings of His displeasure that reach us this side the grave, persuade us to leave off our mad rebellion, and seek a timely peace. (*R. A. Hallam, D.D.*)

Gradations of trial :—I. TO THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BY TRIFLING DIFFICULTIES IN THE SERVICE OF GOD. To renounce Christian service because of its difficulties, is to faint among the footmen, and ultimately to contend with the horses. For how wilt it be when awakened conscience, with its multiplied rebukes, assails thee ? How wilt thou assuage the mourning over lost opportunities, and the deep remorse called up by the retrospect of a wasted life ? II. TO THOSE WHO SUCCEED TO BUT FEEBLE TEMPTATIONS. Take the case of one who has recently fallen into the commission of sin—open, known sin. The inducements to commit the great transgression were not powerful in themselves, but the unhappy victim was ensnared almost without resistance ; perhaps from want of vigilance, or it may have been through desperate carelessness. The circumstances may even have proved favourable for a triumph over the powers of darkness. A few urgent cries for deliverance would have been successful, escape was close at hand, but the effort, alas ! was not made, or feebly made ; and now the memory of that sin haunts the conscience, destroys the peace, and embitters all the joys of life. Falling thus easily into the wiles of Satan, what will become of you when he cometh in like a flood ? How will you endure when resistance must be unto blood striving against sin ? In that hour, unless the heart be established by grace, you will be driven like chaff from the threshing-floor. Or, take the case of the young man

who, while yet in his father's house, surrounded by all the amenities of domestic love, and sheltered by the sanctions of a Christian home, has fallen, nevertheless, into sinful habits. What will become of him when all these restraints are removed ?

III. TO THOSE WHO SINK UNDER LIGHT AFFLICTIONS. It is not insensibility which is required of us, because there can be no courage in bearing what we do not feel ; nor are we to sink into despair in the hour of suffering, because that would sacrifice the virtue of the trial. The happy medium is prescribed (Heb. xii. 5). It is, however, a very narrow pathway this, between too much and too little feeling of Divine chastisement. There is too much sensibility when we are rendered incapable of the worship of God, or are thrown out of sympathy with our fellow-men, or when we are utterly absorbed in sorrow to the neglect of all the pressing claims of duty. There is too little feeling of Divine chastisement when we are not by its agency brought to faithful heart-searching, and to anxious inquiry respecting the purpose of our Heavenly Father in the correction. Let us look at all our trials as opportunities of personal advantage. The exercise of patience is of itself a grand moral lesson. To be joyous in tribulation is greater grace than to be zealous in the time of strength. It may help us in the season of depression and suffering to compare our condition with that of others. The most accumulated of distresses, the strangest combination of griefs, will not make us the worst off in the world. Least of all can we count our sorrows against His "who gave Himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." We can also in the midst of all afflictions anticipate the rapidly approaching hour of deliverance. We shall presently cast off all earth's calamities as the drops of a summer shower that have scarcely penetrated through our garments.

IV. TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT PROFITING BY FAVOURABLE PROVIDENCES. One of the later Latin poets has an apologue on the missing of opportunity worthy of our attention. A visitor to the studio of Phidias having inspected the statues of the different deities, inquired the name of one unknown object. It had winged feet,—to show how swiftly it flies ; its features were covered with hair,—because, when approaching the spectator, it is rarely identified ; it was bald behind,—because when once gone none can seize upon it ;—closely following at its heels was a slavish form. The first is Opportunity,—the last Repentance. Men miss the goddess Opportunity, and fall into the arms of Repentance. "So are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." (IV. G. Lewis.)

The progressive trials in life's mission :—The preceding verses display two things in the spiritual history of the prophet, which good men in all ages have often deeply felt—1. An apparent incongruity between a fundamental article of religious belief, and the common facts of society. The righteousness of God he grasped with the tenacity of an earnest faith, it lay as the basis of all his religious views ; and yet the facts of society, everywhere, seemed to contradict it. He saw, on all hands, the wicked prosperous and happy. 2. An incongruity between the fundamental spirit of religion and the passing feelings of the moment. The underlying spirit of religion is love ; love to God and love to man—love even to enemies ; but the prophet here expresses feelings in direct opposition to this spirit. How does he feel towards these wicked men ? Commiseration ? No, vengeance ! Now, the text must be regarded as a gentle but impressive reproof, addressed by the great God to the prophet, for his want of forbearance and self-control.

I. THE TRIALS IN LIFE'S MISSION ARE OF VARIOUS DEGREES OF POWER IN THE HISTORY OF THE SAME MAN.

1. None ever sailed the sea of mortal life and found every wind and tide propitious, the ocean always calm, and the horizon ever bright. But we are to speak of trials of a certain class, not the trials which come upon a man independent of his conduct, such as physical pain, bereavement, &c. ; rather of such as are connected with the prosecution of his duties,—the trials of endeavour. 2. Every man has a mission ; and every man who endeavours to fulfil it will meet with trials.

(1) There are trials in the endeavour to get knowledge. These obstruct the child in studying his alphabet, and the sage in grappling with the last problem. (2) There are trials in the endeavour to get a living. (3) There are trials in the endeavour to get moral excellence. (4) There are trials in his endeavour to serve his age. What stolid ignorance—what warping prejudices—what base habits—what moral obtuseness—what indifference, ingratitude, and sometimes malignity !

II. THE MAN WHO FAILS TO CONTEND SUCCESSFULLY WITH THE LESSER TRIALS, WILL NOT BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND THE GREATER. This principle is capable of application to all the departments of action to which we have referred ; but we shall apply it exclusively to the comparative difficulties of getting religion in

different periods of life. 1. We apply it to youth and age. With youth there are docility of disposition, tenderness of feeling, and freedom of intellect. As age comes on these disappear, and prejudices, indifference, and confirmed habits take their place. 2. We apply it to health and disease. There is required, especially in adult life and for investigating minds, a large amount of mental abstraction as the necessary means of attaining religion. Disease and suffering are not only unfavourable to such abstraction, but, in many cases, necessarily prevent its exercise. 3. We apply it to life and death. What is religion? The surrendering of our all to God,—the yielding up of ourselves as a living sacrifice. How can the man, therefore, who cannot resign himself to a commercial loss, or who responds most inadequately, if at all, to the claims of benevolence in life, be able, cheerfully, to yield his friends, property, and all he has, and is, to the great God in death? (*Homilist.*) *The less and the greater conflict* :—The Christian life is an exercise; necessarily a trial of strength and scene of discipline. But in the order of nature and providence there is a wise gradation, a benevolent introduction from the lesser to the greater ills of life. Steadfastness, patience, cheerful confidence in the smaller and less dangerous conflicts of life, will discipline and adapt us to bear the fiery assaults of the enemy. I. ORDINARY LIFE, COMMON EVERYDAY LIFE, IS THE "RUNNING WITH THE FOOTMEN," IS "THE LAND OF PEACE, WHERE WE ARE SECURE." It tries our temper, our patience, our principles. It puts us to the proof whether we honour God most and best. Look where you will, be what you may, life is a trial. Riches, learning, piety, nothing can ward off trouble. It is a condition, not an accident of humanity. II. THERE IS A BENEVOLENT PREPARATION AND EDUCATION FOR GREATER AND MORE DISTRESSING CONFLICTS BY ACCUSTOMING US TO THOSE WHICH ARE COMMON. The unerring eye sees the cup, the strong fatherly hand measures the draught. But we must bear in mind, when we have to tread the winepress alone, that God has a purpose in every vexation of daily life, in every cross, in every baffled enterprise, in every silent tear; and that that purpose is to prepare us by steadfastness in what is little and easy to bear, for confidence in Him under greater perils, in troubles which are hard to bear. The light in the darkness of to-day's disappointment is designed to make us hold fast the lamp against the hour of that "darkness which may be felt." Let no one think these lessons of daily life unimportant. "He that despiseth little things shall perish by little and little." We must learn the secret of strength while running with the footmen. III. IN THIS DIVINE REMONSTRANCE IT IS DISTINCTLY IMPLIED THAT WE SHALL BE CALLED TO CONTENT WITH THE HORSEMEN. The future is dark with shadows, but the Lord's words will hold good of us all. Prepared or unprepared we must meet the storm, and if a little rain frighten us, how shall we meet it? Our sins, our weaknesses, our temptations, the virulence of the enemy, all render the coming struggles inevitable. Whatever you have gone through in this way is but a preparation for the hour of darkness; you will be called to contend with an enemy stronger than yourself, as a horseman is stronger than a footman; and you will be trodden down unless you are clothed with the strength of Him who is able to make you confident, "though a host should encamp against you." (*B. Kent.*) *Trivial trouble* :—We condole with ourselves about troubles which are nothing but passing inconveniences; pin-pricks are crucifixions. The fact is we bewail ourselves so continually and piercingly because we have little or no real trouble. Consider the sorrows of your neighbours, the misfortunes and crushing trials of your friends, and, in comparison, your troubles are absurd. Landsmen crossing the sea are full of anxiety and protest if only a slight breeze rock the ship; they are in anguish as if they suffered shipwreck; but the old salt, who has known the wrath of the ocean, smiles at their fretfulness and fear: and our neighbours and friends, who know what trouble is, listen with a compassionate smile to the glib recital of our toy tragedies. Our lamentations over this, that, or the other trifle are convincing proof that we are well off; one genuine misfortune, one shattering thunderbolt, would hush our woful tale. In the meantime we make more ado about a crumpled rose leaf than thousands of noble men and women do about a crown of thorns. The age in which we live tends to intensify sensitiveness, and we need to be on our guard against magnifying molehills into mountains and thistles into forests. We are taken care of on every side, our thousand artificial wants are promptly and ingeniously met, we have facilities and luxuries innumerable, until we become hyper-sensitive, and feel ourselves martyrs if the wind blows a little hot or cold, if we suffer toothache, or are overtaken by "the pleasant trouble of the rain." The

habit of observing these shallow troubles, nursing them, talking about them, making far more of them than we justly ought to make, is to be carefully watched. It tends to impair the largeness, strength, and heroism of the soul, and to leave us unfortified against the real trials which most likely await us a little farther on. If the footmen weary us, how shall we contend with horses? A calm, wise, reticent way of bearing ordinary irritations, annoyances, and misfortunes will discipline and brace us to play our part worthily when we must battle with the avalanche, earthquake, and flood. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Prepare for greater things* :—If they cannot face the candle, what will they do when they see the sun? (*Demosthenes.*) *Effort easier now than it will be in the future* :—If, in early life, when sin was comparatively weak and conscience was comparatively strong, we were so easily and so often overcome by temptation, what hope for us when this order is reversed; when conscience has become weak and sin grown strong? If we were no match for the cub, how shall we conquer the grown lion? If we had not strength to pull out the sapling, how are we to root up the tree? If it exceeded our utmost power to turn the stream near its mountain cradle, how shall we turn the river that, roaring and swollen, pours its flood on to the sea? If we could not resist the stone on the brow of the hill, how shall we stop it when gathering speed at every turn, and force at every bound, it rushes into the valley with resistless might? Sin gaining such power by time and habit. **And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?**—*The land of peace* :—

I. EXPOSTULATION. 1. God has appointed to all of us our peculiar trials; some have a heavy burden, and are inclined, on looking upon the events which befall them, to join in the complaint of the patriarch, "All these things are against me." "Deep calleth unto deep," &c. (*Psa. xlii. 7*); while that which has fallen to the lot of others is so slight as hardly to be called trial at all. The point in question, however, is not as to the degree of trial, but as to the way in which it is borne, and the results it is producing. All trials have their own work to perform, their result to produce, which could be produced in no other way: but then let us ask ourselves individually, Are these trials producing that result in my own case? We know what those fruits are; the patience, the bringing under the impatient and rebellious will, and the disciplining it to wait in humble submission upon God, the experience of self, and of the evil within, of God's love as exactly suiting the need felt—the hope, not impulsive and uncertain, but sure and steady, and making not ashamed. 2. Similar thoughts may be suggested with regard to our conflict with sin and internal corruption. We are apt to complain of the difficulties of our Christian course. The way of self-denial and cross-bearing is found to be a hard way, the power of indwelling corruption is great, and love is cold. This is all true; but God warned us on our setting out, that the race we were engaging in was no easy matter, but that it would call for every energy, and that at no time could vigilance be laid aside with safety. The question is, then, have those difficulties complained of led to increased distrust of self—more constant watchfulness? There may be greater difficulties yet to be overcome, a greater and more important work to be done for the Master's sake, and how can utter failure be avoided in these more difficult contests, unless we are gaining ground in that to which we have already been called? The question is (and this point is a most important one), not what success might you be gaining under other conditions, with temptations less strong, with fuller opportunities of good, and so forth; but in that particular conflict to which you are called, with those very besetting sins, prone to this infirmity or that, are you striving in the strength of the Lord earnestly and unremittingly? 3. There is a thought which may be brought to our minds by the typical idea familiarly attached to Jordan, as the emblem of death. Is there not often too wide a difference between a Christian employed in the active duties of life, and the same man when cast upon a bed of sickness, and knowing that perhaps his end may be near? There is necessarily a difference in the demonstration of feeling, but should there be this difference in the whole tone as it were of our religion? Unless now, while all is peaceful, and matters are going on in their accustomed course, there is the habitual living upon Christ, with a frequent sense of His presence, and delight in communion with Him, how shall we do in the swelling of Jordan? II. ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE CONVERSE THOUGHT. If you have been faithful in that which is less, there is room for hope that you will be upheld in that which is greater, that if you have not been wearied and neglectful in the lesser conflict in which you have

already been engaged, you will not be suffered to fall or be overcome in any that may yet threaten you. Have you misgivings and doubts as to future attacks of sin, and the strength of temptation under some new circumstances which may hereafter arise? As far as your own strength is concerned there is indeed much reason for that fear, but you know whom you have believed, whose strength has been put forth for you, on whose arm you have leant in the past, and therefore although your race were to become far more arduous than it is now, although hundreds of difficulties now unforeseen should spring up into being, yet you will not doubt His love, or distrust His power. What you have learnt of His past faithfulness and love forbids you to be apprehensive for the future; you will trust and not be afraid, knowing that you can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you. The question is worthy of serious consideration, especially by those who, convinced of the vanity of earth's gratifications, and of the value of the Christian portion, are yet withholding their hearts from Christ, and are yet unwilling to be wholly His. This, indeed, is the land of peace wherein you trust; but is yours indeed a true peace which will abide? Peace is truly offered, reconciliation provided, all ready on God's part. Peace will surely follow upon pardon—upon the purging away of sin in the blood of Jesus, but is that peace truly yours now? (*J. H. Holford, M.A.*)

Then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?—*The swelling of Jordan*.—I. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND PRIMARY MEANING OF THE WORDS. Like many of the names that occur in Old Testament Scripture, that of Jeremiah—"raised up," or "appointed by God,"—has a peculiar significance, if we consider the duties, important, yet hazardous, he was called upon to discharge during successive reigns. Jeremiah was very young when the Word of the Lord first came to him, in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, while he was resident at Anathoth, his native city. There, after the prophetic gift was imparted, he continued to live for several years, until the hostility, not only of his fellow-townsmen, but of the members of his own family having been aroused, on account, probably, of the holiness of his life, and the fidelity of his remonstrances, he quitted Anathoth, and took up his residence at Jerusalem. The finding of the Book of the Law, five years after he had begun to prophesy, must have had a powerful influence on the mind of Jeremiah, in whom, doubtless, the young and right-minded king Josiah found valuable help in the efforts he put forth with a view to promote national reformation. No sooner, however, was the influence of the court in favour of true religion withdrawn, than Jeremiah became an object of attack, as he had doubtless been long an object of dislike, on the part of those whose anger had been roused by his rebukes. This bitterness of opposition continued during successive reigns, and at various times his life was threatened. At the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, he was "put in confinement by Pashur, the chief governor of the house of the Lord"; but he seems soon to have been liberated, for we find that he was not in prison at the time when Nebuchadnezzar's army commenced the siege of Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah had severe trials and manifold difficulties and discouragements to contend against. His counsels were rejected, and his voice was lifted up in the name of Jehovah seemingly in vain; his soul yearned with solicitude and tender affection towards those who turned a deaf ear to his admonitory voice, despised his "counsels," and "would have none of the reproofs" he was commissioned to utter. By "footmen" some understand the Philistines and Edomites, whose armies were composed principally of infantry, and by "horses" the Chaldeans, who had abundance of cavalry and chariots in their army, and who subsequently ravaged Palestine, at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. But whether such be the force of the allusion or not, the gist of the argument seems to be as follows:—if lesser trials seem hard to be borne; if earthly losses have a sting of bitterness, and often inflict a severe wound; is there not need of holy resolution, based on a sure foundation, when, in addition to minor ills, as in the swelling of Jordan, which periodically overflowed its banks in the time of harvest, men's lives might be placed in jeopardy, their flocks exposed to lions driven out of their lairs, and the produce of the harvest-fields submerged or swept away; so the more ordinary trials of life, which yet demanded patience and meekness, would be followed by graver emergencies, such as a heaven-derived and supported hope, resting on no insecure or shifting foundation, but upon the Rock, the "Rock of Ages," could alone enable men to bear up under; when, so to speak, the heavens grew dark, the waters raged, the banks were overflowed, the lashing hail fell, the earth "shook and trembled," the lightning glanced and the thunder rolled, as in the severity of

an almost tropical storm? "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

II. PRACTICAL LESSONS, APPLICABLE TO VARIOUS CLASSES OF PERSONS. 1. To those who are careless about religion and its claims. It were almost ludicrous, if it were not also most melancholy, to notice man, who is indebted to God for all that he possesses, thus standing to "defy the Omnipotent in arms"; yet such is the attitude assumed by every one who defies, maligns, insults the Great Benefactor, who, if strong to save, is also mighty to inflict just and condign punishment upon His foes. "Now, consider this," says the Psalmist, "ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." 2. To the undecided. The position resembles that of a man on shifting sand, liable to the encroachment of the swiftly flowing stream. Ah! if at certain times uneasiness could not be banished, but care ate as a canker into the heart of what had the semblance of joy; an angry God, as it were, seen above; the abyss of darkness opening beneath; "blackness of darkness," as if around; what need of arriving at a proper and satisfactory decision! Now, while mercy can be found; while God's invitation through Christ is heard, of "turning to the Stronghold as a prisoner of hope"; for if lesser difficulties have been perplexing; if grief and disappointment have already planted furrows on the brow, "what shall be the end of them that will not obey the Gospel of God"; who will not comply with a Saviour's bidding, nor give their minds to the truth, nor allow of the Holy Spirit's action upon the heart? 3. To such as are living in antagonism and opposition to God's holy mind and will. Judgment may appear to be deferred; it is impending nevertheless—God hath spoken it. 4. To doubting Christians. Pilgrim, come: there "is bread enough, and to spare." Tempted one, come: strength shall be given and decision imparted to repel the evil suggestion, as Paul at Melita cast aside the viper that sprang out of the fire, and fastened upon his hand. Mourner, approach; the Friend of mourners can support under earthly blanks and losses. (A. R. Bonar.)

The swelling of Jordan.—I. CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MAKE DEATH MORE APPALLING THAN ANY OTHER CALAMITY. 1. Death must be met alone. 2. Not only the solace of thine accustomed society, but every other temporal result will then fail thee. 3. Death ushers us into a new and strange world. Well may flesh and blood shrink from the prospect of being effectually unhinged from all that is usual and accustomed—effectually divested of every material and earthly association, and of dipping its foot in the brink of that cold river, whose flood is appointed to roll over the head of all flesh. 4. Our great Enemy, as in all our trials so in this especially, will be at hand to improve it to our ruin.

II. TO EVERY SINCERE BELIEVER IN CHRIST THE HORROR WITH WHICH THE ABOVE CIRCUMSTANCES INVEST DEATH IS ENTIRELY DISPELLED. 1. Although the Christian, in the trying hour of dissolution, cannot, any more than others, fall back upon the sympathy and support of his fellow-men, still he is not left in the pitiful plight of the worldling and sinner to encounter death alone (Psa. xxiii. 4). 2. What is it to him, if all earthly stays and confidences be broken up? He has not built his hopes of eternity on refuges of lies. He has "an anchor of the soul sure and stedfast." He has first the sure word of promise, assuring him that his Lord will be with him when he passes through the rivers (Is. xliii. 2). And then he has the gracious and glorious work of atonement and mediation, upon which is based the everlasting covenant which God has made with him in Christ, and from the consideration of which he may draw up endless supplies of peace and satisfaction, even in those dark hours of disquietude. 3. It follows next to speak of the acquaintance which the Christian's soul has during life contracted with the new sphere into which the swelling of Jordan bears him away. Some regards and respects to things terrestrial he must have entertained as dwelling on the earth—but this home, the home of his affections, has never, since he became a sincere Christian, been situated here below. This is only the house of his pilgrimage, and he accounts it so to be. While walking on the earth he has his "conversation in heaven." Accordingly death ushers him into no strange scene, and introduces him to no strange company. No! he is already "come to Mount Zion," &c. (Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24). 4. The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" is at hand to wrestle with the lion who "walketh about seeking whom he may devour," and to bear away triumphantly from the conflict his own redeemed servant without the loss of a hair of his head, thus asserting his claim to "divide a portion with the great, and to divide the spoil with the strong." (Dean Goulburn.)

The swellings of Jordan.—If troubles, slow as footmen, surpass us, what will we do when they take the feet of horses? and if now in our lifetime we are beaten back and submerged of

sorrows because we have not the religion of Jesus to comfort us, what will we do when we stand in death, and we feel all around about us "the swelling of Jordan"? What a sad thing it is to see men all unhelped of God, going out to fight giants of trouble; no closet of prayer in which to retreat, no promise of mercy to soothe the soul, no rock of refuge in which to hide from the blast. Oh, when the swift coursers of trouble are brought up, champing and panting for the race, and the reins are thrown upon their necks, and the lathered flanks at every spring feel the stroke of the lash, what can we on foot do with them? How can we compete with them? If, having run with the footmen, they wearied us, how can we contend with horses? We have all yielded to temptation. We have been surprised afterwards that so small an inducement could have decoyed us from the right. How insignificant a temptation has sometimes captured our soul. And if that is so, my dear brother, what will it be when we come to stand in the presence of temptation that prostrated a David, and a Moses, and a Peter, and some of the mightiest men in all God's kingdom? If the footmen are too much for us, won't the odds be more fearful against us when we contend with horses? But my text suggests something in advance of anything I have said. We must all quit this life. Oh, when the great tides of eternity arise about us, and fill the soul and surround it, and sweep it out towards rapture or woe, ah, that will be "the swelling of Jordan." Our natural courage won't hold us out then. However familiar we may have been with scenes of mortality, however much we may have screwed our courage up, we want something more than natural resources. When the north-east wind blows off from the sea of death, it will put out all earthly lights. The lamp of the Gospel, God-lighted, is the only lamp that can stand in that blast. The weakest arm holding that shall not be confounded; the strongest one neglecting that shall stumble and die. Oh, I rejoice to know that so many of God's children have gone through that pass without a shudder. Someone said to a dying Christian: "Isn't it hard for you to get out of this world?" "Oh, no," he says, "it is easy dying, it is blessed dying, it is glorious dying"; and then he pointed to a clock on the wall, and he said: "the last two hours in which I have been dying, I have had more joy than all the years of my life." General Fisk came into the hospital after the battle, and there were many seriously wounded, and there was one man dying, and the general said: "Ah, my dear fellow, you seem very much wounded. I am afraid you are not going to get well." "No," said the soldier, "I am not going to get well, but I feel very happy." And then he looked up into the general's face, and said: "I am going to the front!" But there is one step still in advance suggested by this subject. If this religion of Christ is so important in life, and so important in the last hours of life, how much more important it will be in the great eternity. Alas! for those who have made no preparation for the future! When the sharp-shod hoofs of eternal disaster come up panting and swift to go over them, how will they contend with horses? And when the waves of their wretchedness rise up, white and foamy, under the swooping of eternal storms, and the billows become more wrathful and dash more high, oh, what, what will they do "amid the swelling of Jordan"? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Are you prepared to die?*—I. This is an EXCEEDINGLY PRACTICAL QUESTION. How wilt thou do? is the inquiry. There are some subjects which are more or less matters of pure faith and personal feeling; and though all Christian doctrines bear more or less directly upon the Christian life, yet they are not what is commonly meant by practical subjects. Our text, however, brings us face to face with a matter which is essentially a matter of doing and of acting: it asks how we mean to conduct ourselves in the hour of death. Christians may differ from me on some points, but I am sure that here we are united in belief—we must die, and ought not to die unprepared. II. It is UNDOUBTEDLY A PERSONAL QUESTION. How wilt "thou" do? It individualises us, and makes us each one to come face to face with a dying hour. Now we all need this, and it will be well for each one of us to look for a minute into the grave. We are too apt to regard all men as mortal but ourselves. The ancient warrior who wept because before a hundred years were passed he knew his immense army would be gone, and not a man remain behind to tell the tale, would have been wiser if he had wept also for himself, and left alone his bloody wars, and lived as a man who must one day die, and find after death a day of judgment. Each one of you must die. We all come into the world one by one, and will go out of it also alone. We had better therefore take the question up as individuals, seeing that it is one in which we shall be dealt with singly, and be unable then to claim or use the help of an earthly friend.

III. It is one of the MOST SOLEMN questions. Death and life are stern and awful realities. To say that anything "is a matter of life and death," is to bring one of the most emphatic and solemn subjects under our notice. Now, the question we are considering is of this character, and we must deal with it as it becomes us, when we investigate a subject involving the everlasting interest of souls.

IV. This question was put by way of *REBUKE* to the prophet Jeremiah. He seems to have been a little afraid of the people among whom he dwelt. They had evidently persecuted him very much, and laughed him to scorn; but God tells him to make his face like flint, and not to care for them, for, says He, If thou art afraid of them, "how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" This ought to be a rebuke to every Christian who is subject to the fear of man. There is an old proverb, that "he is a great fool that is laughed out of his coat," and there was an improvement on it, that "he was a greater fool who was laughed out of his skin"; and there is another, that "he is the greatest fool of all who is laughed out of his soul." He that will be content to be damned in order to be fashionable, pays dear indeed for what he gets. Oh, to dare to be singular, if to be singular is to be right; but if you are afraid of man, what will you do in the swelling of Jordan? The same rebuke might be applied to us when we get fretful under the little troubles of life. You have losses in business, vexations in the family—you have all crosses to carry—but my text comes to you, and it says, "If you cannot bear this, how will you do in the swelling of Jordan?" When one of the martyrs, whose name is the somewhat singular one of Pommily, was confined previous to his burning, his wife was also taken up upon the charge of heresy. She, good woman, had resolved to die with her husband, and she appeared, as far as most people could judge, to be very firm in her faith. But the jailer's wife, though she had no religion, took a merciful view of the case as far as she could do so, and thought, "I am afraid this woman will never stand the test, she will never burn with her husband, she has neither faith nor strength enough to endure the trial"; and therefore, one day calling her out from her cell, she said to her, "Lass, run to the garden and fetch me the key that lies there." The poor woman ran willingly enough; she took the key up and it burned her fingers, for the jailer's wife had made it red hot; she came running back crying with pain. "Ay, wench," said she, "if you cannot bear a little burn in your hand, how will you bear to be burned in your whole body?" and this, I am sorry to add, was the means of bringing her to recant the faith which she professed, but which never had been in her heart. I apply the story thus: If we cannot bear the little trifling pangs which come upon us in our ordinary circumstances, which are but as it were the burning of your hands, what shall we do when every pulse beats pain, and every throb is an agony, and the whole tenement begins to crumble about the spirit that is so soon to be disturbed? V. The question may be put as a MATTER OF CAUTION. There are some who have no hope, no faith in Christ. Now I think, if they will look within at their own experience, they will find that already they are by no means completely at ease. The pleasures of this world are very sweet; but how soon they cloy, if they do not sicken the appetite. After the night of merriment there is often the morning of regret. "Who hath woe? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." It is an almost universal confession that the joys of earth promise more than they perform, and that in looking back upon them, the wisest must confess with Solomon, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Now if these things seem to be vanity while you are in good bodily health, how will they look when you are in sickness? If vanity while you can enjoy them, what will they appear when you must say farewell to them all? VI. I use the question as EXCITING MEDITATION in the breasts of those who have given their hearts to Christ, and who consequently are prepared to die whenever the summons may come. Well, what do we mean to do, how shall we behave ourselves when we come to die? I sat down to try and think this matter over, but I cannot, in the short time allotted to me, even give you a brief view of the thoughts that passed through my mind. I began thus, "How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?" Well, as a believer in Christ, perhaps, I may never come there at all, for there are some that will be alive and remain at the coming of the Son of Man, and these will never die. A sweet truth, which we place first in our meditation. I may not sleep, but I must and shall be changed. Then I thought again, "How shall I do in the swelling of Jordan?" I may go through it in the twinkling of an eye. When Ananias, a martyr, knelt to lay his white head upon the block, it was said to him as he closed

his eyes to receive the stroke, "Shut thine eyes a little, old man, and immediately thou shalt see the light of God." I could envy such a calm departing. Sudden death, sudden glory; taken away in Elijah's chariot of fire, with the horses driven at the rate of lightning, so that the spirit scarcely knows that it has left the clay, before it sees the brightness of the beatific vision. Well, that may take away some of the alarm of death, the thought that we may not be even a moment in the swelling of Jordan. Then again, I thought, if I must pass through the swelling of Jordan, yet the real act of death takes no time. We hear of suffering on a dying bed; the suffering is all connected with life, it is not death. A dying bed is sometimes very painful; with certain diseases, and especially with strong men, it is often hard for the body and soul to part asunder. But it has been my happy lot to see some deaths so extremely pleasing, that I could not help remarking, that it were worth while living, only for the sake of dying as some have died. Well, then, as I cannot tell in what physical state I may be when I come to die, I just tried to think again, how shall I do in the swelling of the Jordan? I hope I shall do as others have done before me, who have built on the same rock, and had the same promises to be their succour. They cried "Victory!" So shall I, and after that die quietly and in peace. If the same transporting scene may not be mine, I will at least lay my head upon my Saviour's bosom, and breathe my life out gently there. VII. "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" may be well used by way of WARNING. You grant that you will die, and you may die soon. Is it not foolish to be living in this world without a thought of what you will do at last? A man goes into an inn, and as soon as he sits down he begins to order his wine, his dinner, his bed; there is no delicacy in season which he forgets to bespeak, there is no luxury which he denies himself. He stops at the inn for some time. By and by there comes in a bill, and he says, "Oh, I never thought of that—I never thought of that." "Why," says the landlord, "here is a man who is either a born fool or else a knave. What! never thought of the reckoning—never thought of settling-day!" And yet this is how some of you live. You have this, and that, and the other thing in this world's inn (for it is nothing but an inn) and you have soon to go your way, and yet you have never thought of settling-day! "Well," says one, "I was casting up my accounts this morning." Yes, I remember a minister making this remark when he heard of one that cast up his accounts on Sunday. He said, "I hope that is not true, sir." "Yes," he said, "I do cast up my accounts on Sunday." "Ah, well," he said, "the day of judgment will be spent in a similar manner—in casting up accounts, and it will go ill with those people who found no other time in which to serve themselves except the time which was given them that they might serve God." You have either been a dishonest man, or else you must be supremely foolish, to be spending every day in this world's inn, and yet to be ignoring the thought of the great day of account. But remember, though you forget it, God forgets not. VIII. Before I close I must guide your thoughts to what is **THE TRUE PREPARATION FOR DEATH**. Three things present themselves to my mind as being our duty in connection with the dying hour. First seek to be washed in the Red Sea of the dear Redeemer's blood, come in contact with the death of Christ, and by faith in it you will be prepared to meet your own. Again, learn of the Apostle Paul to die "daily." Practise the duty of self-denial and mortifying of the flesh till it shall become a habit with you, and when you have to lay down the flesh and part with everything, you will be only continuing the course of life you have pursued all along. And as the last preparation for the end of life, I should advise a continual course of active service and obedience to the command of God. I have frequently thought that no happier place to die in could be found than one's post of duty. If I were a soldier, I think I should like to die as Wolfe died, with victory shouting in my ear, or as Nelson died, in the midst of his greatest success. Preparation for death does not mean going alone into the chamber and retiring from the world, but active service, "doing the duty of the day in the day." The best preparation for sleep, the healthiest soporific, is hard work, and one of the best things to prepare us for sleeping in Jesus, is to live in Him an active life of going about doing good. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Who shall carry me over the river?*—A prominent business man thus expressed himself to a Christian minister: "I am interested in Church matters, and always glad to see ministers when they call. But I have thought the subject over long and carefully, and have come to the deliberate decision that I have no need of Jesus." A single week had not passed before that man was taken sick. His disease was accompanied

with such inflammation of the throat as forbade his speaking at all. This enforced silence continued until the hour of death, when he was enabled to utter simply this one despairing whisper: "Who shall carry me over the river?" *The swelling of Jordan*:—These words are a remonstrance which God addresses to His prophet, Jeremiah. He had the most shrinking, sensitive nature of all the Hebrew prophets. Yet his task was to make a stand for God in the time of his nation's direst need. Babylon, the great heathen power, had thrown a cord round the neck of Israel which it tightened every year. Its forces were closing round Jerusalem with the slow but sure pressure of a military advance. And the people all the while were unaroused, like sleeping children in a house that has caught fire. The politicians trusted to their diplomacy; they hoped to fight the brute force of the enemy with their wits. The priests and the prophets drugged the conscience of the nation with the facile phrases of a lazy and stupid trust. Jeremiah stood out alone, like Athanasius against the world, hated alike by the statesmen and the leaders of the religious world. There are usually, we say, two sides to every question, and the case for Jeremiah's foes was something like this. He seemed to them a tiresome herald of ill, prating always of fateful things because he had a gloomy nature. He seemed to be without any patriotic feeling, constantly saying hard things about his own country, and glorifying Babylon as the avenging instrument of God. So it had come about, long ere the last crisis of Jerusalem, that the Jews felt a bitter hatred of Jeremiah. We have read (xi. 18, xii. 6) how, somewhat early in his history, some of them tried to kill him. The prophet was paying a visit to his native village of Anathoth, a few miles from Jerusalem. He was ignorant of danger. And all the while his own townsmen and brethren were plotting his death. But for some special providence of God his career would have reached a too early close. But now, when the danger is past, a strange thing is seen. There is no record of any psalm of deliverance to help the praise of our later generations. But, as if in its place, there falls on the prophet one of those terrible moods of depression when, in Bunyan's language, he is held in the grasp of Giant Despair and thrown into Doubting Castle. Why must he face with single hand the troops of the wicked? Why cannot God strike in and cut short the struggle? He who by nature was sensitive as a reed became by God's grace as an iron pillar and a brazen wall. And so it is here. In the words of the text, the demon of depression is driven off and retires for a season. Jeremiah crushes the cowardly thoughts that had arisen within him by the vision of sterner trials in the future. The brush with the men of Anathoth is a small affair, a mere race with footmen; Jerusalem in the days to come will see him try his speed against horses. Soon he will look back to the present time as to a mild land of peace, girdled by a summer-dried river. Ah, you say, we have little in common with a great prophet. He was set to do a loud-rousing task, while our days are passed in obscurity, far away from the roar of a battle of the nations. Yes, but all human lives run up to a centre. The inner struggle of every soul is the same, whether it is fought out in the cottage, or in the tent of the soldier, or in the fiery heart of the prophet. It has come readily to men to liken human life to a stream descending to the sea. But it is not the precise image of the text, which rather compares the life of man to the flat meadows that adjoin some mighty stream. For long months of the year there is a time of holy quiet. The flowers are gay, the grass is green, the river murmurs gently as if singing a song of rest, the boys and girls are shouting at their play. But one day a change seems to come over the stream. Its gentle murmur swells into a threatening roar. The days of dreadful ease are gone; desolation looks men in the face with a grey and grim reality; the evil days have come. That is the image of the text. What of its practical meaning? There are times when our duty seems almost easy, when it is not hard to beat off temptation. Such times are our "land of peace." But there are other times, when the need is sore and the contest cruel. Every nerve is strained. Such times are for us as "the swelling of Jordan." The text puts into heightened and rhythmic words a very obvious truth, which surely wins emphasis and illumination from the stern history to which it belongs. It should make us cease moaning over our trivial griefs, when we find that God speaks so lightly of a serious trouble. Jeremiah had barely escaped with his life, yet his foretaste of the bitterness of death is compared to "a land of peace." He gets no petting, and is promised no relief from such trial in the future. He is merely asked to reflect on the principle that underlies all moral heroism. "He that is faithful

in that which is least is faithful also in much." Let us follow out this principle in two or three illustrations. Take first of all the everyday calls of duty, what Keble has named "the trivial round, the common task." To all of us, at some time in our lives, there come periods of crisis when a heavy demand is made on our store of courage and endurance. Then it is that the dire need sifts our character and declares the moral poverty or wealth. As the man is, so is his strength. The text tells us that this great day of "the swelling of Jordan" is bound together with our easy days in "the land of peace." Those deeds of vast renown, which the grace of God calls out on occasion, do not come flashing out of a background of moral laxity or shame. They are not idle, lawless lights of heaven, coming we know not whence, going we know not whither. They have been prepared for by long and quiet days of lowly service. In the "Character of the Happy Warrior" Wordsworth insists that a soldier's brave feats of daring in battle are just the outcome of faithfulness to duty in days of peace. In "the mild concerns of ordinary life" the genuine hero is training for a mightier task. Suddenly he confronts some awful moment, weighty with solemn issues. Then the hidden strength leaps forth. He is "attired with sudden brightness, like a man inspired." Water, we say, does not rise higher than its source, and certainly men and women do not leap to a height and marvel of self-sacrifice until their daily practice has subdued them to a resolute self-mastery. Take, as a second illustration of the principle of the text, our everyday experiences of temptation and moral defeat. The man who brings his conscience to bear on his everyday tasks is training for higher things in a future that may rush on him at any moment. But there is also the sad opposite of that truth. Neither for good nor for evil can we wholly cut ourselves away from our past life. The years that are no more have a part on shaping the years that are to be. The fall from grace to-day was easier because yesterday you did not strive mightily against sin. Habits and desires move on to their climax and fulfilment. Alike in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of sin, you have no permission to stand still. Every day of our lives puts us to some proof or trial. These things are so, yet it is only in our high moments that we fully realise and act upon them. We forget that the oft-repeated story of a ruined life tells not of one great fall, but of many little ones. Men overlook the tiny breaches which sin has made in the wall of resistance. They are weary of this endless running with the footmen. After long days there steals on them the drowsiness of the enchanted ground. But the weariness is fatal, as the soft sleep of the tired traveller amid the falling snow. Let us remember that those periods of moral crisis struck even upon the stainless Christ. He was tempted, an apostolic writer tells us, in all points as we are. But temptation concentrated its powers in great turning-points of His history, in the wilderness and in the agony of the garden, in the remonstrance of a chosen apostle and in the hour of darkness on the Cross. All the disastrous forces with which the moral atmosphere was charged gathered themselves together and burst in furious storm. And the life of Jesus resembles in this the life of men. All our history is in part a history of temptation. But there are times in the lives of all of us when temptation concentrates its powers. Our life is no longer a series of skirmishes. Now at length it is a pitched battle with the enemy in full armour, and all his forces set in array against us. (D. Connor, M.A.)

Ver. 9. *Mine heritage is unto Me as a speckled bird.*—A *speckled bird* :—Mine (God's) heritage is unto Me as a speckled bird. As an owl, say some, that loveth not the light; as a peacock, say others, as oft changed as moved. God, that could not endure miscellany seed, nor linsey-woolsey, in Israel, can less endure that His people should be as a speckled bird, here of one colour, and there of another; or as a cake not turned (Hos. v. 4). (John Trapp.) *God's people as speckled birds* :—"Mine heritage (the godly man's) is unto me as a speckled bird." When living at Cambridge Mr. Spurgeon was appointed to preach at a village just outside the city, and during the day, after much reading and meditation, he was unable to light upon a suitable text, and was, as Bunyan would say, "much tumbled up and down" in his thoughts. Rising from prayer and the reading of the Scriptures he walked to the window, and, looking out, espied on the other side of the narrow street a solitary canary upon the roof-ridge, surrounded by a crowd of sparrows that were all pecking at it. At that moment the verse quoted flashed into his mind, and he started off upon his country walk, restful in heart and mind, and composed his sermon as he journeyed, the main points of his

discourse being the peculiarity of God's people and the persecutions they suffer in consequence. He thus speaks of the episode himself: "I preached with freedom and ease to myself, and, I believe, with comfort to my rustic audience. The text was sent to me, and if the ravens did not bring it, certainly the sparrows did." (*Chas. Spurgeon.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

VERS. 1-11. Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it: and, behold, the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing.—*The cast-off girdle.*—In many instances the prophets were bidden to do singular things, and among the rest was this: Jeremiah must take a linen girdle and put it about his loins, and wear it there till the people had noticed what he wore, and how long he wore it. This girdle was not to be washed; this was to be a matter observed of all observers, for it was a part of the similitude. Then he must make a journey to the distant river Euphrates, and take off his girdle and bury it there. When the people saw him without a girdle they would make remarks and ask what he had done with it; and he would reply that he had buried it by the river of Babylon. Many would count him mad for having walked so far to get rid of a girdle: two hundred and fifty miles was certainly a great journey for such a purpose. Surely he might have buried it nearer home, if he must needs bury it at all. Anon, the prophet goes a second time to the Euphrates, and they say one to another, The prophet is a fool: the spiritual man is mad. See what a trick he is playing. Nearly a thousand miles the man will have walked in order to hide a girdle, and to dig it up again. What next will he do? Whereas plain words might not have been noticed, this little piece of acting commanded the attention and excited the curiosity of the people. The record of this singular transaction has come to us, and we know that, as a part of Holy Scripture, it is full of instruction. Thousands of years will not make it so antique as to be valueless. The Word of the Lord never becomes old so as to lose its vigour; it is still as strong for all Divine purposes as when first of all Jehovah spoke it. 1. In our text we have AN HONOURABLE EMBLEM of Israel and Judah: we may say, in these days, an emblem of the Church of God. 1. God had taken this people to be bound to Himself: He had taken them to be as near to Him as the girdle is to the Oriental when he binds it about his loins. The traveller in the East takes care that his girdle shall not go unfastened: he girds himself securely ere he commences his work or starts upon his walk; and God has bound His people round about Him so that they shall never be removed from Him. "I in them," saith Christ, even as a man is in his girdle. "Who shall separate us?" saith Paul. Who shall ungird us from the heart and soul of our loving God? "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord." 2. But Jeremiah's girdle was a linen one: it was the girdle peculiar to the priests, for such was the prophet; he was "the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth." Thus the type represents chosen men as bound to God in connection with sacrifice. We are bound to the Most High for solemn priesthood to minister among the sons of men in holy things. The Lord Jesus is now blessing the sons of men as Aaron blessed the people, and we are the girdle with which He girds Himself in the act of benediction by the Gospel. 3. The girdle also is used by God always in connection with work. When Eastern men are about to work in real earnest they gird up their loins. When the Lord worketh righteousness in the earth it is by means of His chosen ones. When He publishes salvation, and makes known His grace, His saints are around Him. When sinners are to be saved it is by His people. When error is to be denounced, it is by our lips that He chooses to speak. When His saints are to be comforted, it is by those who have been comforted by His Holy Spirit, and who therefore tell out the consolations which they have themselves enjoyed. 4. Moreover, the girdle was intended for ornament. It does not appear that it was bound about the priest's loins under his garments, for if so it would not have been seen, and would not have been an instructive symbol: this girdle must be seen, since it was meant to be a type of a people who were to be unto God "for a people, and for a name, and for a praise and for a glory." Is not this

wonderful beyond all wonder, that God should make His people His glory? But now, alas! we have to turn our eyes sorrowfully away from this surpassing glory.

II. These people who might have been the glorious girdle of God displayed in their own persons A FATAL OMISSION. Did you notice it? Thus saith the Lord unto Jeremiah, "Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water." 1. Ah, me! there is the mischief: the unwashed girdle is the type of an unholly people who have never received the great cleansing. No nearness to God can save you if you have never been washed by the Lord Jesus. No official connection can bless you if you have never been washed in His most precious blood. Here is the alternative for all professors,—you must be washed in the blood of Christ, or be laid aside; which shall it be? 2. The prophet was bidden not to put it in water, which shows that there was not only an absence of the first washing, but there was no daily cleansing. We are constantly defiling our feet by marching through this dusty world, and every night we need to be washed. If you suffer a sin to lie on your conscience, you cannot serve God aright while it is there. If you have transgressed as a child, and you do not run and put your head into your Father's bosom and cry, "Father, I have sinned!" you cannot do God's work. 3. The more this girdle was used the more it gathered great and growing defilement. Without the atonement, the more we do the more we shall sin. Our very prayers will turn into sin, our godly things will gender evil. O Lord, deliver us from this! Save us from being made worse by that which should make us better. Let us be Thy true people, and therefore let us be washed that we may be clean, that Thou mayest gird Thyself with us.

III. Very soon that fatal flaw in the case here mentioned led to A SOLEMN JUDGMENT. It was a solemn judgment upon the girdle, looking at it as a type of the people of Israel. 1. First, the girdle, after Jeremiah had made his long walk in it, was taken off from him and put away. This is a terrible thing to happen to any man. I would rather suffer every sickness in the list of human diseases than that God should put me aside as a vessel in which He has no pleasure, and say to me, "I cannot wear you as My girdle, nor own you as Mine before men." 2. After that girdle was laid aside, the next thing for it was hiding and burying. It was placed in a hole of the rock by the river of the captivity, and left there. Many a hypocrite has been served in that way. 3. And now the girdle spoils. It was put, I dare say, where the damp and the wet acted upon it; and so, when in about seventy days Jeremiah came back to the spot, there was nothing but an old rag instead of what had once been a pure white linen girdle. He says, "Behold the girdle was marred; it was profitable for nothing." So, if God were to leave any of us, the best men and the best women among us would soon become nothing but marred girdles, instead of being as fair white linen. 4. But the worst part of it is that this relates undoubtedly to many mere professors whom God takes off from Himself, laying them aside, and leaving them to perish. And what is His reason for so doing? He tells us this in the text: He says that this evil people refused to receive God's words. Dear friends, never grow tired of God's Word; never let any book supplant the Bible. Love every part of Scripture, and take heed to every word that God has spoken. Next to that, we are told that they walked in the imagination of their heart. That is a sure sign of the hypocrite or the false professor. He makes his religion out of himself, as a spider spins a web out of his own bowels: what sort of theology it is you can imagine now that you know its origin. Upon all this there followed actual transgression,—“They walked after other gods to serve them and to worship them.” This happens also to the base professor. He keeps up the name of a Christian for a little while, and seems to be as God's girdle; but by and by he falls to worshipping gold, or drink, or lust. He turns aside from the infinitely glorious God, and so he falls from one degradation to another till he hardly knows himself. He becomes as a rotten girdle “which profiteth nothing.” (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Nearness to God destroyed by sin.—I. NEARNESS TO GOD. 1. These Jews were like a girdle bound upon the loins. Should have entwined themselves around God. So nations may be near—(1) In the great things that God had done for them. (2) In the covenant relation which He had entered into with them. (3) In the privileges which He had conferred upon them. 2. Man is near God. (1) By nature. Created in God's image. (2) Near to God's heart. (3) Near in God's care over him. (4) Near in the privileges of liberty, religion, knowledge, discipline, warning. (5) In a position to become eternally nearer by growing up into Christ. (6) Brought near for God's glory. II. His

NEARNESS DESTROYED BY SIN. 1. Sin is the destroyer of nations as well as individuals. The Jews destroyed by idolatry, lust, selfishness, pride. 2. As of nations, so of individuals: sin will destroy them, unless resisted and cast out. 3. This destruction is voluntary. The sinner is a suicide. 4. God is represented as active in this destruction. (1) Not that God deserts the sinner first. (2) But, when measure of sin is full, God removes restraints, and sets in motion the agency of judgment. 5. This destruction will consist in—(1) Separation from God. (2) Utter corruption and rottenness. Learn—1. The terrible power of sin. 2. To guard against it as our chief enemy. (*E. Jerman.*) *Good reasons for singular conduct*:—*Good Words* contains an excellent story about Professor Blackie by the editor, Dr. Donald Macleod:—"Professor Blackie frequently stayed at my house when lecturing in Glasgow. He was always at his best when one had him alone. One night we were sitting up together, he said in his brusque way: 'Whatever other faults I have, I am free from vanity.' An incredulous smile on my face roused him. 'You don't believe that: give me an instance.' Being thus challenged, I said: 'Why do you walk about flourishing a plaid continually?' 'I'll give you the history of that, sir. When I was a poor man, and when my wife and I had our difficulties, she one day drew my attention to the thread-bare character of my surtout, and asked me to order a new one. I told her I could not afford it just then; when she went, like a noble woman, and put her own plaid-shawl on my shoulders, and I have worn a plaid ever since in memory of her loving deed!'" The prophet Jeremiah must often have been looked upon as a man of eccentric conduct. But like Professor Blackie with his plaid-shawl, he was not actuated by whims, fancy, or vanity. Jeremiah's warrant for the singular use to which he put his girdle was the authority and mandate of the Lord.

Ver. 10. *This evil people which refuse to hear My words.—Rejecters of God's word*:—I. SENSATIONAL PREACHING: IN WHAT SENSE TO BE APPROVED. The style of this teaching of Jeremiah looks sensational. He is bidden to take a fine, new linen girdle—a most important and ornamental part of an Oriental gentleman's garments—and bury it for a time near the Euphrates. Taking it up afterwards, he was to exhibit it to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, with all the marks of injury and decay upon it, as a sign and type of the decline and decay that the Lord would bring on them in Babylon, when, parted from Him to whom they had been bound as a girdle to a man's body, they should be buried under the oppression and contempt of their proud and domineering captors. II. REJECTION OF THE DIVINE WORD. 1. Even the most highly favoured persons may reject God's Word. 2. The transgressors in such cases prefer their own imagination to God's revelations. Religion says to God, "Thy will be done." The natural heart says, "My will be done"—"Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" 3. The moral influence of such perverseness is bad, progressively bad. Having cast off God, the human nature cannot stand up alone. It needs a support. It must worship. So it goes after other, and of course false, gods. Every sin has three distinct effects, apart from the punishment of the future: (1) It depraves and deteriorates the nature that sins. The brain is not broken, but strained; the marble is not fractured, but the eye of omniscience sees the flaw. (2) It familiarises with evil and goes so far towards making an evil habit. (3) It renders some other sin not only easier, but apparently necessary. "Having done one thing," says the sinner, "of course I had to do the other." 4. The effect of rejecting God's Word is lamentable in the extreme. If the fire of Divine anger burnt up that vine which He had planted, how will it be with the common tree of the forest? III. BY WHOM IS THE WORD OF THE LORD REJECTED? 1. In a certain strict and literal sense every unbeliever is an infidel, i.e. he is without faith. But many are without faith who yet assent to the general truths of God's Word. Many infidels have made it their own interest to impugn and deny Divine revelation. A man has broken its precepts—perhaps suffered socially in consequence—has not repented, but only been embittered, begins to count those who censure or condemn him first bigoted, narrow-minded, then pharisaical, and hypocritical or fanatical. They justify their action by the Scriptures, and he begins to transfer his dislike to the Scriptures, feels a pleasure in any doubt cast on them, flatters himself that to weaken them is to strengthen his case, and that contempt poured on them is respect won back for him. Hence the bitterest scoffers have often been the religiously-trained sinners. 2. Sceptics are included among the rejecters of God's Word. Not that they are necessarily irreligious,

or deniers of a Divine Being and of obligation to Him ; but they deny the Scriptures as an authoritative revelation from Him and make nature a sufficient teacher. 3. If I include Romanism among the rejecters of God's Word, it must be with a qualification. That system admits the inspiration, Divine origin, and partial authority of God's Word, and so far as it can appeal to Scripture does so. Its sins in this regard are : (1) Putting up beside the Word tradition, which, like that of the Pharisees, makes the Word of God of no effect. (2) Making the authorisation of the Scripture depend on the Church, and constituting the Church the only expounder of Scripture. (3) And following from this, she withholds the Scriptures from her people. 4. The indifferent and unbelieving reject God's Word. You have heard it explained, read it, had it urged on you by beloved ones, now praising God in the rest of the saints. Have you believed it ? Received Christ ? Are you resting on Him ? Doing His will ? For if not, your condemnation is doubly sure. (*John Hall, D.D.*) *God's girdle* :—I. ISRAEL AND JUDAH CLAVE UNTO JEHOVAH AS A GIRDLE TO THE LOINS OF A MAN. 1. Unto His person for favour. 2. Unto His Word for direction and teaching. 3. Unto His promise for encouragement. 4. Unto His worship for devotion. II. ISRAEL AND JUDAH WERE THEN A PRAISE AND GLORY TO JEHOVAH. A girdle of strength and honour before the nations. 1. As opposed to the idolatries of the world. 2. As expressing obedience to Divine law. 3. As exhibiting the beneficial effects of true religion. III. ISRAEL AND JUDAH BECAME FAITHLESS AND DISOBEDIENT. 1. An evil people refusing to hear the Word. 2. A stubborn people going their own way. 3. A deluded people in vain imaginations. 4. An idolatrous people, like the nations less favoured, going after other gods to serve and worship them. IV. ISRAEL AND JUDAH BECOMING FAITHLESS, BECAME ALSO WEAK AND WORTHLESS. Went from prominence to obscurity, from freedom to captivity, from privilege to punishment. (*W. Whale.*) *Cleaving unto God* :—In Trinidad there are small oysters to be found that grow upon trees, or rather cluster round the roots of trees, in the river mouths. The little bivalves are so firmly attached that it is usual to saw down the trees in order to obtain the oysters, and such an attachment is typical of the ideal life of a Christian. He should love the Lord his God, and obey His voice, that he may cleave unto Him. God, who is the source of all life, will indeed be his life and the light of his days. As the strength of the tree is placed at the disposal of the oyster, so is the omnipotence of God offered to all who will trust Him. (*Christian Commonwealth.*) *Which is good for nothing*.—*Good for nothing* :—I. DWELL UPON A PAINFUL FACT. All was done for them that could be, and yet good for nothing. II. POINT OUT THE CAUSE OF THEIR SAD CONDITION. 1. They refused to hear the Word of the Lord. 2. They followed the imagination of their hearts. 3. They became idolaters. III. SHOW WHAT THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN AS A PEOPLE. 1. Separated from the nations as peculiarly the people of God. 2. Before the nations for the glory of Jehovah, as opposed to idols. 3. Among the nations as witnesses and examples. IV. PROCLAIM SOME UNIVERSAL TRUTHS. 1. Refusing to hear God's Word is proof that the people are an evil people. 2. An evil people will substitute a false worship for that which is true. 3. A false worship will produce and foster an erroneous religious life. 4. A people walking according to the imagination of their own hearts must be useless to themselves, to the world, to the Church, or to God. (*W. Whale.*) *The unprofitableness of a sinful life* :—I heard the other day a Sunday school address which pleased me much. The teacher, speaking to the boys, said, "Boys, here is a watch ; what is it for ?" "To tell the time." "Well," said he, "suppose my watch does not tell the time, what is it good for ?" "Good for nothing, sir." Then he took out a pencil. "What is this pencil for ?" "It is to write with, sir." "Suppose this pencil won't make a mark, what is it good for ?" "Good for nothing, sir." Then he took out a pocket-knife. "Boys, what is this for ?" They were American boys, so they shouted, "To whittle with,"—that is, to experiment on any substance that came in their way, by cutting a notch in it. "But," said he, "suppose it will not cut, what is the knife good for ?" "Good for nothing, sir." Then the teacher said, "What is the chief end of man ?" and they replied, "To glorify God." "But suppose a man does not glorify God, what is he good for ?" "Good for nothing, sir." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 12-14. Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine ?—*Drunk with evil* :—They are supposed to think that the prophet is merely

stating what was the plain meaning of the words, and, under that impression, to reply, What great matter is this, to tell us that bottles which are made to be filled with wine should be filled with wine?—not seeking for any deeper meaning in the Lord's Word. But, "thus saith the Lord, Behold I will fill all the inhabitants of this land." These were the bottles truly spoken of, "even the kings that sit upon David's throne," &c. Now the drunkenness wherewith they were to be filled was not drunkenness with wine, but drunkenness with an evil spirit, with a mad spirit, with a spirit of discontent, a breaking up of all the bonds of society, a spirit of contempt of God, and of all God's ordinances. This was the drunkenness wherewith they were to be filled—in consequence of which they were to be falling against, and crushing each other, as happens to a nation in which all subordination disappears, and all is anarchy and confusion, and the people are, as it were, dashed against each other. And this is said to be the Lord's judgment upon them. It is after the manner of God that, when men refuse the Spirit of God, they should be given up to the spirit of Satan; that, when men refuse to be dwelt in of the Holy Spirit, they should be dwelt in by the spirit of madness and of fury; and this was the judgment threatened upon the Jews, that they should be dashed one against another, even the fathers and the sons together; and then, as if he would say, Do not think that I am not in earnest; do not think that, because judgment is my strange work, it is a work in which I will not engage: be assured that it shall be as I say, "I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy." Three times God declares that He will not show mercy, but, on the contrary, destroy; because there is a voice which God has put within us to testify that God is merciful; and because there is a bad use which men are apt to make of the suggestions of that voice; and they are apt to feel as if a good and merciful God could not find it in His heart to put forth His hand to judgment. Oh, if men but knew God's tender mercy, they would indeed feel that that must be a strong reason which could move Him to pluck His hand from His bosom and rise up to wrath. It is as if God were saying—I have so proved My love to you, My unwillingness that you should perish, that ye may be slow to believe that I, even I, will punish. But be not deceived; there are reasons strong enough to prevail—to shut up even My compassions. I will not pity, nor spare, nor have compassion, but destroy. (*J. M. Campbell.*) *The wine of the wrath of God.*—1. Every man is being fitted a vessel to honour or dishonour, to good or evil. 2. Every man will ultimately be filled to his utmost capacity by good or evil, according to his spiritual state. 3. The process of adaptation is being carried on by loyalty or disobedience to truth and God. 4. Where all are evil, every one will be injurious to the others. This will make a hell. The reverse of this is true also. 5. God, who is love, has a time for severity as well as a time for mercy. 6. If God help not, none can aid effectually. (*W. Hale.*) *I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the Lord.*—*Divine punishments.*—These words should be spoken with tears. It is a great mistake in doctrine as well as in practice to imagine that the imprecations of Holy Scripture should be spoken ruthlessly. When Jesus came near the city He wept over it. I. DIVINE PUNISHMENTS ARE POSSIBLE. If we are not destroyed, it is not for want of power on the part of the offended Creator. The universe is very sensitively put together in this matter; everywhere there are lying resources which under one touch or breath would spring up and avenge an outraged law. Now and then God does bring us to see how near death is to every life. We do not escape the rod because there is no rod. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. Think of that. Do let it enter into our minds and make us sober, sedate—if not religious and contrite. II. DIVINE PUNISHMENTS ARE HUMILIATING (ver. 13). Some punishments have a kind of dignity about them; sometimes a man dies almost heroically, and turns death itself into a kind of victory; and we cannot but consent that the time is well chosen, and the method the best for giving to the man's reputation completeness, and to his influence stability and progress. God can bring us to our latter end, as it were, nobly: we may die like princes; death may be turned into a kind of coronation; our deathbed may be the picture of our life—the most consummately beautiful and exquisite revelation of character—or the Lord can drive us down like mad beasts to an unconsecrated grave. How contemptuous He can be! How bitter, how intolerable the sarcasm of God! "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." The Lord seems now and again to take a kind of delight in showing how utterly our pride can be broken up and trampled underfoot. He will send a worm to eat up the

harvest: would He but send an angel with a gleaming sickle to cut it down we might see somewhat of glory in the disaster. Thus God comes into our life along a line that may be designated as a line of contempt and humiliation. Oh, that men were wise, that they would hold themselves as God's and not their own, as Divine property rather than personal possession! Then would they walk soberly and recruit themselves in many a prayer, and bring back their youth because they trust in God. III. DIVINE PUNISHMENTS WHEN THEY COME ARE COMPLETE. "I will destroy them." We cannot tell the meaning of this word; we do not know what is meant by "destruction"; we use the term as if we knew its meaning,—and possibly we do know its meaning according to the breadth of our own intention and purpose; but the word as used by God has Divine meanings upon which we can lay no measuring line. We cannot destroy anything: we can destroy its form, its immediate relation, its temporary value; but the thing itself in its substance or in its essence we can never destroy. When the Lord says He will take up this matter of destruction we cannot tell what He means; we dare not think of it. We use the word "nothing," but cannot tell what He means by the nothingness of nothing, by the negativeness of negation, by the sevenfold darkness, by the heaped-up midnight of gloom. My soul, come not thou into that secret! IV. DIVINE PUNISHMENTS ARE AVOIDABLE (ver. 16). The door of hope is set open, even in this midnight of threatening; still we are on praying ground and on pleading terms with God; even now we can escape the bolt that gleams in the thunder-cloud. What say you, men, brethren, and fathers? Why be hard? why attempt the impossible? why think we can run away from God? and why, remembering that our days are but a handful, will we not be wise and act as souls that have been instructed? (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 15-17. **Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken.—Jehovah hath spoken: will ye not hear?**—I. THERE IS A REVELATION. "For the Lord hath spoken." 1. The voice which we are bidden to hear is a Divine voice, it is the voice of Him that made the heavens and the earth, whose creatures we are. 2. It is a word most clear and plain, for Jehovah hath spoken. He might have taught us only by the works of His hands, in which the invisible things of God, even His eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen. What is all creation but a hieroglyphic scroll, in which the Lord has written out His character as Creator and Provider? But since He knew that we were dim of sight and dull of comprehension, the Lord has gone beyond the symbols and hieroglyphs, and used articulate speech such as a man useth with his fellow: Jehovah hath spoken! 3. Moreover, I gather from the expression in the text that the revelation made to us by the Lord is an unchangeable and abiding word. It is not to-day that Jehovah is speaking, but Jehovah hath spoken: His voice by the prophets and apostles is silent now, for He hath revealed all truth which is needful for salvation. 4. This revelation is pre-eminently a condescending and cheering word. The very fact that the great God speaks to us by His Son indicates that mercy, tenderness, love, hope, grace, are the burden of His utterance. II. Since there is a revelation, IT SHOULD BE SUITABLY RECEIVED. 1. If Jehovah hath spoken, then all attention should be given; yea, double attention, even as the text hath it, "Hear ye, and give ear." Hear, and hear again: incline your ear, hearken diligently, surrender your soul to the teaching of the Lord God; and be not satisfied till you have heard His teaching, have heard it with your whole being, and have felt the force of its every truth. "Hear ye," because the word comes with power, and "give ear," because you willingly receive it. 2. Then it is added, as if by way of directing us how suitably to hear this revelation—"Give glory to Jehovah your God." (1) Glorify the Lord by accepting whatsoever He saith unto thee as being infallibly true. In all its length and breadth, whatsoever the Lord saith we believe; and we desire to know neither less nor more than He has spoken. (2) We must receive the word, however, in a hearty and honest manner so as to act upon it. We must therefore repent of the sin which the Lord condemns, and turn from the way which He abhors; we must loathe the vice which He forbids us, and seek after the virtue which He commands. (3) But we must go further than repentance and the acceptance of the truth as truth, we must further reverence the gracious voice of God when He bids us believe on Christ and live. He has couched that message of love in so blessed a form that he who does not accept it must be wantonly malicious against God and against his own soul. III. PRIDE IN THE HUMAN HEART PREVENTS SUCH A RECEPTION. 1. In

some it is the pride of intellect. They do not wish to be treated like children. Things that are despised, hath God chosen, and things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are : that no flesh may glory in His presence. Oh, let none of us be so proud as to lift up ourselves in opposition to that which Jehovah hath spoken ! 2. In some others it is the pride of self-esteem. It is a dreadful thing that men should think it better to go to hell in a dignified way than to go to heaven by the narrow road of a childlike faith in the Redeemer. Those who will not stoop even to receive Christ Himself and the blessings of eternal life deserve to perish. God save us from such folly ! 3. Some have a pride of self-righteousness. They say " we see," and therefore their eyes are not opened : they cry " we are clean," and therefore they are not washed from their iniquity. 4. In some, too, it is the pride of self-love. They cannot deny their lusts. 5. The pride of self-will also works its share of ruin among men. The unrenewed heart virtually says—" I shall not mind these commands. Why should I be tied hand and foot, and ruled, and governed ? I intend to be a free thinker and a free liver, and I will not submit myself." IV. HENCE THERE COMES AN EARNEST WARNING. " Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains." Listen, thou who hast rejected God and His Christ till now. Thou art already out of the way, among the dark mountains. There is a King's highway of faith, and thou hast refused it ; thou hast turned aside to the right hand or to the left, according to thine own imagination. Being out of the way of safety, thou art in the path of danger even now. Though the sunlight shines about thee, and the flowers spring up profusely under thy feet, yet thou art in danger, for there is no safety out of the King's road. If thou wilt still pursue thy headlong career, and choose a path for thyself, I pray thee remember that darkness is lowering around thee. The day is far spent ! Around thy soul there are hanging mists and glooms already, and these will thicken into the night-damps of bewilderment. Thinking but not believing, thou wilt soon think thyself into a horror of great darkness. Refusing to hear what Jehovah has spoken, thou wilt follow other voices, which shall allure thee into an Egyptian night of confusion. Upon whom wilt thou call in the day of thy calamity, and who will succour thee ? Then thy thoughts will dissolve into vanity, and thy spirit shall melt into dismay. " Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends." Thou shalt grope after comfort as blind men grope for the wall, and because thou hast rejected the Lord and His truth, He also will reject thee and leave thee to thine own devices. Meanwhile, there shall overcloud thee a darkness bred of thine own sin and wilfulness. Thou shalt lose the brightness of thine intellect, the sharp clearness of thy thought shall depart from thee, professing thyself to be wise thou shalt become a fool. Thou shalt be in an all-surrounding, penetrating blackness. Hence comes the solemnity of this warning, " Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness." For after that darkness there comes a stumbling, as saith the text, " before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains." There must be difficulties in every man's way, even if it be a way of his own devising ; but to the man that will not accept the light of God, these difficulties must necessarily be dark mountains with sheer abysses, pathless crags, and impenetrable ravines. He has refused the path which wisdom has cast up, and he is justly doomed to stumble where there is no way. Beware of encountering mysteries without guidance and faith, for you will stumble either into folly or superstition, and only rise to stumble again. Those who stumble at Christ's Cross are like to stumble into hell. There are also dark mountains of another kind which will block the way of the wanderer—mountains of dismay, of remorse, of despair. V. THERE REMAINS FOR THE FRIENDS OF THE IMPENITENT BUT ONE RESORT. Like our Lord in later times, the prophet beheld the city and wept over it : he could do no less, he could do no more. Alas, his sorrow would be unavailing, his grief was hopeless. Observe that the prophet did not expect to obtain sympathy in this sorrow of his. He says, " My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride." He would get quite alone, hide himself away, and become a recluse. Alas, that so few even now care for the souls of men ! This also puts a pungent salt into the tears of the godly, that the weeping can do no good, since the people refuse the one and only remedy. Jehovah has spoken, and if they will not hear Him they must die in their sins. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Attention to God's Word*.—I. HOW SHOULD WE ATTEND TO IT ? 1. With reverence. 2. In faith. 3. Diligently, earnestly. 4. Intelligently. 5. Intending to be governed by it. 6. Prayerfully. II. THERE IS HERE AN IMPLIED NEGLECT.

1. Men are filled with other things. 2. They do not know its worth. 3. They do not apprehend the bearing it may have on their well-being. 4. They are not willing to submit to its teachings. III. WHY SHOULD WE ATTEND? 1. The dignity and glory of the Lord. 2. His wisdom and knowledge. 3. His beneficence, interest, and love. 4. He speaks to us of matters in which we have the deepest interest. Learn—1. To read the Bible regularly. 2. To treasure it in the heart. 3. To honour it in your life. (*E. Jerman.*)

Be not proud.—Pride:—I. DIFFERENT KINDS OF PRIDE. 1. Race pride—pride in ancestors. 2. Face pride—pride in outward appearance. 3. Place pride—pride in social position. 4. Grace pride—pride in godliness. II. THE WARNING. Be not proud—1. Because we have nothing to be proud of. 2. Because it is abhorrent to God. 3. Because it is unlike Christ. 4. Because it is ruinous. Apply—(1) Some are very proud. (2) Some occasionally. (3) Some are bravely struggling against pride. (*J. Bolton.*)

*The warning against pride:—*Many of the inhabitants of the valleys that lie between the Alps in Switzerland have large swellings, called goitres, which hang down from the sides of their necks, like great bags. They are horrible things to look at. And yet, strange as it may seem, the Swiss get to be proud even of these dreadful deformities. They look down with contempt on their neighbours who do not have these terrible swellings, and call them the "goose-necked" people. And so we see that pride is a sin into which we are all in danger of falling. And here we have God's warning against pride. I. PRIDE BRINGS WITH IT UNHAPPINESS. The fable says, that there was a tortoise once, that was very unhappy because he could not fly. He used to look up and see the eagles and other birds spreading out their wings and floating through the air. He said to himself, "Oh, if I only had wings, as those birds have, so that I could rise up into the air, and sail about there as they do, how happy I should be!" One day, he called to an eagle, and offered him a great reward if he would only teach him how to fly. The eagle said—"Well, I'll try what I can do. You get on my back, and I'll carry you up into the air, and we'll see what can be done." So the tortoise got on the back of the eagle. Then the eagle spread out his wings and began to soar aloft. He went up, and up, and up, till he had reached a great height. Then he said to the tortoise: "Now, get ready. I'm going to throw you off, and you must try your hand at flying." So the eagle threw him off; and he went down, down, down, till at last he fell upon a hard rock and was dashed to pieces. Now here you see, it was the pride of the tortoise which made him so unhappy, because he couldn't fly. And it was trying to gratify his pride which cost him his life.

II. PRIDE BRINGS WITH IT TROUBLE. We never can set ourselves against any of God's laws without getting into trouble. Two masons were engaged in building a brick wall in front of a high house. One of them was older and more experienced than his companion. The younger one, whose name was Ben, placed a brick in the wall which was thicker at one end than at the other. His companion noticed it, and said—"Ben, if I were you I wouldn't leave that brick there. It's not straight, and will be likely to injure the wall by making it untrue." "Pooh!" said Ben, "what difference will such a trifle as that make? You are too particular." "My mother used to teach me," said his friend, "that truth is truth; and that ever so little an untruth is a lie, and that a lie is no trifle." Now Ben's pride was offended by what his friend had said to him. So he straightened himself up, and said in an angry tone—"Well, I guess I understand my business as well as you do. I am sure that brick won't do any harm." His friend said nothing more to him. They both went quietly on with their work, laying one brick after another, and carrying the wall up higher, till the close of the day. Next morning they went back to go on with their work again. But when they got there they found the wall all in ruins. The explanation of it was this: that uneven brick had given it a little slant. As the wall got up higher, the slant increased, till at last, in the middle of the night, it tumbled over and fell down to the ground. And here we see the trouble which this young man brought on himself by his pride. If he had only learned to mind this Bible warning against it, that wall would not have fallen down, and he would have been saved the trouble of building it up again. III. PRIDE BRINGS WITH IT LOSS. The apostle tells us that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." So if we give way to pride, we are in a position in which God is resisting us, and then it is certain, that we can expect nothing but loss in everything that we do. When we begin to love and serve God, He says to each of us, "from this day will I bless thee." And we are told that "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow."

The way in which God's blessing makes His people rich is in the peace, joy, happiness He gives them; the sense of His favour and protection which they have in this world, and the hope of sharing His presence and glory for ever in heaven. But if we give way to pride we cannot love and serve God; and then we must lose His blessing—the greatest loss we can ever meet with in this world. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *God glorified in the fall of pride*.—I. WHAT IS IT WHICH STOPS PEOPLE FROM HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD? 1. One form of pride is shame. Many kept from Christ because ashamed to come and give themselves up to Him. For fear of the paltry scorn, the momentary ridicule, the soul will risk eternity! 2. There is the pride of respectability and social position. Hold apart from religion, because in the one way all must go without distinction. Yet what can justify in a lost sinner any high and vain thoughts of self? 3. There is the pride that conceals a wound. God's Word has stricken the heart; healing and joy could be had if we humbly go to God, yet hide the grief and unrest within, from man and Heaven. 4. There is the pride of self-righteousness. What say when before the Throne—that you were too good to accept the Gospel? II. HUMAN PRIDE MUST EFFECTUALLY BE BROKEN DOWN. 1. When pride humbled and man crushed, God speaks. What say? "Give glory to the Lord your God." "Your" God still, though turned back on Him and grieved Him. 2. The contrite soul cannot realise its inability to glorify God. Broken down, powerless, self-despairing, cast yourself on His salvation. 3. There is a desperate alternative: that you "will not hear." By and by your feet will "stumble on the dark mountains." The day of disease will come; life will grow dim; the thin grandeur of a fading world will begin to pass away; all around the gloom will thicken, and on a dying world "gross darkness" of unrelieved despair will cover you. Then the last moment arrives; one terrified "look for light," but in vain; the soul is "carried away into captivity." (*W. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.*)

Vers. 16, 17. *Give glory to the Lord your God*.—I. COUNSEL. "Give glory to the Lord." 1. Because the Lord's glory is man's good. 2. Because in them that glory might appear. 3. Because by them that glory might be obscured. II. WARNING. "Before He cause darkness," &c. 1. Fading light. No clear vision when God is not glorified. 2. Stumbling feet. No power of progress unless for God's glory. 3. Bewildering night. Captivity. All lost. III. PLEADING. "But if ye will not hear," &c. 1. The counsel of tender love. 2. The counsel of utter unselfishness. (*J. Farren.*) *God glorified by His people*.—I. AN EXHORTATION. What is meant by giving glory to God? To ascribe glory to His name, to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to show forth His glory, to confess Him before men, not only with our lips but in our lives, to believe on Him, to fear Him, to put our whole trust in Him, to call upon Him, to honour His holy Name and His Word, and to serve Him truly all the days of our life. But all these can be traced to two fountains. 1. By faith in Christ we glorify God. (1) It is His gift, and God is glorified in His gifts. (2) It is "the substance of things hoped for," brought home to the believer's mind; and these being things of glory beyond the veil, God is glorified by their manifestation. (3) It is "the evidence of things not seen," and thus brings glory to God, because it takes God at His word, and "sets to its seal that God is true," and glorifies Him in His truth. (4) Through it we are saved; it opens a window in the soul's dark dungeon, and lets in the glories of a crucified and an exalted Saviour; it opens a fountain of new-born hope in the mind, and that fountain is "Christ in us the hope of glory"; it brings back God's image, and restores in Christ what we lost in Adam. It is a lowly faith, and thus brings glory to God. It is a living faith; it comes from a living root, even the "root and the offspring of David." It is a loving faith. It is a working faith. It is a watching and a waiting faith—it watches for the coming of the Lord—it watches and "waits more than they that watch for the morning." 2. By repentance we glorify, or bring glory to God. The evidence or characteristic mark of this true repentance is holiness; we give glory to God by a holy spirit,—"Glorify Him," says the apostle, "in your bodies and spirits, which are His." We give glory to God by a holy life—"Let your light so shine before men," &c. We give glory to God by holy lips, for the Spirit, speaking by the Psalmist, says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me." II. THE MOTIVE. God never positively causes darkness, for He is not the author of evil—He does so negatively. The clouds and mists ascending from the earth obscure the light of the sun's beams from our sight, nevertheless, far above those mists

and shadows, though invisible to us, that glorious orb is shining as undimmed and unbroken as before. Thus it is with God and His sinful people—our iniquities go up as a thick mist from the face of the earth, and our transgressions as a thick cloud, and separate between us and our God. What then is this darkness? 1. There is a spiritual darkness in man's soul—of despair. 2. There is a mental darkness caused by disease of the body affecting and effacing the mind. 3. There is a mortal darkness—the darkness of death. To a believer death has no sting, for Christ has plucked it away—to a believer death has no gloom, for Christ has passed through its dark vaults and left a track of light behind Him; but who can paint the darkness that settles round the deathbed of an ignorant or unbelieving sinner, who dies knowing nothing, fearing nothing, hoping nothing! 4. There is an immortal darkness—the darkness of hell. (*R. S. Brooke, M.A.*) *Giving glory to God by repentance*.—God is the eternal fountain of honour and the spring of glory; in Him it dwells essentially, from Him it derives originally; and when an action is glorious, or a man is honourable, it is because the action is pleasing to God, in the relation of obedience or imitation, and because the man is honoured by God, and by God's vicegerent: and therefore God cannot be dishonoured, because all honour comes from Himself; He cannot but be glorified, because to be Himself is to be infinitely glorious. And yet He is pleased to say that our sins dishonour Him, and our obedience does glorify Him. He that hath dishonoured God by sins, that is, hath denied, by a moral instrument of duty and subordination, to confess the glories of His power, and the goodness of His laws, and hath dishonoured and despised His mercy, which God intended as an instrument of our piety, hath no better way to glorify God than, by returning to his duty, to advance the honour of the Divine attributes, in which He is pleased to communicate Himself, and to have intercourse with man. He that repents confesses his own error, and the righteousness of God's laws; and, by judging himself, confesses that he deserves punishment; and therefore, that God is righteous if He punishes him; and, by returning, confesses God to be the fountain of felicity, and the foundation of true, solid, and permanent joys. And as repentance does contain in it all the parts of holy life which can be performed by a returning sinner, so all the actions of a holy life do constitute the mass and body of all those instruments whereby God is pleased to glorify Himself. 1. Repentance implies a deep sorrow, as the beginning and introduction of this duty: not a superficial sigh or tear, not a calling ourselves sinners and miserable persons: this is far from that "godly sorrow that worketh repentance": and yet I wish there were none in the world, or none amongst us, who cannot remember that ever they have done this little towards the abolition of their multitudes of sins: but yet, if it were not a hearty, pungent sorrow, a sorrow that shall break the heart in pieces, a sorrow that shall so irreconcile us to sin, as to make us rather choose to die than to sin, it is not so much as the beginning of repentance. But I desire that it be observed that sorrow for sins is not repentance; not that duty which gives glory to God, so as to obtain of Him that He will glorify us. Repentance is a great volume of duty; and godly sorrow is but the frontispiece or title-page; it is the harbinger or first introduction to it: or, if you will consider it in the words of St. Paul, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance":—sorrow is the parent, and repentance is the product. Let us, therefore, beg of God, as Caleb's daughter did of her father: "Thou hast given me a dry land, give me also a land of waters," a dwelling-place in tears, rivers of tears; "that," as St. Austin's expression is, "because we are not worthy to lift up our eyes to heaven in prayer, yet we may be worthy to weep ourselves blind for sin." We can only be sure that our sorrow is a godly sorrow, when it worketh repentance; that is, when it makes us hate and leave all our sin, and take up the cross of patience or penance; that is, confess our sin, accuse ourselves, condemn the action by hearty sentence: and then, if it hath no other emanation but fasting and prayer for its pardon, and hearty industry towards its abolition, our sorrow is not reprobable. 2. No confession can be of any use, but as it is an instrument of shame to the person, of humiliation to the man, and dereliction of the sin; and receives its recompense but as it adds to these purposes: all other is like "the bleating of the calves and the lowing of the oxen," which Saul reserved after the spoil of Agag; they proclaim the sin, but do nothing towards its cure; they serve God's end to make us justly to be condemned out of our own mouths, but nothing at all towards our abolition. Our sin must be brought to judgment, and, like Antinous in Homer, laid in the midst, as the sacrifice and the cause of all the

mischief. 3. Well, let us suppose our penitent advanced thus far, as that he decrees against all sin, and in his hearty purposes resolves to decline it, as in a severe sentence he hath condemned it as his betrayer and his murderer; yet we must be curious that it be not only like the springings of the thorny or the high-way ground, soon up and soon down: for some men, when a sadness or an unhand-some accident surprises them, then they resolve against their sin; but as soon as the thorns are removed, return to their first hardness, and resolve then to act their first temptation. They that have their fits of a quartan, well and ill for ever, and think themselves in perfect health when the ague is retired, till its period returns, are dangerously mistaken. Those intervals of imperfect and fallacious resolution are nothing but states of death: and if a man should depart this world in one of those godly fits, as he thinks them, he is no nearer to obtain his blessed hope than a man in the stone-colic is to health, when his pain is eased for the present, his disease still remaining, and threatening an unwelcome return. That resolution only is the beginning of a holy repentance, which goes forth into act, and whose acts enlarge into habits, and whose habits are productive of the fruits of a holy life. 4. Suppose all this be done, and that by a long course of strictness and severity, mortification and circumspection, we have overcome all our vicious and baser habits; suppose that we have wept and fasted, prayed and vowed to excellent purposes; yet all this is but the one half of repentance, so infinitely mistaken is the world, to think anything to be enough to make up repentance. But to renew us, and restore us to the favour of God, there is required far more than what hath yet been accounted for (2 Pet. i. 4, 5). We must not only have overcome sin, but we must, after great diligence, have acquired the habits of all those Christian graces, which are necessary in the transaction of our affairs, in all relations to God and our neighbour, and our own persons. It is not an easy thing to cure a long-contracted habit of sin. Let any intemperate person but try in his own instance of drunkenness; or the swearer, in the sweetening his unwholesome language: but then so to command his tongue that he never swear, but that his speech be prudent, pious, and apt to edify the hearer, or in some sense to glorify God; or to become temperate, to have got a habit of sobriety, or chastity, or humility, is the work of a life. (*Bishop Jeremy Taylor.*) *Give glory to God.*—I. THE COMMAND. One way in which we may obey this command is by confession of sin, the humbling of self before God on account of general unworthiness, and also on account of particular acts of sin. Our natural hearts think but little of sin in this light, as dishonouring to God; they are accustomed and inured to sin; and hence it excites no feeling of aversion, unless exhibited in its grosser forms. By the confession of sin, therefore, God is to be glorified, and how full the promises which God has connected with it! (Prov. xxviii. 13; Psa. xxxii. 5; 2 Sam. xii. 13.) Closely connected with this confession of sin there is a way in which we are called upon to "give glory to the Lord our God," and that is, by receiving God's offered salvation. The public means of grace have been afforded this year as usual. And yet the fact forces itself upon us, as painful as it is obvious, that there may be an outward participation in these privileges, and at the same time no glory given to God. There is nothing so dishonouring to God as unbelief, for in the solemn words of inspiration, "He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar," &c. We may observe, also, that when there is this exercise of faith, receiving God's offered salvation, its tendency is not to exalt the pride of man, but to ascribe all the glory to God: see, for example, Ephesians i., where the grace of God is so fully set forth, and three times in that one chapter the expression occurs that every step of that salvation is "to the praise of His glory." But again, we may obey the command to give glory to the Lord our God by aiming to live according to His will. This can be effected by those only who are obeying the invitations of the Gospel; others have various aims in life, but if Christ is not received into the heart, they cannot live according to God's will. The Lord has a right to look for obedience in His professing people. We give glory to God, by simple childlike confidence in Him and in His providential care and love, by the discharge of the ordinary duties of life, conscientiously as in His sight, and by thus acting up to the spirit of that command, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink," &c. So, also, by submission to His will we are to give glory to God, that which is so easy when God's will runs parallel, so to speak, with our own—so hard when it runs counter to our natural desires. Then to glorify God in the fires, amid the various trials which every year brings in its course, trials which have to do with health, or circumstances, or bereavements;

to sin not, nor charge God foolishly; like Aaron to hold our peace in mute submission when the heart is too full for utterance; to receive the gracious assurance given by the lips of our Divine Master, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" to know the loving sympathy of Him who has said, "I am He that comforteth you"; "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort thee." The various other ways in which we are to give glory to God, and live according to His will, may be summed up in the one expression, fruitfulness in good works. II. THE TIME FOR YIELDING THIS OBEDIENCE IS LIMITED. "Before He cause darkness," &c. In this figure the present time is compared to the day—the time for work, and for obedience, and for giving glory to God,—the time for guiding us safe through the narrow path that leads to heaven and home. Oh, how solemn is the thought of the uncertainty of life. How fearful that darkness must be when it overtakes the sinner groping about in life's byways, instead of being at the gates of the heavenly city, where all is light for ever; life's work undone, and no more the call heard to glorify God, but the cry which excludes hope, "He that is unjust," &c. (J. H. Holford, M.A.) *Giving glory to God*.—There are two ways of giving glory to God. I. BY GIVING HIM BACK HIS OWN GLORY. There are three mirrors in which God's glory is seen. Now, of these mirrors, some are broken and some stained. The first mirror was stained by the sin of man—creation was stained and lost its glory and its beauty by the first stain on it. Oh! the breath of Adam's corruption comes as a thick fog on the face of the glass, and until that thick fog is removed, we shall not see God's glory in the creation. The second mirror is the Word. The Word is stained, the steam of our own corruption goes forth, our darkened understandings, our stubborn will, our adulterous affections, our perverse imaginations send forth a filthy effluvia, and the filthy effluvia gathers into a thick and impenetrable mist, and that covers the glass. Besides that, there is the darkness of hell. But when the Holy Spirit removes the cloud and enables you to look into the mirror—into the cleansed and polished mirror,—then you behold the glory of God. Again, there is a third glass, the glass of the Church. This glass is broken, the visible Church now is not presenting the glory of God; the visible Church now is as a mirror shattered into a thousand fragments, and until the Holy Ghost comes and joins together these shattered fragments of the mirror, we never shall see God in the Church. The principal glory of the Church is holiness—there is no glory like that! but there is another glory which the Church has lost—and she ought not to have lost it—she has lost it, however, through unbelief—I mean the glory of power from God. We ought to have the gifts of the Spirit among us now as well as His graces; and I do believe, when you shall be brought to pray for the same—when you shall be brought to expect the promise of the Father, the Lord will respond to your prayer, and all creation shall testify in a moment that He is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. 1. Now, to come more closely, we give glory to God when we see Him as He is—when we see Him as a Father—when we do not see the doctrine about Him as a Father, but see Himself as a Father. 2. We give glory to God when we behold His love in Christ, and are delighted with that love. 3. We give glory to God in a third particular, when we yield ourselves to His Spirit. II. We give glory to God WHEN WE GIVE GOD CREATED GLORY. The first thing is to catch His own glory and send it back, and the second, to give Him created glory. In giving God created glory, begin with your own heart—that is the centre nearest to you, begin with the hearts of your brethren, the heart of your wife, the heart of your child, the heart of your father, the heart of your servant, the heart of your neighbour, the heart of your landlord, the heart of your tenant, endeavour to get all their hearts given to God, as His throne and dwelling-place, and then have the hearts of all you can speak an affectionate word unto, given unto God. Then go out over all creation, and endeavour to give all creation to God; endeavour to take the gold of the world, endeavour to take the fruits and the flowers of the world, and give them to God. You behold the religion of God like the famed river of Grecian song which cannot come to any land without irrigating that land with golden sands, and you desire to send the stream of God's religion, which restrains evil and cherishes virtue, which rescues man from sin, and enstamps on him holiness, you endeavour to send that over the length and breadth of the moral world, that it may go as a stream of richness, a stream of fertilisation, a stream of refreshing and beauty over every part of the wide world. (N. Armstrong.) *God glorified by repent-*

ance :—I. THE REPENTANCE DEMANDED OF US IN SCRIPTURE differs widely from a mere transient regret at having done wrong, and a passing resolve, that we will abstain for the future from certain grosser misdoings. The repentance which conducts to salvation is a thorough change of the whole man, commencing with new views of the nature of sin, and of its character as committed against a God of unbounded loving-kindness, and gradually overspreading the life and conversation, till all around recognise that fresh creation which undeniably attests Divine interference. 1. Take the sense which a true penitent has of the nature of sin, and the confession, as well by action as by word, which that sense will dictate. There is nothing which more strikingly distinguishes man in his natural state from man in his renewed state, than the difference in the estimates which the two form of sin. The wonder with the natural man is, why sin should be everlastingly punished ; the wonder with the renewed man is, how a thing so heinous can ever find pardon. Then if from the present we pass to the future, and observe the alleged consequences of transgression extending themselves like lines of fire through all the spreadings of man's after existence, why, more than ever the stranger to repentance will be sensible of that recoil and jar of feeling which indicates suspicion that God is not just in thus taking vengeance. But how different is it with the renewed—that is, with the penitent man ! God appears righteous in taking vengeance ; this is the discovery, this the unhesitating conviction of the individual in whose mind are the workings of genuine repentance. But if it be true, according to these showings, that to exhort a man to repent is to exhort him to pass from the condition in which his notions of sin obscure all God's dealings, to one in which they illustrate and vindicate those dealings—from the entertainment of the suspicion that the Creator may do wrong, to entertaining the assurance that the Creator does right in exacting everlasting penalties ; if this be true, then surely repentance, as including a right sense of sin, may be identified with glorifying God. 2. Consider the confession, as well by action as by word, which a true penitent will make of his sin, and see whether such confession will not give glory to God. " My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him." Making confession, you observe, is associated, or rather identified, with the giving God glory. When Achan owned that he had taken of the accursed thing, he publicly proclaimed that God had shown Himself omniscient as having brought to light what no eye but his own had observed. The acknowledgment, moreover, was proof to the nation, that God had not smitten without cause, and that His threatenings always take effect ; thus witnessing, so that the whole congregation would understand the testimony, to the justice, authority, and holiness of Jehovah. For he who, moved by the workings of a righteous contrition, falls before his Maker, and confesses himself a sinner, owns to the having forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewn out to himself cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. When he uses the tongue which is emphatically described as the best member which we have, in testifying to the evil of departure from God, in asserting the truth of what God hath uttered in regard of man's fallen estate, and the necessity that we return unto holiness if we would attain unto happiness, this confession of sin carries with it an announcement to all who here try the Word by the test of experience, as it would hereafter to the breathless onlookers as the strange work of judgment goes forward, that there is an ascertained righteousness in God's dealings with unrenewed men as with traitors to that government which extends wheresoever there is moral accountableness. In acknowledging myself a sinner, I acknowledge myself a rebel against the Almighty, and thus out of my own mouth the eternal justice would be vindicated if there were pronounced upon me that sentence of banishment which is yet to be heard by an impenitent multitude ; and certainly if that confession of sin which is a fruit or element of repentance can in any degree cause God to be justified when He speaks, and clear when He judges, there can be no debate that in this very degree it brings honour to God ; in other words, it explains what is done in the text, where, summoning men to repent, the prophet summons them to give glory to God. And oh ! there is a confession which is far stronger, and more productive of glory than that of the lip, even that of the life. Repentance, whatever its internal workings, amounts in its outward demonstration, which is known and read of all men, to a complete change of conduct. II. THE PROPHET LAYS DOWN A LIMITATION AS TO TIME. " Before." There is a whole volume of intelligence, and that, too, startling and touching intelligence, in this one word. It is as much as to say, You cannot avoid giving it at one time or

another ; you must give it after if you refuse to give it before. Give it, therefore, while it may be accepted as an offering, and defer it not until it be exacted as a penalty. And certainly it is a truth which but little reasoning would suffice to establish, that glory will finally be won to God from every section of the universe, and from every member of that intelligent family with which its spreadings are peopled. The power of refusing to give God glory will expire with death, when the day of probation has been followed by the day of condemnation ; and beyond all doubt, in the punishment of the reprobate as in the happiness of the righteous, there shall be a perpetual harvest of honour unto God. Hell, as well as heaven, must be the scene for the display of the Divine attributes ; and wherever these attributes have place of development, there undoubtedly the Almighty is glorified. And therefore, I do not say of the dying sinner, going hence in his ungodliness, that he has outlived all opportunity of giving glory to God ; we rather say of him that he has just reached the necessity of giving glory to God. A moment more—oh ! even in that moment he might grasp the Cross ; but let that moment be another and the last of dishonour done to God, and infinity is before him, paved with the burning tribute which has here been withheld, so that to die in rebellion is only to transfer to eternity arrears which eternity cannot exhaust. We leave the combination in its inexplicable awfulness : we have no language for a state where the fire is unquenchable, and yet the darkness is impenetrable. We thank God we may yet all give glory before our feet stumble, and before the day closes. We are not yet on the dark mountains ; it may be, we are approaching them. The old must be approaching them—the young may be approaching them ; but if we seem to behold them on the horizon—the gloomy, frowning masses—still the Sun of Righteousness hath not yet gone down on our firmament ; still there needs nothing but the looking in faith unto Jesus, “ delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification,” and the beams of that Sun shall edge, as with a line of gold, the dark and dreaded rampart, or rather throw a transparency into the stern barrier, so that it shall seem to us to melt into the garden of hope, the land where the river of life is ever flowing, and the tree of life is ever waving. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

The suspension of Divine judgments :— “ Give glory to the Lord your God **BEFORE.**” We may see a rough image of the suspension of Divine vengeance against sin, and of the real terrors of that suspension, which only a timely repentance can avert, in the mountain torrent swollen by the melting of the winter’s snow. At first a sudden fuller flow announces to the inhabitants of the valley that the thaw has commenced. But the increasing of the waters suddenly ceases, not to the contentment but to the alarm of the inhabitants of the valley below. It inspires their fear and arouses their energies. Instantly they sally out with axe and hook and cord. Mark how eagerly they climb the rugged slippery hill. They know that the present quietude of the torrent tells of future disaster. It is a plain indication to them that some tree has floated down the current, and by the whirling of the waters in a narrow channel has been forced athwart the stream ; that there is being rapidly constructed a natural dam, behind which the flood will gather, and seethe and swell and rage with ever-increasing fury, until it carries all before it, and bursts with devastating volume and force on the farms and fields below ; and the purpose of these men who are hastening upwards is to let out the flood before it assumes these dangerous proportions. In like manner the guilty and impenitent have as little reason to be at ease “ because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily.” On the contrary, that very fact should arouse them to an instantaneous repentance ; for while in mercy the long-suffering of God as a mighty dam obstructs the forthflowing of His righteous vengeance, when in judgment it is at length removed, the terrors of wrath will be in exact proportion to the space in which they were treasured up. (*R. A. Bertram.*)

Before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains.—Darkness and the dark mountains :— It is difficult to imagine a more perilous situation than that of a man overtaken by darkness among the mountains of the East. The face of the sky has become suddenly blackened with clouds ; the serene light of the stars guides his feet no more ; the warring elements threaten his immediate destruction ; and, without guide to conduct or friend to comfort him, he can do nothing but anticipate ruin. Should he sit down, he may perish under the cold ; should he advance, rocks and precipices rise everywhere around ; and, to increase his horror, the wild beasts of the forest fill up with their prolonged roar the pauses of the storm. But if he has himself rushed causelessly upon his fate ; if, notwithstanding that, toward

evening's close, he had been assured, by those who knew them well, that all the prognostics of an immediate storm were gathering in the sky, he gave an incredulous ear to the intimation; if, notwithstanding that there were offered to him the hospitalities of a cheerful dwelling; if he still persisted in his own determination; and if, on finding that his purpose was inflexible, an experienced guide was offered to conduct him, whose services he sullenly rejected;—then, indeed, can we easily understand how the remembrance of these things will occasion only additional agony at every moment when his “feet stumble on the dark mountains,” and that, to the other horrors of his perilous state, there will be superadded the bitterest self-reproach for his own infatuation. Yet all this, as the metaphor under consideration suggests to us, is but a faint emblem of the sinner's wretchedness. To him there is a day of grace; but it too, if unimproved, is succeeded by a night of darkness, and thick gloom. If uncovered by that pavilion which God has erected, he must wander as an outcast on the mountains, uncheered by heaven's mercy. Hence the earnest counsel of the prophet, “Give glory to the Lord your God,” &c. I. The darkness of AFFLICTION. 1. You are now happy, let us suppose, beyond many around you in the world. Your health is unimpaired, and your strength fails not. But where is your security that this state of things shall continue? May not the pestilence that walks in darkness creep silently into your midnight bed? Give now, then, glory to God ere health is taken from you, and you wander on the dark mountains of disease. 2. Or, it may be, your friendships and connections are all blessed of heaven. Now, then, give glory to God; for, sooner than you apprehend, the days of darkness may fall, and your happiness vanish as a dream. Those little ones who now cheer your dwelling may soon go to swell the congregation of the dead; or, worse even than that, some of them, fair as is now their early promise, may fall in temptation's hour into follies, or crimes, which shall make you wish rather that they had never been born. 3. Or, once more, your worldly circumstances are fair and flourishing. You have, if not great wealth, what is better, a competent portion of good things; and, while many cry for bread when there is none to give them, you have enough and to spare. But soon, perhaps, your substance shall be dissolved as snow, and your riches take to themselves wings as eagles. Now, then, “give glory to God,” ere your feet stumble on the mountains of destitution. II. The darkness of INSANITY. Ye whose reason is now sober, whose judgments are now clear, whose understandings are now acute and comprehensive,—are you sure that so they shall continue to the end? Did you never know any instance of a human creature, once as calm and rational as you, hurried as by a whirlwind into the vortex of insanity? Did you never know a case, where neither hereditary transmission, nor constitutional temperament, nor evil habits, could have made way for reason's loss? And where, then, is the security that yours shall not be the lot of those who call truth error, and error truth? That would be darkness indeed, yea, gross darkness, and the very shadow of death. Is it not wise, then, now to give glory to God, lest haply your feet should stumble on that dark mountain? III. The darkness of DESPAIR. It is an awful condition that of a human creature at once apprehensive of judgment and incredulous of mercy. Sometimes this mental depression is a constitutional infirmity, and results more from a finely sensitive nature than a habitually depraved heart. Sometimes, too, it is owing to a gloomy system of theology, which would ordain those to be sorry whom God has not commanded to make sad. And sometimes it is the fruit of educational seeds, growing up at length even as the grapes of Sidon. But in the great majority of instances, the cause of the distemper is previous impenitence. The soul, having at length become alive to a sense of its guiltiness and danger, sinks into the depths of despair, says of itself, “No hope, no hope”; and to those who would administer comfort if they could, replies only, “Miserable comforters are ye all!” That which a philosopher has remarked concerning the earthquake, is eminently true of such a state as this. One may escape from pestilence, from famine, and from sword. The storm and tempest may be run from. The cloud that is as yet no bigger than the hand of a man may be seen afar off, and, when discerned, a refuge may be sought from it. The inundation of waters may be escaped by a timely flight; and even the lightning of heaven may be conducted by a safe passage from our dwellings. But the motions of the earthquake arise in a moment, and surprise one into an agony of alarm. Even thus it is with despair, “that worst enemy of the sinner's soul.” The desponding spirit sits down at the

gate of death, and refuses to be comforted. "Give glory then to God, before your feet stumble on the dark mountains." IV. The darkness of DEATH and the GRAVE. Between that darkness and you there may be only a single step. The eleventh hour may be about to sound its solemn knell, and the sentence may go forth, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." The lamp of life may be well supplied with oil, and yet it may burn only for a brief season. An unexpected breath of wind may extinguish it in a moment; and you know that, in the grave, that cannot be done which has been left undone. Now, therefore, give glory unto God before your feet stumble on the dark mountains. Do but think how unworthy an offering to Him would be the "relics and refuse" of a wicked life; and consider that, even although the night of death may, in your case, be preceded by an evening of sickness, it is most perilous to delay commencing the work of religion to a season when the memory may have become treacherous, the moral feelings blunted, and the conscience seared. Think, too, even should you retain the use of all your mental faculties to the last, how difficult it will be for you to assure yourselves that your repentance is of the right sort,—that which is unto salvation, and needeth not to be repented of. V. The darkness of HELL. The future torments of the wicked, as well as the felicities of the just, it is far beyond the power of imagination to comprehend. The most calamitous condition in which a human being may be placed on earth admits of some relief: let a man be ever so much afflicted, desolate, or forsaken, there is commonly some comfort to be had. The sympathy of others at least may be extended to him; or, if even this be wanting, he has the prospect of getting his sufferings terminated by death. But in regard to the torments of the wicked in a future life, it is not so. There the misery is unmingled, and the pain undiverted by any soothing application. The fountains of sympathy are there dried up; compassion is unknown; nor can even death itself be looked forward to. Add to this, that all the tormenting passions will then be let loose upon the guilty soul. And if even one of these passions, when brought into full action, is maddening here, what shall not the effect be there, when all that is fierce and malignant in its own nature shall war against the soul? Only think what shame does—what sorrow, what despair, what hatred do—in the present life; and then conceive, if you can, what all of them together will do for a condemned spirit in the future state. If this be the end of the ungodly (and that it is so the God who cannot lie has solemnly assured us), give glory to God before your feet stumble on the dark mountains. (*J. L. Adamson.*) *The dark mountains*.—I. CONTEMPLATE THE WANDERERS. Darkness is used in Holy Scripture to denote that repugnance to God and spiritual things which sin produces in the mind (*Isa. ix. 2; Rom. i. 21*). Talk to them of these things, and their sealed lips and cold indifference will prove that they have not been taught the way of righteousness by the Spirit of truth. And no wonder (*1. Cor. ii. 14*). But this condition is not forced upon men by any irresistible power. It is true that they are all born in sin and "shapen in iniquity" (*Psa. li. 5*); but the remedy for their blindness is ever at hand, if they would but receive it. Here, then, we see the culpability of their state; it is willing ignorance; they refuse to be enlightened (*John iii. 20*). No wonder, therefore, that they prefer the dark mountains of sin in order that they may pursue, as they list, the forbidden works of darkness (*Job xxiv. 13*). And this rebellion against the light may be traced up to the depravity of their hearts. They are not only willingly ignorant, and therefore criminally guilty, but their affections are corrupted. Here, again, we have another idea suggested by the term darkness. It implies the moral pollution of human nature, which is opposed to that inward purity which the light of the Holy Spirit communicates. The heart of the wicked is actually depraved and vitiated; and from that source, as from a contaminated fountain, flow the copious streams of ungodliness and worldly lust. II. EXPOSE THEIR DANGER. 1. As we dwell attentively on the scene thus brought before us, we discover that these mountains are overspread with many rough places and pitfalls. No wonder, then, that, encompassed as they are with darkness, without a light or a truthful guide, we see many of those wanderers continually falling. We picture to ourselves that young man, just released from the parental restraints of home, wandering up the side of yonder dark mountain in the depth of night. He does not mean to wander far, and he thinks he can easily retrace his steps at will. But although to those whose eyes are spiritually opened it is a dark and sterile ground, it possesses for him a secret and seductive attraction, which leads him on, and farther still he goes. 2. They were not happy when

they began the dismal journey, and they have never been happy since ; but we see them stumbling into greater miseries at every step they take. 3. As we gaze upon these wanderers, we see by the light of the text a thicker darkness overspreading the mountains, and some are rapidly lost to our sight in the impenetrable gloom. At first we see but a comparatively light cloud ; the cloud of affliction. That poor wanderer has squandered his health in the service of sin ; and now he is brought low, he can enjoy sin no longer. As our vision is still resting on the dark mountains, another cloud arises ; see it shooting forth the forked lightnings of God's judgments, and many are the victims it brings low. III. ENFORCE THE EXPOSTULATION OF THE TEXT. To give glory to God is to honour Him, and God is honoured when we turn to Him with hearty repentance, and submit ourselves in obedience to His authority. (*W. J. Brock, B.A.*) *Dark mountains :—*

I. IN THE ONWARD WAY OF YOUR LIFE DARK MOUNTAINS LIE BEFORE YOU, WHICH YOU MUST CROSS FOR YOUR FURTHER PROGRESS. We may travel for a time along the pleasant greensward of youth, but as we advance to our middle life and ripest years, we must expect to ascend acclivities, and clamber up steepes unknown to our earlier career. By and by, if we have not before met with them, we shall espy mountainous heights right across our road, and there will be no avoidance of them. These we must traverse, and they will tax all our strength to the utmost. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards." One of these mountains may be that of worldly adversity, an obscure position in society, the want of a suitable opening, and the toil and sadness connected with insufficient means. Or it may be, whilst you are happily exempt from this, you have a more mountainous obstacle in your delicate and precarious health. Disappointments, too, reverses, losses, may trouble you as they trouble others, and make your lifeway uphill, stony, and rugged. You may find yourself, moreover, ere you are aware, clambering up to the top of a long and toilsome height, and when you gain the summit there yawns beneath you, on the other side, a terrific precipice, down which, if you fall, your destruction is inevitable. This is the hilltop of temptation, and to each of us there comes at intervals an evil day, when a solitary false step on our part will ruin us for this life and the future. We climb, too, a sharp mountain of sorrow when we stand by the bedside of those whom, though we love, we shall see them here no more, and presently follow the form that embodied them in its passage to the grave that shall hide it. Some, and it may be many, of these mountainous acclivities you will have to traverse. Look, and you will see them ; then make ready for the steep ascent. There is one mountain height to which I have not referred, up which, if you have not yet crossed it, sooner or later you must travel. You are a sinner. Sin involves punishment. As surely as you have sinned, so surely you must reap the consequences. There will come a time to you, if it has not yet come, when your sin will cause you grief. This mountain, whether of repentance or remorse, may likely prove a steep and high one. It will be hard work for your soul to get up over it. It is these mountain ranges of our way that invest our life here with such awful solemnity and grandeur. The big sorrows that beset us, give a solid reality to our existence, and stamp it with dignity and worth. God's will is, that each of us shall be equal and superior to the life obstacles He has adapted to us. You must climb them ; you can't help yourself ; you must move onward.

II. THE NATURAL DARKNESS OF THESE MOUNTAINS WILL BE ALLEVIATED OR INTENSIFIED BY OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD. If you are right with God, and are giving Him glory in your life, God will be a light to you as you ascend your difficult way. And that light, too, will give you strength. You will see where you are, and whither you are going ; the hilltop will not be so far off, the path thitherward, though meandering and tortuous, will be discernible, and the track of footsteps before you will give you cheer. Ay, and with the light of heaven around you, there will be the strength of heaven within you ; and as the natural darkness of the mountain will be swallowed up in the light of heaven, so the weakness of your heart will be forgotten in the strength that is imparted. The Holy Spirit will testify that you are a child of God, an heir of the kingdom of heaven, for what son is he a father chasteneth not ? And if, for a moment, you should fail, you will feel a hand helping you upward, and hear a voice cheering you onwards ; and should it come almost to the worst, as with Jesus in Gethsemane, there will be an express angel from heaven to strengthen you. Should you, I say, when you come to these mountain-troubles of your way, be in close relationship to God, giving glory to Him in your life, you will prove His presence and His

help; you will see His light and His favour, and will find needful strength to enable you to prosecute your course. But should this not be so; should you, apart from God and alienate from His love, be pursuing your life career merely by the natural force which is derived from your animal and mental vigour; should you unexpectedly find yourself at the base of a mountainous trouble, whose steep sides ascend with a frightful incline, on whose summit overhangs a portentous cloud, casting its deep shadows all along your appointed way—your situation will be deplorable indeed. III. HOW MAY THESE EVILS BE AVOIDED? "Give glory to the Lord your God." The Lord is your God, your Creator, your Proprietor, your Sustainer, your Provider, your Defender, your Helper, your Governor, your Guide. On Him you depend, and in Him you live. Without Him you are nothing; in Him you are complete and full. You are so constituted by Him, and have such capacities given you, that you can know Him, admire Him, love Him, and serve Him. He expressly made you that you should do this. It is the design of His creation, the intent of your existence. If you achieve this, you answer His purpose and satisfy His mind. If you fail in this, you thwart His intention and disappoint His expectation. (*W. T. Bull, B.A.*)

Vcr. 20. *Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?*—*A question for parents and pastors:*—Here is a flock that is being inquired about, not a flock only, but a beautiful flock. 1. The question comes into our family life, and asks us where all the children are, those lovely children, that banished the silence of the house and made it ring with music. They were fair, they were charming, they were affectionate; what a sweet, merry little fellowship they made!—where are they? Have they been spoiled into evil, flattered into self-idolatry, neglected into atheism? Have they been over-instructed, over-disciplined, wholly overborne, so that the will has not been only broken but shattered? He is no shepherd, but a tyrant, who does not co-operate with his children, lure them, fascinate them, and give them sacred instruction without appearing to do so, and who when offering religious privileges offers them as if offering coronation, yea, and all heaven. 2. The question enters also into our Church life, saying to every pastor, "Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?"—not large, perhaps, but so expectant, so sympathetic, so co-operative. What the flock wants is pastoral preaching. The difficulty is to overcome the temptation to preach to somebody who is not there. The preacher must always know himself to be set for the healing and nurture of men. In every congregation there are the broken-hearted, those who are shattered in fortune, feeble in health, spiritually-minded; women who have great home cares; souls that cannot thrive on criticism; lives that need all nourishment and comfort and loving sympathy. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's claim on parents:*—I. WHAT IS HERE SHOWN US RESPECTING THE FLOCK. 1. It is not yours in proprietorship, only in charge. Children are peculiarly and specially God's. Authority over them is God's gift to parents; but He has a claim prior to yours. He continues His work of creation in every child born. Its existence is wonderful. Much more so its capacities—physical, mental, social, spiritual. 2. Christ highly estimates the flock. Christian hospitality to a child is homage to God. II. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS TO WHOM GOD HAS ENTRUSTED HIS FLOCK. 1. They have to impart religious ideas. At home the first principles are instilled: indeed, the child's mind is there made acquainted with the germ of all truth—sin, forgiveness, righteousness, salvation, love human and Divine: all the ideas involved in religion. 2. Parents represent to their children the character of the Invisible God. The Gospel is a declaration of the paternal love. 3. The inquiry for the flock will be addressed to parents. III. THE WAY IN WHICH THIS RESPONSIBILITY SHOULD BE MET. If you would prepare to answer joyfully this question, set it before you as—1. A distinct purpose. The wish for your children's salvation is not enough. Register a purpose in the sight of God. 2. Intense devotion is necessary. To have converting power over your own children you must love their souls, and hold them fast for God. (*A. Davies.*) *Where are you?*—What a question this for ministers and for people! For ministers. Where are the few sheep whom He has put under our care? What have we done for them? And for the flock likewise, God's people and children. What a question for them! Where are you? I. You are God's FLOCK. "The people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." He acknowledges you as His sheep, and like the Good Shepherd, He knows you every one. He looks at you as you are, and thinks of the difference between one and another.

II. His flock is "BEAUTIFUL." 1. For what He has made them. Look how beautiful He has made us all in body, mind, and soul. 2. Because of what they are capable of. Look at the wonderful things which man has been enabled to do, and then think what more God may intend him to do. Look at him sailing over the sea, and travelling over land by means of fire and water! And then think what may not man's mind and body be capable of doing. But look at man sanctified by the Holy Ghost, his soul filled with grace, and bringing forth fruits of righteousness. How beautiful is a Christian, when he is gentle, forgiving, loving, forgetting himself, and seeking to help others, bearing trials without murmurs, and rejoicing even in sorrow! 3. Because of what they are intended for. You, poor creatures that you are, disappointed and disappointing yourselves so constantly, promising yourselves so much and performing so little—God intends you to be lights in this world, to show the way to those around you, and to be His companions in heaven.

III. "WHERE ARE YOU?" "Where am I?" 1. We are here, whilst so many others have been called away. 2. Judge yourselves where you are in spiritual things. (1) To this end review your opportunities, and see what they have done for you, where they have left you. They are like the wind or steam to a ship, like the carriage or train to the traveller; they are intended to help you on your way, and you ought to find yourself nearer home since you have had the use of them. (2) Judge yourselves about open, plain, public sins. What have there been of these in the year? drunkenness, swearing, thieving, cheating, lying, uncleanness, wasting Sunday, slandering your neighbour. Have you done such things as these? (3) Judge yourselves whether you are more in earnest about religion than you were. Are you ever anxious about yourself? Are you taking any pains? (*W. H. Ridley, M.A.*) *Christian responsibility*:—To the minister of Christ, when looking back on the irremediable past, and forward on the dim future, the thought must naturally arise,—How much have we to answer for, and what answer shall we make? But let all seriously minded Christians consider how great is the responsibility of us all, with respect to children and young persons, that they be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Every one knows that example is more forcible than precept, and especially evil example than good precept. When grown-up persons then, whether parents or others, use themselves to violent and intemperate language, swearing, or indecent expressions, or slander, it is as if they took pains to instruct children in the language of lost spirits. Or, to glance at another case; many there are who, while they preserve a decent exterior of conduct, yet leave their children, or other young persons for whom they are in any manner responsible, to shift for themselves; I mean in religious matters, take no personal care or trouble to give them an education substantially Christian. But I ask, Is not that which is true and good for the parent, true and good for the child? Must not fathers and mothers be answerable for the bringing up of their little flock, the children whom God has given them, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? And can this be true Christian nurture and admonition, to habituate them to those unfixed and unprincipled notions and ways in the great matter of Divine worship, and communion with Christ's Church here militant, but in heaven triumphant? This responsibility lies on us all—all grown-up persons—all have an influence either for good or evil on the younger; and happy will they be, who shall be found to have exerted this influence to the honour of our Almighty Lord and Master, and the edification of that flock which He purchased with His own blood. Such persons, if parents, have made it a principal matter of their thoughts and cares that their children should be also God's children. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times."*)

Ver. 21. What wilt thou say when He shall punish thee?—*A question to the impenitent*:—It was in view of certain threatened calamities that were to come on Judah from the hand of the Lord, that this question is asked of her. I put this question to each individual who is not obeying the Gospel of Christ. What wilt thou say, dying as thou art living, appearing before God in judgment as thou appearest to Him now, continuing impenitent, persisting in disobedience to the Gospel, if the character thou carriest into eternity be that which you are now forming for it? But perhaps you have no faith in future punishment; perhaps you do not believe that you, or any sinner will ever be brought into these circumstances. Then you have no faith in the veracity of God, or in the Bible as His Word. You are fulfillers of prophecy, for it is said (1 Pet. iii.) there should be such

as you. But you say, the belief is unreasonable; it conflicts with all our ideas of be evocence and justice. What! that a righteous moral Governor should punish incorrigible offenders, rebels that refuse to be reconciled to Him, though often invited, and the meanwhile most kindly dealt with by their injured Sovereign, and when the terms of reconciliation are easy as they could be made, and the whole expense of bringing it about is borne by God! The question is not, what now you have to say, for now you imagine you have a great deal to say. And some can speak long and fluently in a strain of self-exculpation; but then, when confronted with your Maker and Judge; and when all things are seen by the clear and searching light of eternity; then, what wilt thou say? 1. You will not be able to say that you were ignorant of the existence of the law, for the transgression of which you are condemned. 2. Nor can you say that this law is unintelligible. Whatever obscurity attaches to the doctrines of the Bible, none rests on its precepts. 3. Nor, again, can you reasonably complain of the character of this law. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good." Its spirit is love; its tendency happiness. 4. Nor can you complain of any want of adaptation in this law; that it transcends your capacities, exceeds your natural powers of performance. No; you want no new faculty to obey it perfectly. You want only a rectified heart. You want but the will. 5. You cannot plead ignorance of its penalty. You cannot say that you were not warned of the consequences of disobedience; and that God strikes, before He speaks. What has not been done to deter you from sinning? What obstructions have not been thrown in your way to destruction! But you surmount them all. What then wilt thou say, when He shall punish thee? That you have never transgressed this law, or only once, or but seldom, and then inadvertently, through infirmity? This you will not say; you cannot. Who has not sinned many times, and deliberately? Will you say that your sin did no harm, injured no one, no one but God? But you must allow the Lawgiver to be the judge of that. The consequences of a particular sin He alone is able to trace out. Will you be able to say, that, when you had sinned, God hastened the execution of the sentence against you; waited not for a second offence, and gave you no opportunity to evade the stroke; that, as soon as you found you had sinned, you were sorry, and penitently sought His face, but was spurned away; and that, seeing your case to be hopeless, you went on sinning in despair? What will you say? That there was an irreversible Divine decree that stood an insurmountable obstruction in your way to heaven, and even impelled you in the downward direction? You will see by the light of eternity that that was not the case, nor indeed the doctrine of those who were supposed to hold it. What then wilt thou say, when He shall punish thee? I can think of nothing, nothing exculpatory, nothing extenuating. You will be speechless, not through intimidation, but from conviction, not as unable to speak, but as having nothing to say; self-condemned, as well as condemned by your Judge; conscience confirming the decision against you, and your own self through all eternity reproaching you, and thus nourishing a worm gnawing within worse than the fire that shall burn about you. And shall it come to this? Shall this be the issue of life? (*W. Nevins, D.D.*) *Future punishment*.—I. THE PUNISHMENT SUPPOSED. 1. Sometimes it commences in the present world. 2. It will assuredly be inflicted after death. 3. It will be consummated at the judgment day. 4. It will be proportionate (*Matt. xix. 27; Rom. ii. 6; Rev. ii. 23*). 5. That it will be everlasting. II. THE INTERROGATION PRESENTED. 1. Will you say it is unrighteous? 2. Will you say it is severe? 3. Will you say that you were not warned? 4. Will you plead for a further period of trial? 5. Will you confess your guilt, and seek mercy? 6. Will you endeavour to resist the almighty arm? (*Isa. xxvii. 4; Nah. i. 5*). 7. Will you endeavour to meet your doom with firmness? (*Prov. i. 27; Rev. vi. 17*). Application—1. Future punishment may be averted. Bless God that you are favoured with time and opportunities; with mercy, and with gracious invitations. 2. Timely repentance, and sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, will infallibly preserve you from the wrath to come. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *The justice of future punishment*.—I. OFFER THREE GENERAL REMARKS. 1. All the afflictions to the wicked have the nature of punishment: they are not salutary. Grace turns the serpent into a rod; but sin turns the rod into a serpent. The former turns poison into a remedy; the latter, the remedy into poison. 2. Punishment is the natural and necessary consequence of sin. If we drink of the cup of abominations, God will give us the cup of trembling (*Psa. lxxv. 8*). 3. Whoever are the immediate

instruments of inflicting punitive evils, God is the author of them. II. CONSIDER THE SOLEMN INQUIRY IN OUR TEXT. "What wilt thou say when He shall punish thee?" 1. Wilt thou charge God with injustice, or say that the punishment is undeserved? To admit such a thought betrays the greatest insolence and pride, as well as an entire ignorance of all the principles of truth and righteousness (Rom. iii. 5, 6; Rev. xv. 3, xvi. 7). 2. Wilt thou say that God is severe; and that though punishment be deserved, yet it is too great for the offence? (2 Thess. i. 6-10.) 3. Wilt thou say that thou wast taken by surprise, without being warned; and that, therefore, judgments came unlooked for? The very heathens cannot say this; for as the creatures instruct them, so conscience warns them. 4. Wilt thou desire a further time of trial, that judgment may be deferred, and a longer season of probation be afforded thee? Instead of wishing for a greater extension of Divine forbearance, God might say to the dying and desponding sinner, The measure of thine iniquities is already full, and further forbearance would only make it run over. "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe." 5. Wilt thou say that thou hast sinned by an inevitable necessity, and that thy ruin was predetermined? But if this be the language of sinners in this world, it will not be so in the world to come. They will then know that if they were the slaves of sin and Satan, they were so voluntarily, and by choice; that if they were sold to commit iniquity, like Ahab, they sold themselves; and that if any spiritual blessing were withheld, it was that to which they had no claim and for which they had no desire (Jer. vii. 10; Isa. lxiii. 17; Matt. xxiii. 37; John v. 40; Acts ii. 23; John xii. 39, xv. 22; Rom. ix. 19, 20). 6. The question proposed in the text implies that the sinner will have nothing to say when he falls into the hands of God. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *A serious question:—*

I. THE PUNISHMENT REFERRED TO. A freethinker once said, "I am seventy years old, and have never seen such a place as hell, after all that has been said about it." A child at once replied, "But have you ever been dead yet?"

1. The punishment itself. This is brought before us—(1) By express declarations. (2) In figurative forms. 2. Its infliction. (1) God, faithful to promises, must also be to threatenings. (2) Graded, in accordance with degree of crime.

II. THE PERSONS ON WHOM IT WILL BE INFLICTED. 1. Atheists. 2. Unbelievers. 3. Hypocrites. 4. Persecutors. 5. Backsliders. III. THE QUESTION, "What wilt thou say?" Many can talk now, revile, question, sneer. What will you say then? (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *No appeal:—*Advert to the time when, in the order of the Divine government, ungodly sinners will be punished according to law. What wilt thou say in extenuation of thy guilt, and against the justice of the punishment that He shall inflict upon thee? 1. Will you say that you did not know the law which you had broken? Whose fault was that? Had you not a Bible as your own? Had you not a law in your conscience which acquitted or accused you in the actions of life? 2. That you meant no wrong in what you had done? Then why do wrong? For pleasure? For profit? Was this any justification of wrongdoing? 3. That your sins had not done such evil as to deserve such punishment? Can you be a judge in this? 4. That God might have prevented you sinning, and the results of your sins, if He had been so disposed? Yes, had He destroyed your free agency. But did not God use means to prevent you, and you would not? 5. That you sinned only a short time in comparison with the duration of your punishment? Punishment is not given in its duration according to the time taken in the act of transgression. The act of murder, and its punishment. 6. That you have only done as others have done? A thousand doing wrong is no justification or extenuation of one doing a similar or the same wrong that they have committed. 7. That you have not been so bad as others? The law knows nothing of degrees in crime, so far as exempting from punishment. Besides, he that offends in one point is guilty of all. 8. That while you have done many things that have been wrong, you have done others that have been right? Doing a right will not save you from the punishment of doing a wrong. 9. That you had great temptations to do as you have done? But there were at your command resources of help sufficient to keep you from their power. 10. That you were led into sin by bad examples? There were good examples to follow as well as bad, why did you not follow them? 11. That you were never educated? Education has nothing to do with moral principles and actions. 12. That you were never warned or admonished against sin? Can this be true? If you were not, whose fault was it? Had you not warnings and admonitions of conscience and of the Spirit of God? 13. That

the Spirit of God never strove with you? This is false, or God's Word is, and human experience. Perhaps you so quenched the Spirit as to harden your heart. 14. That you were born into the world with a sinful nature, and could not help sinning? But God made every provision to meet your case in this respect. 15. That the inconsistencies of Christians were a stumbling-block to you? If one man walk awry, or if he stumble, is that any reason why you should do so? 16. That you were pre-ordained by God to do as you have done? This is false, both in reason and in Scripture. 17. That your punishment is too severe? It is no wonder you should say this. Is it undeserved? Is it against law and justice? 18. That your punishment is more than you can bear? You should have thought of this before. Did you in committing sin think of how others could bear the wrong you were doing them? How God could bear your sins? (*Local Preacher's Treasury.*)

Ver. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?—The Ethiopian.*—I. THE QUESTION AND ITS ANSWER. 1. The difficulty in the sinner's case lies—(1) In the thoroughness of the operation. The Ethiopian can wash, or paint; but he cannot change that which is part and parcel of himself. A sinner cannot change his own nature. (2) In the fact that the will is itself diseased by sin. In man's will lies the essence of the difficulty: he can not, means that he does not will to have it done. He is morally unable. (3) In the strength of habit. Practice in transgression has forged chains, and bound the man to evil. (4) In the pleasure of sin, which fascinates and enslaves the mind. (5) In the appetite for sin, which gathers intensity from indulgence. Drunkenness, lechery, covetousness, &c., are a growing force. (6) In the blindness of the understanding, which prevents men from seeing the evil of their ways, or noting their danger. Conscience is drugged into a deep sleep. (7) In the growing hardness of the heart, which becomes more stolid and unbelieving every day, till nothing affects it. (8) In the evident fact that outward means prove ineffectual: like "sope" and "nitre" on a negro, they fail to touch the living blackness. 2. For all these reasons we answer the question in the negative: sinners can no more renew themselves than Ethiopians can change their skins. (1) Why then preach to them? It is Christ's command, and we are bound to obey. Their inability does not hinder our ministry, for power goes with the word. (2) Why tell them that it is their duty to repent? Because it is so: moral inability is no excuse: the law is not to be lowered because man has grown too evil to keep it. (3) Why tell them of this moral inability? To drive them to self-despair, and make them look to Christ. II. ANOTHER QUESTION AND ANSWER. 1. All things are possible with God (*Matt. xix. 26*). 2. The Holy Spirit has special power over the human heart. 3. The Lord Jesus has determined to work this wonder, and for this purpose He came into this world, and died, and rose again (*Matt. i. 21*). 4. Many such jet-black sinners have been totally changed: among ourselves there are such, and in all places such may be found. 5. The Gospel is prepared with that end. 6. God has made His Church long for such transformations, and prayer has been offered that they may now be wrought. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Evil habits a great difficulty to reformation of life.*—Habit may be looked on—1. As a necessary law. (1) A facility of performing an act in proportion to its repetition. (2) A tendency grows up in us to repeat what we have often done. 2. As a beneficent law. It is because acts grow easier and generally more attractive the oftener they are performed, that men advance in the arts, the sciences, the morality, and the religion of life. 3. As an abused law. The text is a strong expression of its abuse. The words of course are not to be taken in an absolutely unqualified sense. The idea is great difficulty. Our subject is the difficulty of converting old sinners, men "accustomed to do evil." I. IT IS A SELF-CREATED DIFFICULTY. 1. Habit is but an accumulation of acts, and in each of the aggregate acts the actor was free. 2. The sinner himself feels that he has given his moral complexion the Ethiopian stain, and painted his character with the leopard spots. This fact shows—(1) The moral force of human nature. Man forging chains to manacle his spirit, creating a despot to control his energies and his destiny. (2) The egregious folly of wickedness. It makes man his own enemy, tyrant, destroyer. II. IT IS A GRADUALLY AUGMENTING DIFFICULTY. Habit is a cord. It is strengthened with every action. At first it is as fine as silk, and can be broken with but little effort. As it proceeds it becomes a cable strong enough to hold a man of war, steady amidst boisterous billows and furious winds. Habit

is a momentum. It increases with motion. At first a child's hand can arrest the progress. As the motion increases it gets a power difficult for an army of giants to overcome. Habit is a river, at its head-spring you can arrest its progress with ease, and turn it in any direction you please, but as it approaches the ocean it defies opposition, and rolls with a thunderous majesty into the sea. 1. The awful condition of the sinner. 2. The urgency for an immediate decision. Procrastination is folly. 3. The necessity of the special prayers of the Church on behalf of aged sinners. III. IT IS A POSSIBLY CONQUERABLE DIFFICULTY. 1. The history of conversions shows the possibility of overcoming this difficulty. 2. The mightiness of Christ shows the possibility of overcoming this difficulty. He saves to the uttermost. Uttermost in relation to the enormity of the sin—uttermost in relation to the age of the sinner. (*Homilist.*) *Evil habits and their cure* :—If we compare together these words of Jeremiah with other words on the same subject by Isaiah we arrive at a more complete view of the force of evil habits than is presented to us by this single text. "Come, now, let us reason together, though your sins," &c. This is the essential message of Christ, that there is forgiveness of sins—that the transgressions of the past can be blotted out and he who has done evil learn to do good. This doctrine was very early objected to. It was one of the arguments that the educated heathen in the first ages of the Christian Church brought against Christianity that it declared that possible which they believed to be impossible. "It is manifest to everyone," writes Celsus, the first great polemical adversary of Christianity, who flourished in the second century, "that those who are disposed by nature to vice, and are accustomed to it, cannot be transformed by punishment, much less by mercy, for to transform nature is a matter of extreme difficulty," but our Lord has taught us that what is impossible with men is possible with God, and Christianity proved again and again its Divine origin in accomplishing this very work which, according to men, was impossible. Against the sweeping assertion of Celsus to the contrary, we may place the living examples of thousands upon thousands who through the Gospel have been turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. To trace the steps of such a change in any particular case is one of the most fascinating studies in biography; but no study will ever explain all, for in the work of a soul's regeneration there is a mystery which can never be brought into the mould of thought. "The wind," said Christ, "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit," but man's part in the work can be conceived, and this is what we should strive to understand, so that we may work with God, and there are three chief ways in which we may do so: 1. There is resistance. As every yielding to temptation strengthens a bad habit, so every act of resistance weakens it. It was the belief of the North American Indians that the strength of the slain foe passed into the body of the slayer; and in the moral world it is so, for not only does resistance take from the force of habit, it strengthens the will against it, so that in a double way acts of resistance undermine the force of habit. 2. Then there is education. Every man who is not wholly lost to a sense of right-doing feels every time he gives way to an evil habit a silent protest working in his breast, something that tells him he is wrong, that urges him to do differently, that interferes with the pleasure of the sin, mingling with it a sense of dissatisfaction. This protest will generally take the form of urging us towards the good which is opposite to the evil in which we are indulging. And by educating, by drawing out the desire after this good more and more, the evil is more and more put to flight. Thus the way to overcome inattentiveness of the mind is not so much to fix our attention on the fault, as to cultivate and educate its opposite, concentration of mind. 3. Once again, there is prayer. It has been said that to labour is to pray, and that is true in a measure; and those who labour in resisting evil habits and in cultivating good ones are, in a sense, by such actions praying to God; but anyone who has ever prayed knows that that definition does not exhaust the meaning or force of prayer. Prayer is more than labour—it is having intercourse with God. It is one of the chief means by which we are made conscious that we are not alone in the battle of life; but that there is One with us who is our unchangeable Friend, who looks down upon us with an interest that never flags, and a love that never grows cold. (*Arthur Brooke, M.A.*) *Inability to do good arising from vicious habits* :—I. TO EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF EVIL HABITS, PARTICULARLY THE TENDENCY OF THEM, TO RENDER MEN INDISPOSED TO MORAL GOODNESS. No habit leaveth

a man in a state of indifference, it putteth a strong bias upon his mind to act according to its direction, as experience showeth in innumerable instances, and in the most ordinary affairs, and even amusements of life; how naturally and easily do we fall into the beaten track, and hold on the accustomed course, though our reason discerneth no importance in it at all! Nay, by the influence of habit, trifles are magnified into matters of great moment, at least they engage the desire, and determine the active powers as if they were, so that we find it very difficult to break them off. Again, the only rational way of reclaiming men from ill practices is, by convincing them that they are ill, and that they must be attended with unhappy consequences to themselves: but the effect of habits is to darken the understanding, to fill the mind with prejudices, and to render it unattentive to reason. How then shall they that are accustomed to do evil learn to do well, since they are biassed against it, being expert in the contrary practice, and since they have made themselves in a great measure incapable of instruction? II. CONSIDER PARTICULARLY HOW WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND THAT DISABILITY TO DO GOOD WHICH IS CONTRACTED BY BEING ACCUSTOMED TO DO EVIL. 1. That the impotence is not total nor equal to that which is natural, will appear from the following considerations. (1) Where there is a total disability, and equal to that which is natural, there can be no guilt. (2) It is very well known in a multitude of instances, that men by strong resolutions, and a vigorous exertion of the natural force of their minds, have actually conquered very inveterate habits, and turned to a quite different way of living. 2. You see then where the difference lieth, that it is in ourselves, and what that impotence is which ariseth from habits, that it is no more than irresolution which is properly the fault of the mind, and to be charged wholly upon it. 3. God waiteth to be gracious to them, unwilling they should perish, if they are disposed on their part to submit to the remedy which His mercy hath provided. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *Habits*.—1. Everyone remembers how much of his discipline as a child was connected with points of manner; how often he was reproved for little rudenesses, &c. And if by the neglect of others or by his own he formed any such habit, does he not remember too how much pain and effort it cost him to get rid of it, however little pleasure there might be in indulging it, or however easy it might appear, in prospect, to part with it at any moment when it might become troublesome? And I need not remind any of you of the force of habit as shown, in an opposite way, in matters which, though they occupy much of your time and thoughts elsewhere, must yet be regarded as trifling in comparison with the graver subjects which ought to fill our minds here; I mean, in those exercises of bodily strength and skill which form so large a part of our youthful training. 2. But now go one step farther, and observe the effect of habit, for good or evil, upon the mind. If language be your chief subject of study, the repeated sight of certain symbols, which were at first entirely strange and unintelligible to you, makes them familiar, and associates them for ever in your mind with the ideas which they symbolise; and the repeated formation for yourselves of words and sentences in that foreign language, according to certain rules, gives you at last an almost intuitive and instantaneous perception of what is right and beautiful in it. This is the reward of the diligent; their reward in proportion to the original gift of mind for which they are not responsible, and to their diligence in the use of it for which they are. And if this be, in intellectual matters, the force of habit for good, need I speak of its influence for evil? Those repeated neglects which make up the school-life of an idle or presumptuous boy; the little separate acts, or rather omissions of act, which seem to him now so trifling; the postponements, half-learnings, or total abandonments of lessons; the hours of inattention, vacancy, or wandering thoughts, which he spends in school; the shallowness and looseness and slovenliness—still worse, the too frequent unfairness—of his best preparations of work; these things too are all going to form habits. 3. The soul too is the creature of habit. Have you not all found it so? When you have for two or three days together forgotten your prayers, has it not become, even in that short time, more easy to neglect, more difficult to resume them? When you have left God out of sight in your daily life; when you have fallen into an unchristian and irreligious state of mind and life, how soon have you found this state become as it were natural to you; how much less, day by day, did the idea of living without God alarm you; how much more tranquil, if not peaceful, did conscience become as you departed farther and farther in heart from the living God! But there is another, an opposite, habit of the soul, that of living to God,

with God, and in God. That too is a habit, not formed so soon or so easily as the other, yet like it formed by a succession of acts, each easier than the last, and each making the next easier still. 4. I have spoken separately of habits of the body, the mind, and the soul. It remains that we should combine these, and speak a few serious words of those habits which affect the three. Such habits there are, for good and for evil. There is a devotion of the whole man to God, which affects every part of his nature. Such is the habit of a truly religious life; such a life as some have sought in the seclusion of a cloister, but which God wills should be led in that station of life, whatsoever it be, to which it has pleased or shall please Him to call us. One day so spent indeed, is the earnest, and not the earnest only but the instrument too, of the acquisition of the inheritance of the saints in light. How can we, after such thoughts, turn to their very opposite, and speak of habits affecting for evil conjointly the body, the mind, and the soul? Yet such habits there are, and the seed of them is often sown in boyhood. 5. It is the fashion with some to undervalue habits. The grace of God, they say, and say truly, can change the whole man into the opposite of what he is. It is most true: with God—we bless Him for the word, it is our one hope—all things are possible. But does God give any encouragement in His Word to that sort of recklessness as to early conduct, which some practically justify by their faith in the atonement? Is it not the whole tenour of His Word that children should be brought up from the first in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? 6. I have spoken, as the subject led me, of good habits and evil: there is yet a third possibility, or one which seems such. There is such a thing, in common language at least, as having no habits. Yes, we have known such persons, all of us; persons who have no regularity and no stability within or without; persons who one day seem not far from the kingdom of God, and the next have drifted away so far from it that we wonder at their inconsistency. As you would beware of bad habits, so beware also of having no habits. Grasp tenaciously, and never let go, those few elements at least of virtuous habit which you acquired in earliest childhood in a Christian home. You will be very thankful for them one day. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

Importance of the right formation of habits:—I. HOW FAR THE INFLUENCE OF HABIT EXTENDS. Habit extends its influence over the body, the mind, and the conscience. The body, considered merely as an animal frame, is much under the influence of habit. Habit inures the body to cold or heat; renders it capable of labour, or patient of confinement. Through habit the sailor rides upon the rocking wave without experiencing that sickness which the unaccustomed voyager is almost sure to feel. I might now proceed from the body to the mind, only there are some cases which are of a mixed nature, partaking both of body and mind, in which we neither contemplate the body apart from the mind, nor the mind apart from the body; and habit has its influence upon both. Such is the pernicious use of strong liquors, habit increases the desire, diminishes the effect of them. So all undue indulgence of the body increases the desire of further indulgence. The appetite by constant gratifications becomes uncontrollable; and the mind also grows debauched, is rendered incapable of purer pleasures, and altogether unfit for the exercises of religion. Nor is it only through the body that habit has its effect upon the mind. There are habits purely mental, as well as habits purely bodily. Profaneness may become a habit; a man may contract a habit of swearing, a habit of speaking irreverently of sacred things. So the anger of a passionate man is often called constitutional. Further, the Apostle Paul speaks of those whose mind and conscience is defiled. Habit has its effect on the conscience also. One would think that the more frequently a man had committed a fault, the more severely would his conscience upbraid him for it. But the very contrary is the case: his conscience has become familiar with the sin, as well as his other faculties of mind or body.

II. THE DIFFICULTY OF OVERCOMING HABITS. Even in the case of those who have been soberly and virtuously brought up, and whose life is unstained by a course of profane or licentious conduct, there is a principle of evil which keeps them far from God. They have no love to Him, no delight in Him, no communion with Him. How much more palpably impossible is it for the wretched sinner to break his chains, when sin by long indulgence has become habitual; when the body itself has been made subject to it, the mind polluted by it, and the conscience seared as with a red-hot iron! Does experience teach you to expect that these men will correct themselves? It may be that such men may change one sin for another, a new bad habit, as it acquires strength, may supplant an old one, the sins of youth may

give way to the sins of age. But this is not ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. It is only altering the manner of doing evil. With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible. Divine grace can not only take away the greatest guilt; it can also enlighten the darkest understanding, and sanctify the most corrupt heart. III. ADDRESS TWO DESCRIPTIONS OF CHARACTERS. I. Those who are still walking in their accustomed way of evil. 2. Those who have been delivered from it. (*J. Fawcett, M.A.*) *Habits*:—The formation of habits goes on in part by conscious volition or purpose. Men set themselves at work in certain directions to acquire accomplishments and various elements of power. Thus are habits formed. And the same process goes on under a more general schooling. We are living in society at large. Not only are we influenced by that which goes on in our households, but there is the reflection of a thousand households in the companionship into which we are thrown day by day, which influences us. The world of most persons is a microcosm with a small population; and they reflect the influence of the spheres in which they have had their training and their culture. The influences which surround them, for good and evil, for industry or indolence, are well-nigh infinite in number and variety. Every man should have an end in view; and every day he should adopt means to that end, and follow it from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, and from year to year. Then he is the architect of, and he is building, his own fortune. Out of a careless and unarmoured way spring up mischievous habits which at first are not very striking, nor very disastrous. Prominent among them is the habit of carelessness respecting the truth—carelessness in respect to giving one's word in the form of a promise. Never make a promise without a distinct and deliberate thought as to whether you can fulfil it or not; and having made a promise, keep it at all hazard, even though it be to your damage. Do not break your word. Then, aside from that mode of falsifying, men fall into the habit of uttering untruths. The love of truth is not in them. They do not esteem truth for itself's sake. They regard it as an instrument, as a coin, as it were; and when it is profitable they speak the truth, but when it is not profitable they are careless of it. Multitudes of persons by suppression falsify; and they use so thin and gauzy a veil as this: "Well, what I said was strictly true." Yes; but what you did not say was false. For you to tell the truth so that no one shall suspect the truth, and so that it shall produce a false and illusory impression—that has an evil effect upon others, and a still more evil effect upon your own character. The desire to conform your speech to Yea, yea, and Nay, nay; the desire for simplicity of truth; the desire to state things as they are, so that going from your mind they shall produce pictures in another's mind precisely as they lie in your own—that is manly. Still more likely are men by extravagance to fall from strict habits of truth. We live in an age of adjectives. Nothing is natural. The whole force of adjectives is exhausted on the ordinary affairs of life, and nothing is left for the weightier matters of thought and speech. Men form a habit in this direction. Frequently it is formed because it is very amusing. When a man has a good reputation for speaking the truth, and he speaks in a back-handed way, at first it is comical; as, for instance, where a man speaks of himself as being a dishonourable fellow when he is known to be the very pink of honesty and scrupulousness; or, where a man speaks smilingly of trying with all his might to live within his income, when he is known to roll in riches. Such extravagances have a pleasing effect once or twice; and not only individuals, but families and circles fall into the habit of using extravagant words and expressions, because under certain conditions they are amusing; but they cease to be so when they are applied to the common elements of life, and are heard every day. They become altogether distasteful to persons of refinement, and are in every way bad. The same is true of bluntness. Now and then the coming in of a blunt expression from a good, strong, honest man is like a clap of thunder in a hot, sultry day in summer—and we like it; but when a man makes himself disagreeable under the pretence that bluntness of speech is more honest than the refined expressions of polite society, he violates good taste and the true proportions of things. Nor is it strange, under such circumstances, that a man feels himself easily led to the last and worst form of lying—deliberate falsification; so that he uses untruth as an instrument by which to accomplish his ends. Closely connected with this obliteration of moral delicacy there comes in a matter of which I will speak, reading from Ephesians, the 5th chapter—"All uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you," &c. Where men tip their wit with salacious

stories; where men indulge in *double entendre*; where men report things whose very edge is uncomely and unwholesome; where men talk among themselves in such a way that before they begin they look around and say, "Are there any ladies present?" where men converse with an abominable indecorum and filthiness in repartee, jesting with things that are fine, and smearing things that are pure, the apostle says, "It is not convenient." The original is, It is not becoming. In other words, it is unmanly. That is the force of the passage. And we are forbidden to indulge in these things. Yet very many men run through the whole of them, sink into the depths of pollution, and pass away. I scarcely need say that in connection with such tendencies as I have reprobated will come in the temptation to a low tone of conduct socially; to coarse and vulgar manners, and to carelessness of the rights of others. By good manners I mean the equity of benevolence. If you will take the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, and, though it be perverting the text a little, substitute for "charity" the word politeness, you will have a better version of what true politeness is than has ever been written anywhere else. No man has any right to call himself a gentleman who is oblivious of that equity of kindness which should exist under all circumstances between man and man. I have noticed a want of regard for the aged. Grey hairs are not honourable in the sight of multitudes of young men. They have not trained themselves to rise up and do obeisance to the patriarch. I have observed that there was a sort of politeness manifested on the part of young men if the recipient of it was young and fair; but I have noticed that when poor women come into a car, sometimes bearing their babes in their arms, young men, instead of getting up and giving them their places, are utterly indifferent to them. The habits of our times are not courteous, and you are not likely to learn from them the art of good manners, which means kindness and equity between man and man in the ordinary associations of life; and if you would endow yourself with this Christian excellence you must make it a matter of deliberate consideration and assiduous education. I will mention one more habit into which we are liable to fall, and toward which the whole nation seems to tend: I mean the habit of loving evil. I refer not to the love of doing evil, but to the love of discussing evil. True Christian charity, it is also said in the 13th of 1st Corinthians, "rejoiceth not in iniquity." A man ought to be restrained from any commerce with that which is evil—evil news, evil stories, evil surmises, evil insinuations, innuendoes, scandals, everything evil that relates to society. Set yourselves, then, as Christian men and women, to abhor evil and to rejoice not in iniquity, but in the truth. I will speak of one other habit—namely, the growing habit of profanity. Men accustom themselves to such irreverence in the use of words which are sacred, that at last they cease to be words of power to them. Men swear by God, by the Almighty, by the Lord Jesus Christ, in a manner which shocks the feelings and wounds the hearts of truly conscientious people. And they who thus addict themselves to rudeness of speech violate the law of good society. Not only that, but they do it uselessly. You do not give weight to what you are saying in conversation by the employment of expletives. There is no statement which is more forcible than that which is expressed in simple language. And in giving way to the habit you are doing violence to the Word of God, to your best moral instincts, and to your ideal of the sanctity of your Ruler and your Judge; and I beseech of you who are beginning life to take heed of this tendency, and avoid it. We are all building a character. What that character is to be it doth not yet appear. We are working in the dark, as it were; but by every thought and action we are laying the stones, tier upon tier, that are going into the structure; and what it is to be the light of the eternal world will reveal. It is, therefore, wise for every man to pray, "Search me, O God; try me and see if there be any evil way in me." It is worth our while to go back to the Old Testament again, and say, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word." The cleanest Book, the most honourable Book, the most manly Book, the truest, the simplest, and the noblest Book that ever was written or thought of is this Book of God. In the Psalms of David, in the Proverbs of Solomon, in the whole New Testament, you cannot go amiss. There is not one place where you will be led down morally, where the ideal is not noble, and where it does not ascend higher and higher, till you stand in Zion and before God. (H. W. Beecher.)

*Of the difficulty of reforming vicious habits:—*I. THE GREAT DIFFICULTY OF REFORMING VICIOUS HABITS, OR OF CHANGING A BAD COURSE, TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DEEPLY ENGAGED IN IT, AND LONG ACCUSTOMED TO IT.

This will fully appear—1. If we consider the nature of all habits, whether good, or bad, or indifferent. A rooted habit becomes a governing principle, and bears almost an equal sway in us with that which is natural. It is a kind of a new nature superinduced, and even as hard to be expelled, as some things which are primitively and originally natural. 2. This difficulty ariseth more especially from the particular nature of evil and vicious habits. These, because they are suitable to our corrupt nature, and conspire with the inclinations of it, are likely to be of a much quicker growth and improvement, and in a shorter space, and with less care and endeavour, to arrive at maturity and strength, than the habits of grace and goodness. 3. The difficulty of this change ariseth likewise from the natural and judicial consequences of a great progress and long continuance in an evil course. II. THE CASE OF THESE PERSONS, THOUGH IT BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT, IS NOT QUITE DESPERATE; BUT AFTER ALL, THERE IS SOME GROUND OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT LEFT, THAT THEY MAY YET BE RECLAIMED AND BROUGHT TO GOODNESS. 1. There is left, even in the worst of men, a natural sense of the evil and unreasonableness of sin; which can hardly be ever totally extinguished in human nature. 2. Very bad men, when they have any thoughts of becoming better, are apt to conceive some good hopes of God's grace and mercy. 3. Who knows what men thoroughly roused and startled may resolve, and do? And a mighty resolution will break through difficulties which seem insuperable. 4. The grace and assistance of God when sincerely sought, is never to be despaired of. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *The difficulty of repentance*.—I. FROM THE NATURE OF HABITS IN GENERAL, OF VICIOUS HABITS IN PARTICULAR. Concerning habits, we may observe that there are many things which we practise at first with difficulty, and which at last, by daily and frequent repetition, we perform not only without labour, but without premeditation and design. Thus it is with the habits of memory. By frequent practice and slow degrees we acquire the use of speech: we retain a surprising variety of words of arbitrary sounds, which we make the signs of things. Thus it is in the habits of the imagination. When we accustom our minds to certain objects, when we call them often before us, these objects, which at first were perhaps as indifferent as any other, become familiar to us, they appear uncalled and force themselves upon us. Thus it is with the habits of sin. They are acquired like other habits by repeated acts; they fix themselves upon us in the same manner, and are corrected with the same difficulty. A sinner by long offending contracts an aversion from his duty, and weakens his power of deliberating and choosing upon wise motives. By giving way to his passions he has made them ungovernable; they rise of themselves, and stay not for his consent, and by every victory over him they gain new strength, and he grows less able to resist them. His understanding and reason become unserviceable to him. At first, when he did amiss, he was ashamed of it; but shame is lost by long offending. Add to this, that vicious habits make a deeper impression and gain faster upon us than good habits. Sin recommends itself to our senses by bringing present profit or pleasure, whilst religion consists frequently in renouncing present profit or pleasure for a greater interest at a distance, and so recommends itself, not to our senses, but to our reason; upon which account it is more difficult to be good than to be bad. One being asked, what could be the reason why weeds grew more plentifully than corn? answered, Because the earth was the mother of weeds, but the step-mother of corn; that is, the one she produced of her own accord, the other not till she was compelled to it by man's toil and industry. This may not unfitly be applied to the human mind, which on account of its intimate union with the body, and commerce with sensible objects, easily and willingly performs the things of the flesh, but will not bring forth the spiritual fruits of piety and virtue, unless cultivated with assiduity and application. II. FROM EXPERIENCE. There are few who forsake any vice to which they are remarkably addicted. The truth of this may be easiest observed in those faults where the body seems not to be much concerned, such as pride, conceit, levity of mind, rashness in judging and determining, censoriousness, malice, cruelty, wrath, moroseness, envy, selfishness, avarice. These bad dispositions seldom forsake a person in whom they are fixed. Besides, many of them are of so deceitful a nature, that the mind entertains them and knows it not; the man thinks himself free from faults which to every other person are most visible. III. SCRIPTURE CONCURS WITH REASON AND EXPERIENCE. When the Scriptures speak of evil habits, they make use of figures as strong and bold as language can utter and the imagination conceive, to set forth their pernicious nature. Persons in that condition are said to be enclosed in a

snare, to be taken captives, to have sold themselves to work wickedness, to be in a state of slavery. Even those passages which contain great encouragement and favourable promises to repentance, inform us at the same time of the difficulty of amending. Our Saviour gives a plain and familiar representation of it. A shepherd, says He, rejoices more over one sheep which was lost and is found, than over ninety-and-nine which went not astray. Why so? For this, amongst other reasons, because he could not reasonably expect such good fortune, and had little hopes of finding a creature exposed to a thousand dangers, and unable to shift for itself. IV. REFLECTIONS USEFUL TO PERSONS OF ALL AGES AND OF ALL DISPOSITIONS. 1. If the words of the text were to be taken rigorously and in the strictest sense, it would be a folly to exhort a habitual sinner to repentance, and an unreasonable thing to expect from him a natural impossibility; but it is certain that they mean no more than an extreme difficulty. 2. There are persons who sincerely profess the Christian religion, who fear God and desire to be in His favour, but whose lives are not so conformable to their belief as they ought to be, who are sorry for their faults, and fall into them again, who make not the progress in goodness which they acknowledge to be justly expected from them, and who have not that command over their passions which by a little more resolution and self-denial they might acquire. Such persons should seriously consider the difficulty of reforming bad habits, and the extreme danger of that state: for though it be not their present condition, yet if they use not timely caution, sad effects may ensue. 3. These sad examples should be a warning to those whose obedience is so incomplete and sullied with so many defects, whose love of virtue is not equal and uniform, and whose affections are placed sometimes on God and religion, and sometimes on the follies and vanities of the world. 4. There are Christians who abstain from known and deliberate transgressions, who strive to make a daily progress in goodness, and to perform an acceptable service to God. The difficulty of reforming vicious habits may warn them to be upon their guard, that after they have set out well and proceeded well, they fail not at last, nor lose a reward near at hand. 5. They who have wisely and happily preserved themselves from evil habits ought to be very thankful to God, by whose blessing they are free from that heavy bondage, and strangers to the sad train of evils which attend it. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *The sinner's helplessness*.—I. IF MAN CANNOT TURN HIMSELF TO HAPPINESS AND GOD, WHY NOT? 1. Because of the force of sinful habit. The man who has his arm paralysed cannot use it for his own defence; and sin deprives the soul of power, it paralyses the soul. The man thinks he can pray, but when the time comes, he finds that sinful habits are so strong upon him that he cannot. I well recollect, one winter's night, when the storm was raging and the wind was howling, being called up to attend one who was in the agonies of death, and who had long been living an avowed life of sin, but he became anxious at the last to know if it were possible for him to find a place of safety; and never shall I forget the answer which that poor man made to me, when I directed him to pray: "Pray, sir! I cannot. I have lived in sin too long to pray. I have tried to pray, but I cannot, I know not how; and if this be all, I must perish." A long continued life of sin had paralysed that man's soul; and it does so, consciously or unconsciously, in every case. 2. Because of the fault of his sinful nature. You know well, that if the glorious sun in the heavens were to shine upon the face of a man who is naturally dead he would neither see it nor feel its warmth. If you were to present to that man all the riches of the world he would have no eye to look at them, no heart to wish for them, no hand to put forth to grasp them. And so with the man who is unconverted. He may be all alive to sin, he may have all the powers of his mind in full exercise, but his heart is alienated from God; he has no wish for "the unsearchable riches of Christ"; he has no desire to become enriched with those treasures which shall endure for ever. 3. Because of the enmity of Satan. Do you see that poor man who has been toiling in all the heat of a summer's day with a heavy burden upon him? His strength is now gone, and he has fallen into the ditch; and when he tries to raise himself, do you see that tyrant who has got his foot upon his back, and who plunges him again into the ditch and keeps him down? You have there a picture of the enmity and power of Satan. II. IF MAN CANNOT TURN HIMSELF, IF HE BE LIKE THE ETHIOPIAN WHO CANNOT CHANGE HIS SKIN, WHY TELL HIM OF IT? Is it not to pour insult upon his miserable and abject condition? Oh no! It is necessary to tell him of his helplessness. 1. Because God commands it. His eye is upon the poor prodigal in all his wanderings: He knows the desperato

wickedness and deceitfulness of his heart ; He, the Lord, searches the heart ; He knows what it is best for fallen man to know and to be made acquainted with ; and He tells those whom He sends to be His ambassadors to preach the Word, to proclaim the whole counsel of God, to keep back nothing whatsoever that is contained in the revealed will of God. 2. Because there must be a sense of need before deliverance can be experienced. If a man were to have an idea, when he was in a building surrounded by danger, that whenever he pleased he could get up and take the key out of his pocket and unlock the door and walk out, then he might indeed sit still and laugh at those who would fain arouse him to a sense of his danger ; but if you can tell the man that the key which he fancies he possesses he has lost—if you can get him to feel for it, if you can once bring him to the conviction that he has lost it, and that he cannot get out of the building in which he is, then you rouse him from his state of apathy, then you bring him to the point at which he is ready to welcome the hand of any deliverer. 3. God has promised to give us His Holy Spirit. Here the sinner's objections are met. If he has no power, yet if he has the wish to be delivered from his dreadful state, God promises to pour out His Spirit ; and that Spirit leads to Jesus, convinces of sin, and then takes of the things of Jesus and applies them to the sinner's soul. III. INFERENCES. 1. Without Christ men must perish. 2. Is there not a danger of delay in this matter ? 3. Think of the responsibility of this present moment. (*W. Cadman, M.A.*) *Custom in sin exceeding dangerous* :—I. THE DEFILEMENT OF SIN. 1. Its inherence. (1) This should humble and abase us in consideration of our vileness ; not lead us to excuse our sins. (2) We see here what cause we have to desire that God would change our nature, and bestow a new nature on us. 2. Its monstrosity. (1) It alters a man's country ; turns an Israelite into an Ethiopian, and thus causes a degeneration there. (2) It also alters a man's nature ; gives him the quality and disposition even of the beasts, makes him a leopard, and thus makes a degeneration there. 3. Its multiplication. A beast of divers colours, marks, and spots (Gal. v. 19). 4. Its universality. A deformity in all parts and members (Isa. i. 5 ; Gen. vi. 5). II. THE ENTANGLEMENTS OF SIN. 1. The qualification or condition of the persons accustomed to do evil. More correctly, "taught to do evil." Taught—(1) By doctrine and instruction. There is a great deal of such teaching in the world (Matt. v. 19 ; Titus i. 11 ; Mark vii. 7 ; 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4). (2) By pattern and example. That which men see to be practised they soon and easily fall into. (3) By practice and use "accustomed to do evil." Use makes perfect. 2. The invincible necessity which follows upon custom in sin : they "cannot do good." (1) An impotency to good (Gal. v. 17). (2) A precipitancy unto evil (Eccles. viii. 11). Conclusion—1. Take heed of having anything to do with sin at first. 2. If any should fall into sin, do not stay in it, but hasten out of it with speed (Rom. vi. 1). 3. Take heed of relapses, and falling back to sin again (2 Pet. ii. 20). (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *The alarming power of sin* :—I. THE HABITS OF MEN ARE STRENGTHENED AND CONFIRMED BY INDULGENCE. Even habits which relate to matters of indifference become inveterate, and are with great difficulty modified and overcome. The longer a man continues in sinful courses, the more fully his mind becomes trained in these habits of resistance to all that is good. He is insensibly led on from one course of wickedness to another, till he is under a sort of necessity of sinning. He has taken so many steps in this downward road, and his progress has become so accelerated and impetuous that he cannot resist it. II. THE INFLUENCE OF THIS WORLD, AS MEN ADVANCE IN LIFE, USUALLY BECOMES MORE PERPLEXING, AND A GREATER HINDRANCE TO THEIR CONVERSION. While the eye is pleased, the ear regaled, and all the senses delighted, there is everything to corrupt and destroy. A man in middle life may, now and then, feel powerful inducements to become pious ; the grasp of the world may, for a short season, be partially relaxed ; and he may withdraw himself for a little from his old companions, to think of the scenes of that invisible world to which he is hastening ; but soon his courage and self-denial fail him, and he is soothed or frightened away from his purpose. Some golden bait, some earnest entreaty, some subtle stratagem, some unhallowed influence disheartens him, and he goes back again to the world. The world is still his idol. The concerns of time absorb the attention and exhaust the vigour of his mind. Having thrown himself into the current, he becomes weaker and weaker, and though the precipice is near, he cannot now stem the tide and reach the shore. III. AS YEARS INCREASE, MEN BECOME LESS INTERESTED IN THE SUBJECT OF RELIGION, AND MORE OBDDURATE AND AVERSE TO

ANY ALTERATION IN THEIR MORAL CHARACTER. The season of sensitiveness and ardent affection is gone by. The only effect which the most powerful instructions or the best adapted means of grace are apt to have upon such a mind, is increasing insensibility and hardness, and greater boldness in iniquity. They cannot endure to be disturbed in their sins. When you urge the claims of piety upon them, they treat the whole matter with neglect and contempt. They have made up their minds to run the hazard of perdition, rather than be roused to the severe and dreadful effort of forsaking their sins. Here, too, is the danger of men accustomed to impenitence. The scenes of eternity to such men have a melancholy and direful aspect. Everything is conspiring to harden, deceive, and destroy them; and there is little probability that these augmented obstacles to their conversion will ever be removed. IV. THE THOUGHT OF MULTIPLIED AND LONG-CONTINUED TRANSGRESSION IS VERY APT TO DISCOURAGE ALL ATTEMPTS AT REPENTANCE. Not unfrequently they will tell you, "Once the work might have been performed, but it is now too late; the favourable opportunity is past; human life is but a dream, and the day of hope is gone by!" It is a dark—very dark problem, whether persons of this description will ever repent and believe the Gospel. It is true that God's mercies are infinite; that those who seek Him shall find Him; that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin; and that while there is life there may be hope; and yet a more hopeless condition this side eternity cannot easily be conceived, than the condition of such a man. V. THERE IS AWFUL REASON TO APPREHEND THAT GOD WILL LEAVE MEN OF THIS DESCRIPTION TO PERISH IN THEIR SINS. If we look into the Bible, we shall find that most of the prophets and apostles, as well as those who were converted through their instrumentality, were called into the kingdom of God in childhood, or youth, or in the dawn and vigour of manhood. One of the distinctive features of all revivals of religion is, that they have prevailed principally among the young. It has also been remarked, that in ordinary seasons, the individuals who have occasionally been brought into the kingdom of Christ, with few exceptions, have been from those not habituated to impenitence. Almost the only exception to this remark is found in places where men have never sat under faithful preaching, and never enjoyed a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, until late in life. In such places I have known persons brought into the vineyard at the eleventh hour. And this is also true of heathen lands. But even here, there are comparatively few instances of conversion from among those who have grown old in sin. Conclusion—1. Admonition to the aged. What the means of grace could do for you, they have probably done; and that your day of merciful visitation has well nigh reached its last limits. God still waits that He may be gracious. And He may wait till the last sand of life has fallen. But, oh, how ineffably important to you is the present hour! Your hoary hairs may be even now "a crown of glory, if found in the way of righteousness." Let not another hour be lost! This very call rejected may seal our destiny. 2. Our subject addresses those who are in middle life. The period most auspicious to the interests of your immortality is gone. You are now in the midst of your most important designs and pursuits, and probably at the zenith of your earthly glory. Everything now conspires to turn away your thoughts from God and eternity. Better leave every other object unattained than your eternal salvation. Better give up every other hope, than the hope of heaven. Oh, what a flood of sorrows will roll in upon you by and by, when you see that "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and you are not saved!" 3. Our subject addresses the young. Yours is the season of hope. If you become early devoted to God, you may live to accomplish much for His cause and kingdom in the world; your influence and example may allure multitudes around you to the love and practice of godliness; and you may be delivered from the guilt of that destructive influence, which will plant thorns in your dying pillow. (*G. Spring, D.D.*) *Habit*:—When in a vacant hour we fall into reverie, and the images of the past come pouring out of the storehouse of memory at their own sweet will, how arbitrary appears the succession of our thoughts! With a rapidity greater than that of seven-leagued boots, the mind passes from country to country, and from century to century. This moment it is in Norway, the next in Australia, the next in Palestine, the next in Madagascar. But this apparent arbitrariness is not real. In reality thought is linked to thought, and for the wildest leaps and most arbitrary turns of the fancy there is in every case a sufficient reason. You are thinking of Norway; but that makes you recall a friend who is now in Australia, with whom you visited that picturesque country;

and so your thought flies to Australia. Then, being in Australia, you think of the Southern Cross, because you have been reading a poem in which that constellation was described as the most remarkable feature of the southern hemisphere. Then the likeness of the name of the cross makes you think of the Cross of Christ, and so you pass over centuries and find yourself in Palestine; and the Cross of Christ makes you think of the sufferings of Christians, and your mind is in Madagascar, where the missionaries have recently been exposed to suffering. Thus, you see, beneath the phenomena apparently most arbitrary, there is law; and even for the most apparently unaccountable flights and leaps of the mind there is always a good reason.

I. THE ORIGIN OF HABIT. Habit may be conceived to arise in this way. When, in the revolution of time—of the day, or the week, or the month, or the year,—the point comes round at which we have been thinking of anything, or have done anything, by the law of the association of ideas we think of it again, or do it again. For instance, when day dawns we awake. We get out of bed because we have done it at that time before. At a later hour we take breakfast, and go away to business, for the same reason; and so on through the day. When Sunday morning comes our thoughts turn to sacred things, and we make ready to go to the house of God, because we have always been accustomed to do that. The more frequently anything has been done, the stronger is habit, and frequency acts on habit through something else. Frequency gives ease and swiftness to the doing of anything. We do anything easily and swiftly which we have done often. Even things which seemed impossible can not only be done, but done with facility, if they have been done often. A celebrated character tells that in a month he learned to keep four balls up in the air and at the same time to read a book and understand it. Even tasks that caused pain may come to be done with pleasure, and things that were done at first only with groans and tears may at last become a source of triumph. It is not only the mind that is involved in habit. Even the body is subdued to its service. Do we not recognise the soldier by his gait, the student by his stoop, and the merchant by his bustle? And in the parts of the body that are invisible—the muscles and nerves—there is a still greater change due to habit. Hence the counsel of the philosopher, and I think it is a very profound counsel: “Make your nervous system your ally instead of your enemy in the battle of life.”

II. EXCESSIVE HABIT. Habit, even good habit, may be excessive. It tends to become hide-bound and tyrannical. There is a pharisaical sticking to opinions once formed, and to customs once adopted, which is the principal obstacle to human progress. Yet, on the whole, there is no possession so valuable as a few good habits, for this means that not only is the mind pledged and covenanted to good, but the muscles are supple, and even the very bones are bent to what is good.

III. DESIRABLE HABITS. I should be inclined to say that the most desirable habit which any young person can seek to have is self-control; that is the power of getting yourself to do what you know you ought to do, and to avoid what you know you ought to avoid. At first this habit would be exceedingly difficult to acquire, but there is an enormous exhilaration when a man can do the thing he knows he ought to do. It is moral strength that gives self-respect, and it will very soon win the respect of others. The second habit I would like to name is the habit of concentration of mind. I mean the power of withdrawing your thoughts from other subjects, and fixing them for long at a time on the subject in hand. I am sure many of you know how difficult that habit is to acquire. If you attempt to think on any particular subject, immediately you will think of other things; but by perseverance your mind will become your servant, and then you are on the way to being a thinker, for it is only to people who begin to think in this way that the secret and joy of truth unfold themselves. I mention, as the third desirable habit, that of working when you are at work. I do not care what your work is, whether work of brain or hand, whether well-paid or ill-paid; but what I say is, do it as well as it can be done for its own sake, and for your own sake. Do it so that you can be proud of it. There is one other habit that I should like to mention that is very desirable, and that is prayer. Happy is that man who at some hour or hours every day—the time which he finds to be most suitable for himself—goes down on his knees before his Maker. I say happy is that man, for his heavenly Father who seeth in secret will reward him openly.

IV. THE TYRANNY OF EVIL HABIT. Evil habits may be acquired through simply neglecting to acquire good ones. Like weeds, they grow up wherever the field is uncultivated and the good seed

is not sown. For example, the man who does not work becomes a dissipated loafer. The young man who does not keep up the habit of going to church loses spiritual instinct—the instinct for worship, for fellowship, for religious work, and becomes a prey to sloth on the Sabbath. The tyranny of evil habit is proverbial. The moralists compare it to a thread at the beginning, but as thread is twisted with thread, it becomes like a cable which can turn a ship. Or they compare it to a tree, which to begin with is only a twig which you can bend any way, but when the tree is fully grown, who can bend it? And apart altogether from such illustrations, it is appalling how little even the most strong and obvious motives can turn aside the course of habit. This truth is terribly expressed in our text: “Can the Ethiopian,” &c. I suppose we all have contracted evil habits of some kind, and therefore for all of us it is an important question, Can these be unlearned and undone? V. HOW TO BREAK BAD HABITS. Moralists give rules for undoing evil habits. Here are some of them. 1. “Launch yourself on the new course with as strong an initiative as possible.” I suppose he means, do not try to taper your evil habit off, but break it off at once. Give it no quarter; and pledge yourself in some way; make some public profession. 2. “Never suffer an exception to occur till the new habit is rooted in your life.” 3. “Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of habits you aspire to gain.” 4. “Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day.” This writer strongly recommends that every one who seeks moral strength should every day do something he does not want to do, just to prove to himself he has the power of doing it. He would not mind very much whether it was an important thing or not, but he would say, “Every day do something deliberately that you do not want to do, just that you may get power over yourself—the power of getting yourself to do anything you want.” 5. I do not disparage rules like these. We have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, but the other half of that maxim is equally true, “It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.” (*Jas. Stalker, D.D.*) *Habit*.—1. To form a vicious habit is one of the easiest processes in nature. Man comes into a world where sin is, in many of its various forms, originally pleasant, and where evil propensities may be gratified at small expense. Nothing is required but to leave man to what is called the state of nature, to make him the slave of habitual sensuality. But even after the mind is, in some degree, fortified by education, and reason has acquired a degree of force, the ease with which a bad habit can be acquired is not less to be lamented. Vice gains its power by insinuation. It winds gently round the soul, without being felt, till its twines become so numerous, that the sinner, like the wretched Laocoon, writhes in vain to extricate himself, and his faculties are crushed at length in the folds of the serpent. Vice is prolific. It is no solitary invader. Admit one of its train, and it immediately introduces, with an irresistible air of insinuation, the multitude of its fellows, who promise you liberty, but whose service is corruption, and whose wages is death. 2. The effects of sinful indulgence, which make its relinquishment so difficult, are, that it perverts the moral discernment, benumbs the sensibility of conscience, destroys the sentiment of shame, and separates the sinner from the means and opportunities of conversion. The moral discernment is perverted. As the taste can be reconciled to the most nauseous and unpleasant impressions, the eye familiarised to a deformed object, the ear, to the most grating and discordant noises, and the feeling, to the most rough and irritating garment, so the moral taste becomes insensible to the loathsomeness of vice. Another effect of habitual transgression is, to banish the sentiment of shame. It is the tendency of habit to make a man regardless of observation, and at length of censure. He soon imagines that others see nothing offensive in what no longer offends himself. Besides, a vicious man easily gathers round him a circle of his own. It is the society of numbers which gives hardihood to iniquity, when the sophistry of the united ingenuity of others comes in aid of our own, and when, in the presence of the shameless and unblushing, the young offender is ashamed to blush. The last effect of vicious habits, by which the reformation of the sinner is rendered almost desperate, is, to separate him from the means of grace. He, who indulges himself in any passion, lust, or custom which openly or secretly offends against the laws of God or man, will find an insuperable reluctance to those places, persons, or principles by which he is necessarily condemned. One means of recovery yet remains, the reproof and

example of the good. But who will long bear the presence of another, whose very looks reprove him, whose words harrow up his conscience, and whose whole life is a severe, though silent, admonition? 3. Do you ask when education should commence? Believe me, it has begun. It began with the first idea they received—the insensible education of circumstances and example. While you are waiting for their understandings to gain strength, vice, folly, and pleasure have not waited your dilatory motions. While you are looking out for masters and mistresses, the young immortals are under the tuition of innumerable instructors. Passion has been exciting, and idleness relaxing them, appetite tempting, and pleasure rewarding them, and example, example has long since entered them into her motley school. Already have they learned much, which will never be forgotten: the alphabet of vice is easily remembered. Is it not time to examine, whether there be not in you some vicious habit, which, notwithstanding your caution, frequently presents itself to their greedy observation, thus recommended by all the weight of parental authority? But, though the doctrine of the early operation of habit be full of admonitions, it presents consequences, also, full of consolation and pleasure. God hath set the evil and the good, one over against the other; and all His general laws are adapted to produce effects ultimately beneficial. If the love of sensual pleasure become inveterate by indulgence, the pure love of truth and goodness, also, may, by early instillation and careful example, become so natural and constant, that a violation of integrity, and offence against gratitude, a breach of purity or of reverence toward God, may prove as painful as a wound. (*J. S. Buckminster.*) *The force of habit.*—I. THE NATURE OF OUR HABITS GENERALLY. As we become accustomed to the performance of any action, we have a proneness to repeat it on like occasions, the ideas connected with it being always at hand to lead us on and direct us; so that it requires a particular effort to forbear it, but to do it demands often no conscious act of the will at all. Habits of body are produced by repeated external acts, as agility, gracefulness, dexterity in the mechanical arts. Habits of mind are formed by the repeated exertion of the intellectual faculties, or the inward practical principles. To the class of mental habits belong the moral virtues, as obedience, charity, patience, industry, submission to law, self-government, the love of truth. The inward practical principles of these qualities, being repeatedly called into exertion, and acted upon, become habits of virtue: just as, on the other hand, envy, malice, pride, revenge, the love of money, the love of the world, when carried into act, gradually form habits of vice. Habit is in its own nature therefore indifferent to vice or virtue. If man had continued in his original righteousness, it would have been, what the merciful Creator designed it to be, a source of unspeakable moral strength and improvement. Every step in virtue would have secured further advances. To what point man might at length have reached by the effect of use and experience thus acting on faculties made for enlargement, it is impossible to say, and it is vain to inquire. For we are lost creatures. We are prone to commit sin, and every act of it only disposes us to renewed transgressions. The force of these evil habits lies much in the gradual and almost imperceptible manner in which they are acquired. No man becomes reprobate at once. The sinner at first has difficulties. Shame, conscience, education, motives of religion, example, the unreasonableness of vice, the immediate evil consequences of it in various ways, God's judgments on sinners, alarming events in His providence, the admonitions of friends and the warnings of ministers, are all barriers to the inundation. But habits, insensibly formed, sap the embankment. The powerful current works its way, and all opposing hindrances are carried before it. It is, indeed, true, that habit, in many cases, diminishes the enjoyment derived from sin. The sense of vicious pleasure is pallied by indulgence. But, unhappily, the same indulgence which lessens the pleasure increases the vicious propensity. A course of debauchery, for example, deadens the sense of pleasure, but increases the desire of gratification. The passive principle is in some degree worn away, but the active principle is invigorated. Drunkenness, again, destroys the sensibility of the palate, but strengthens the habit of intemperance. A continued course of impiety and profaneness lessens the lamentable pleasure which the scoffer originally felt in insulting religion, but confirms him in the practical rebellion against its laws. A continued course of worldliness and irreligion takes off from the zest and relish of worldly pursuits, but augments the difficulty of renouncing them. They are become joyless; but are still followed from a sort of sad necessity. II. THE CONSEQUENCES ARISING FROM CORRUPT HABITS, IN OUR FALLEN STATE. Any one

transgression, if habitual, excludes from the kingdom of heaven, and every transgression is in the way of speedily becoming so: here lies the danger. Look at yonder criminal, whose hands have violated the property, and perhaps been imbrued in the life, of his fellow-creature. His conscience is seared as with a hot iron. Is he ashamed when he commits abomination? Nay, he is not at all ashamed, neither can he blush. What has brought him hither? What has transformed the meek and decent and reputable youth into the fierce and vindictive ruffian? Evil habits. He began with breaking the Sabbath; this led to wicked company; drunkenness followed, and brought every other sin in its train—lust, passion, malice, desperation, cruelty, bloodshed. The road, dreadful as it seems to us, was easy to him. One bad habit prepared for the following. But my design is, not to dwell on a picture too shocking for a calm consideration; but to point out the danger of the same principle in cases by far more common and less suspected; and where the fatal effects of sinful customs in hardening the heart against the calls of grace and duty are less conspicuous perhaps at first sight, but not less fatal to the conversion and salvation of the soul. For what can account for that sober and measured system of sensual indulgence in which the great mass of mankind live, but habit working on the fallen state of mind? How is it that an immortal creature, gifted with reason and destined for heaven, can go on secure in gratifying all those earthly passions, which he once well knew to be inconsistent with a state of grace; but which he now pursues, forgetful of God and religion? What has made him morally insensible to the obligations of holiness, purity, and the love of God? The habit to which he has resigned himself. The effect has not been brought about at once. The desire for indolent and sensual gratification has increased with indulgence. Every day his resolutions for serving God have become weaker, and his practical subjugation to an earthly life has been confirmed. He has lost almost all notions of spiritual religion and self-government. He moves mechanically. He has little actual relish even for his most favourite pleasures; but they are necessary to him. He is the slave of the animal part of his frame. He vegetates rather than lives. Habit has become a second nature. If we turn from this description of persons, and view the force of habit in multitudes of those who are engaged in the affairs of trade and commerce, or in the prosecution of respectable professions, we need only ask what can account for the practical object of their lives? Why are nefarious or doubtful practices so frequently countenanced? Why are precarious speculations so eagerly embraced? Why are the aggrandisement of a family, the amassing of riches, the gratification of ambition, so openly pursued? And how does it arrive that this sort of spirit pervades so many thousands around us? It is their habit. It is the force of custom and the influence of the circle in which they move. They came by degrees within the magic charm, and are now fixed and bound to earth and its concerns. Again, notice for a moment the intellectual habits of many of the scholars and philosophers of our age. The world by wisdom knows not God. The pride of our corrupted hearts readily forms the properly intellectual or reasoning part of our nature to habits, as ensnaring and as fatal, as any which have their seat more directly in the bodily appetites. If once the inquisitive student resigns himself to a daring curiosity, applies to the simple and majestic truth of revelation the sort of argumentation which may safely be employed in natural inquiries, he is in imminent peril of scepticism and unbelief. The mind comes within a dangerous influence. A young and superficial reader once fixed in a habit of this sort, comes at last either tacitly to explain away the fundamental doctrines of the Holy Trinity, of the Fall, of human corruption, of redemption, and the work of the Holy Ghost, or openly to sacrifice them to the madness of infidelity, or to the scarcely less pernicious errors of the Socinian heresy. And whence is all this? Habit, working on a corrupt nature, has produced it, confirmed it, riveted it. Habit is as fruitful and as fatal a cause of intellectual disorder as of merely animal or sensual depravation. What, again, seduces the mere external worshipper of God to withhold from his Maker his heart, whilst he insults Him with a lifeless service of the lips? What, but the surprising and unsuspected influence of evil habit? He knows that the Almighty sees everything. He cannot but acknowledge that outward ceremonies, if destitute of fervent and humble devotion, are nothing less than a mockery of God, and abominable in His sight. And yet he proceeds in a heartless round of religious duties,—a mere lifeless shadow of piety. This he has so long allowed himself to offer to the Almighty, that at last his mind is unconscious of the

impiety of which he is guilty. A habit of formality and ceremonial observance, with a practical, and perhaps at length an avowed, opposition to the grace of true religion as converting and sanctifying the whole soul, has darkened even his judgment. Nor can I forbear to add that the general indifference to practical religion, which prevails in our age, may be traced back in a great measure to the same cause. Men are so accustomed to put off the concerns of their salvation, and to disregard really spiritual religion, that they at length learn to draw a regular and well-defined line between merely decent and reputable persons, and those who lead a seriously religious life; and to proscribe the latter as extravagant and hypocritical. III. THE EXTENT AND MAGNITUDE OF THAT CONVERSION TO GOD WHICH IS THEREFORE NECESSARY. A state of sin and a state of holiness are not like two ways running parallel by each other, and just parted by a line, so that a man may step out of the one into the other; but like two diverging roads to totally opposite places, which recede from each other as they go on, and lead the respective travellers farther and farther apart every step. What, then, is to bring man back to God? What to break the force of custom? What is to stop him in his rushing down the precipice? What to awaken him in his profound lethargy? What to be the starting-post of a new race? What the principle of a new life? What the motive, the master-motive, of a thorough and radical moral alteration? There never was, there never can be, any other effectual method proposed for these high purposes but that which the Scriptures reveal, an entire conversion of the whole soul to God by the mighty operation of the Holy Spirit. God alone that created the heart can renew it after His image. When the soul receives this new and holy bias, then the evil habits in which men formerly lived will resolutely be relinquished, and other and better habits will succeed. They will then repent of sin and separate from it. They will watch and pray against temptation. They will believe in the inestimable promises of life in Jesus Christ, trusting alone in His merits, and renouncing their imagined righteousness which was of the law. They will depend exclusively on the graces and influences of the Holy Spirit for every good thought and every holy action. Thus they will stop at once in the course of their former habits, and begin to form new ones. They will now enter on a life of humility and fear, of conscientiousness and circumspection, of mortification and purity, of meekness and temperance, of justice and charity; all springing from faith in the atonement of Christ, and from a genuine love to His name. (*D. Wilson, M.A.*) *On vicious habits:—*

I. THERE IS IN HUMAN NATURE SO UNHAPPY AN INCLINATION AND PROPENSITY TO SIN, THAT ATTENTION AND VIGILANCE ARE ALWAYS REQUISITE TO OPPOSE THIS INCLINATION, AND MAINTAIN OUR INTEGRITY. The power and influence of habit is the subject of daily observation. Even in matters merely mechanical, where no attention of mind is required, custom and practice give, we know, an expertness and facility not otherwise to be acquired. The case is the same, however unaccountable, in the operations of the mind. Actions frequently repeated form habits; and habits approach near to natural propensities. But if such be the influence of habits in general, vicious ones are still more peculiarly powerful. If the power of custom be on all occasions apt to prevail, we shall have still less inclination to oppose it where the object to which we accustom ourselves is naturally agreeable and suited to our corruption. Here all the resolution we can summon to our assistance will be requisite, and perhaps ineffectual. We may form an idea of the unhappy situation of an habitual offender from the difficulty we find in conquering even an indifferent custom. What was at first optional and voluntary, becomes by degrees in a manner necessary and almost unavoidable. And yet, besides the natural force of custom and habit, other considerations there are, which add to the difficulty of reforming vicious manners. By vicious habits we impair the understanding, and our perception of the moral distinction of actions becomes less clear and distinct. Smaller offences, under the plausible pretext of being such, gain the first admittance to the heart: and he who has been induced to comply with one sin, because it is a small one, will be tempted to a second, from the consideration that it is not much worse. And the same plea will lead him on gradually to another, and another, of still greater magnitude. Every new sin is committed with less reluctance than the former; and he endeavours to find out reasons, such as they are, to justify and vindicate what he is determined to persist in, and to practise: and thus, by habits of sinning, we cloud the understanding, and render it in a manner incapable of distinguishing moral good and evil. But further: As, by long practice and perseverance in sin,

we lose or impair the moral discernment and feeling of the mind ; so, by the same means, we provoke the Almighty to withdraw His assisting grace, long bestowed in vain. II. YET, NOTWITHSTANDING THIS DIFFICULTY AND DANGER, THE SINNER MAY HAVE IT IN HIS POWER TO RETURN TO DUTY, AND RECONCILE HIMSELF TO GOD. When once the sinner feels his guilt,—feels just impressions of his own disobedience, and of the consequent displeasure and resentment of heaven ; if he is serious in his resolutions to restore himself by repentance to the favour of his offended God ; God, who is ever ready to meet and receive the returning penitent, will assist his resolution with such a portion of His grace, as may be sufficient, if not totally, at once to extirpate vicious habits, yet gradually to produce a disposition to virtue ; so that, if not wanting to himself, he shall not fail to become superior to the power of inveterate habits. In this case, indeed, no endeavours on his part ought to be neglected,—no attempts left unessayed, to recommend himself to the throne of mercy. Never, therefore, think of postponing the care of your salvation to the day of old age ; never think of treasuring up to yourselves difficulties, sorrows, repentance, and remorse, against an age, the disorders and infirmities of which are themselves so hard to be sustained. Let not these be the comforts reserved for that period of life which stands most in need of consolation. What confusion must cover the self-convicted sinner, grown old in iniquity ! How reluctant to attempt a task to which he has always been unequal ; and to travel a difficult road ; which opens to him, indeed, happier prospects, but has hitherto been found impracticable ! But if any of us have unhappily lost this first, best season of devoting ourselves to God,—and have reserved nothing but shame, sorrow, and remorse, for the entertainment of riper years ;—let the review of former transgressions be an incitement to immediate repentance. (*G. Carr.*)

*The power of evil habits :—*I. THE POWER OF SIN, AS INHERENT IN OUR NATURE.

1. It pervades all our faculties, whether of mind or body. 2. It finds in us nothing to counteract its influence. 3. It receives aid from everything around us. 4. It conceals its influence under specious names. Amusement, conviviality, good breeding, &c. II. ITS POWER, AS CONFIRMED AND AUGMENTED BY EVIL HABIT.

1. Its odiousness is diminished. 2. Its power is strengthened. 3. Its opportunities for exercise are multiplied. 4. The powers whereby it should be resisted are destroyed. 5. Everything good is by it put at an unapproachable distance.

(*C. Simeon, M.A.*) *The force of habit :—*It is, as Mr. Darwin says, notorious how powerful is the force of habit. The most complex and difficult movements can in time be performed without the least effort or consciousness. It is not positively known how it comes that habit is so efficient in facilitating complex movements ; but physiologists admit that the conducting power of the nervous fibres increases with the frequency of their excitement. This applies to the nerves of motion and sensation as well as to those connected with the act of thinking. That some physical change is produced in the nerve-cells or nerves which are habitually used can hardly be doubted, for otherwise it is impossible to understand how the tendency to certain acquired movements is inherited. That they are inherited we see with horses in certain transmitted paces, such as cantering and ambling, which are not natural to them ; in the pointing of young pointers and the setting of young setters ; in the peculiar manner of flight of certain breeds of the pigeon, &c. We have analogous cases with mankind in the inheritance of tricks or unusual gestures. As to the domination which evil habit acquires over men, that needs not even a passing allusion. It is remarkable that the force of habit may affect even caterpillars. Caterpillars which have been fed on the leaves of one kind of tree have been known to perish from hunger rather than to eat the leaves of another tree, although this afforded them their proper food under a state of nature. Their conduct might suggest reflection to men who are tempted by habit to risk death by adherence to debauched courses rather than return to a natural mode of living. (*Scientific Illustrations and Symbols.*) *Effects of habit :—*While shaking hands with an old man the other day we noticed that some of his fingers were quite bent inward, and he had not the power of straightening them. Alluding to this fact, he said, "In these crooked fingers there is a good text. For over fifty years I used to drive a stage, and these bent fingers show the effect of holding the reins for so many years."

*How habits are formed :—*A writer describing a stalactite cave says, "Standing perfectly still in the cavernous hall I could hear the intense silence broken by first one drop of water and then another, say one drop in each half minute. The huge rock had been formed by the infinitesimal deposit of lime from these drops—deducting the amount washed

away by the same water—for the drops were not only building, they were wasting at the same time. The increase was so minute that a year's growth could hardly be estimated. It is a powerful illustration of minute influences. A man might stand before it and say, 'It is thus my habits have all been formed. My strong points and my weaknesses all come from influences as quiet, minute, and generally as secret as these water drops.'"

No substitute for spiritual renewal:—No earthly change whatever can be a substitute for the change which comes from above; any more than the lights of earth will suffice for the sun, moon, and stars; any more than all the possible changes through which a potter may pass a piece of clay can convert it into the bright, pure, stamped, golden coin of the realm. (J. Bates.)

Moral suasion cannot renew the soul:—All mere outward declarations are but suasions, and mere suasions cannot change and cure a disease or habit in nature. You may exhort an Ethiopian to turn himself white, or a lame man to go; but the most pathetic exhortations cannot procure such an effect without a greater power than that of the tongue to cure nature; you may as well think to raise a dead man by blowing in his mouth with a pair of bellows. (S. Charnock.)

Washing an Ethiopian:—Then the shepherds led the pilgrims to a place where they saw one Fool and one Want-wit washing an Ethiopian, with an intention to make him white; but the more they washed him the blacker he was. Then they asked the shepherds what this should mean. So they told them saying, "Thus it is with the vile person: all means used to get such a one a good name, shall in conclusion tend but to make him more abominable." Thus it was with the Pharisees; and so it shall be with all hypocrites. (J. Bunyan.)

A change of heart should be immediately sought after:—The longer you stay, the more leisure you give the devil to assault you, and to try one way when he cannot prevail by another, and to strengthen his temptations: like a foolish soldier who will stand still to be shot at, rather than assault the enemy. And the longer you delay, the more your sin gets strength and rooting. If you cannot bend a twig, how will you be able to bend it when it is a tree? If you cannot pluck up a tender plant, are you more likely to pluck up a sturdy oak? Custom gives strength and root to vices. A blackamoor may as well change his skin, or a leopard his spots, as these who are accustomed to do evil can learn to do well. (R. Baxter.)

The Divine and human element in conversion:—There is produced in a telescope an image of a star. There is produced in the soul an image of God. When does the image of the star start up in the chamber of the telescope? Only when the lenses are clear and rightly adjusted, and when the axis of vision in the tube is brought into exact coincidence with the line of the rays of light from the star. When does the image of God, or the inner sense of peace and pardon, spring up in the human soul? Only when the faculties of the soul are rightly adjusted in relation to each other, and the will brought into coincidence with God's will. How much is man's work, and how much is the work of the light? Man adjusts the lenses and the tube; the light does the rest. Man may, in the exercise of his freedom, as upheld by Divine power, adjust his faculties to spiritual light, and when adjusted in a certain way God flashes through them. (Joseph Cook.)

Ver. 27. **O Jerusalem | wilt thou not be made clean?**—*The necessity of holiness*:—**I. THE QUESTION.** 1. It is of great importance to be cleansed from the filth of sin, and is what should be sought after with the utmost seriousness (Ezek. xxxvi. 25). 2. Cleansing the heart from sin is the work of God. He that cleanses from guilt, must also cleanse us from corruption; and Christ is made unto us sanctification, as well as righteousness and redemption (Tit. iii. 4-6). 3. God has much at heart the sanctification of His people (Isa. xlviii. 18). 4. Our own unwillingness is the great hindrance to our sanctification. When the will is gained, the man is gained; and those who will be made clean are in part made so already. 5. Yet the obstinacy of the will shall not prevent the purposes of grace: God's design shall be accomplished, notwithstanding all. **II. THE VARIOUS ANSWERS WHICH WILL BE MADE.** 1. Some are willing to be delivered from the punishment of sin, but not from its power. Those who would have the former without the latter, are likely to have neither. 2. Others would be cleansed outwardly, but not inwardly. No prayers, fastings, pilgrimages, penances, nor any other external performances, can supply the want of internal holiness. The sepulchre, however painted and adorned, is but a sepulchre still. 3. Some would be made partly clean, but not wholly so. 4. Some would be made clean, but they do not like God's way of doing it, or the

means He uses for this purpose. 5. There are some who would be made clean, but it must be hereafter. Like Saint Austin, who prayed to be delivered from his easily besetting sin, but added, "Not yet, Lord!" 6. More awful still: some speak out and say, they will not be cleansed at all. They prefer sin and hell to holiness and heaven. 7. Put this question to the real Christian, or the truly awakened sinner, whose conscience has been filled with remorse for his past transgressions, and who has found a compliance with the call of every lust to be the severest bondage—Wilt thou be made clean? "Yea, Lord," says he, with all my heart! "When shall it once be?" This very instant, if I might have my wish. It is what I pray for, wait for, and strive after; nor can I have a moment's rest till I obtain it. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *God is desirous of saving men:—*

I. THE WOES WHICH IMPENITENT SINNERS HAVE REASON TO EXPECT. The punishment that awaits sinners is most tremendous. The loss of heaven is one part of it: and who shall declare how great a loss this is? II. HOW UNWILLING GOD IS TO INFLICT THEM. He complains of men's obstinacy in rejecting the overtures of His mercy. Long has He waited to no purpose: yet still "He waiteth to be gracious unto us." "He stands at the door of our hearts, and knocks." Address—

1. Those who imagine that they have no need of cleansing. Let none entertain such proud conceits. The best amongst us, no less than the worst, need to be washed in the blood of Christ and be renewed by His Spirit; and without this cleansing, must inevitably perish. 2. Those who are unwilling to be cleansed. 3. Those who desire the cleansing of their souls. It is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse from the guilt of sin; and the Spirit of Christ alone that can cleanse from the power and pollution of sin. To apply these effectually, we must embrace the promises, and rest upon them, trusting in God to accomplish them to our souls. (*Theological Sketch-book.*) *Soul cleansing:—*

1. The great need of the soul. 2. The great helplessness of the soul. 3. The great grace of God. 4. The great drawback on our part. 5. The great work of the ministry. (1) To bring home the feeling of guilt. (2) To ask the question of the text. (3) To direct to the cleansing fount. (4) To urge the importance of immediate application. (*W. Whale.*) *God's desire to bless the sinner:—*I. MAN'S UNCLEANNESS.—1. In heart; 2. In life; 3. In religion. II. GOD'S DESIRE THAT HE SHOULD BE CLEAN. III. HIS EXPOSTULATION WITH US. IV. OUR REFUSAL. V. GOD'S CONDEMNATION. (*H. Bonar, D.D.*) *A hopeful question:—*It would seem as if the prophet were speaking the language of despair; but a little rearrangement of the translation will show that the prophet is really not giving up all hope: Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? Shall there not at the very end be a vital change in thee? When the day is drawing to a close shalt thou not feel the power of the Holy One, and respond to it? Shalt thou not be born as a child at eventide? So the spirit of the Bible is a spirit of hopefulness. It will not lose any man so long as it can keep hold of him. It is a motherlike book, it is a most shepherdly book, it will not let men die if they can be kept alive. Here is the Gospel appeal: "Wilt thou not be made clean?" Here is no urging upon Jerusalem to clean herself, to work out her own regeneration, to throw off her own skin, and to cleanse her own characteristic spots and taints and stains. These words convey an offer, point to a process, preach a Gospel. Hear the answer from the leper: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." There is a river the streams whereof receive all our diseases, and still the river flows like crystal from the throne of God. We know what the great kind sea is. It receives all the nations, gives all the empires a tonic, and yet rolls round the world an untainted blessing. The question addressed to each heart is, "Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" Shall it not be at once? Shall it not be at the very end? Shall not the angels have yet to report even concerning the worst, last of men, the festers of moral creation, "Behold, he prayeth!" The intelligence would vibrate throughout heaven, and give a new joy to eternity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XIV.

VERS. 1-9. They came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered

their heads.—*The drought of nature, the rain of grace, and the lesson therefrom*.—I. First, consider that MAN IS A VERY DEPENDENT CREATURE. He is, in some respects, the most dependent creature that God has made; for the range of his wants is very wide, and at a thousand points he is dependent upon something outside of himself. 1. Man, as a living creature, is peculiarly dependent upon God as to temporals. On what a feeble thread hangs human life! Water, though it be itself unstable, is needful to the establishment of human life, and without it man expires. Many an animal can bear thirst better than man. Other creatures carry their own garments with them; but we must be indebted to a plant, or to a sheep, for the covering of our nakedness. Many other creatures are endowed with sufficient physical force to win their food in fight; but we must produce our own food from the soil. We cannot produce food from the earth without the dew and the rain. However cleverly you have prepared your soil, however carefully you have selected your seed, all will fail without the rain of heaven. Even though your corn should spring up, yet will it refuse to come to the ear if the heavens be dry. Nor can you of yourself produce a single shower, or even a drop of dew. If God withholdeth the rain, what can the husbandman do? Yes, and life itself would vanish as the food of life ceased. It would be an instructive calculation if it could be accurately wrought out—to estimate how much bread-food there is at any time laid up upon the surface of the earth. If all harvests were to fail from this date; if there were no harvests in Australia during our winter, no harvests early in the year in India and the warm regions, if there were no harvests in America and in Europe, I have been informed that, by the time of our own harvest months, there would be upon the face of the earth no more food than would last us for six weeks. God does, indeed, give us bread as we need it; even as, in the wilderness, He gave the manna; but we are every hour dependent upon His generous care. 2. In spiritual things this dependence is most evident. The priceless blessings of pardon and grace: how can we procure them apart from God in Christ Jesus? So is it with the life and the power of the Spirit of God, by which we are able to receive and enjoy the blessings of the covenant; the Holy Spirit, like the wind, bloweth where He listeth, and the order of His working is with the Lord alone. The new life whereby we receive the Lord Jesus: how can it come to us but from the living God Himself? 3. Here is the pity of it: against God, upon whom we are so dependent, we have sinned, and do sin. We are dependent upon Him, and yet rebellious against Him. If pardoned, it must be by the exercise of the sovereign prerogative which is vested in Jehovah, the Lord of all, who doeth as seemeth good in His sight. Provided it can be done justly, sovereignty may step in and rescue the guilty from his doom; but this is a matter which depends upon the will of the Lord alone. If you are executed, the condemnation is so well deserved, that not a word can be said against the severity which shall carry out the sentence.

II. MEN MAY BE REDUCED TO DIRE DISTRESS. Men, being dependent upon God, may be reduced to dire distress if they disobey Him, and incur His just displeasure. 1. To proceed a little in detail with the words of my text: when the Lord causes sinners to feel the spiritual drought, pride is humbled. "Their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters." The philosopher grows into a little child, and gladly accepts the cup which aforetime he sneered at. 2. But you observe that when humbled and made thirsty, these people went to secondary causes: they came to the pits, or reservoirs. Thus souls, when they are awakened, go to fifty things before they come to God. It is sad that, in superstition, or in scepticism, they look for living streams. They try reformation of manners—I have nothing to say against it; but apart from God reformation always ends in disappointment. 3. If you read on, you will find that when they went to these secondary supplies, they were disappointed: "They came to the pits, and found no water." They thirsted to drink; but not a drop was found to cool their tongues. It is an awful thing to come home from sermon with the vessels empty; to rise from the communion-table, having found no living water, and return with vessels empty. To close the Bible, and sigh, "I find no comfort here, I must return with my vessel empty." When the ordinances, and the Word yield us no grace, things have come to an awful pass with us. Do you know what this disappointment means? 4. Now, upon this disappointment, there followed great confusion of mind; they became distracted; "they were ashamed and confounded." Thus have I met with many who, after going to many confidences, have been disappointed in all, and seem ready to lie down in despair, and put

forth no more effort. They fear that God will never bless them, and they will never enter into life eternal; and so they sign their own death-warrants. Shall I confess that I have been better pleased to see them in this condition than to hear their jovial songs at other times? It is by the gate of self-despair that men arrive at the Divine hope. 5. At last, when these people came to despair, it is very remarkable how everything about them seemed to be in unison with their misery. Listen to the third verse: "They covered their heads." Did you hear the last words of the fourth verse? They were the very same: "They covered their heads." Surely the second is the echo of the first. It is even so: earth has sympathy with man. Nature without reflects our inward feelings. III. MAN'S ONLY SURE RESORT IS HIS GOD. "God is a refuge for us." 1. There is no help anywhere else. The very best of duties that you and I can perform, if we put our trust in them, are only false confidences, refuges of lies, and they can yield us no help. 2. Nay, look; according to the text there is no help for us even in the usual means of grace if we forget the Lord. O tried and anxious soul, the sacraments are all in vain, though they be ordained of heaven; and preaching and reading, liturgy and song, are all in vain to bring the refreshing dew of grace. Thou art lost, lost, lost, if a stronger arm than man's be not stretched out to help thee! 3. But with God is all power. He is the Creator, making all things out of nothing; and He can create in thee at once the tender heart, the loving spirit, the believing mind, the sanctified nature. 4. Well, then, what follows from this? If God hath all this power, our wisdom is to wait upon Him, since He alone can help. We draw this inference: "Therefore we will wait upon Thee." 5. Do I hear somebody say, "How I would like to pray"? Yes, that is the way to come to God. Come to Him by prayer in the name of Jesus. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Concerning the dearth*.—I. THE EFFECTS OF DROUGHT UPON INANIMATE CREATION. 1. The pits were empty. Some of these were natural hollows in the hard rocks and in the caves where evaporation was less speedy. Others were dykes and cisterns, the work of man. But neither nature nor art could afford supplies when God dealt with them in His judgments. 2. The ground was chapt (ver. 4). Earth's wounds for man's sin. Mute mouths crying to heaven for pity. 3. There was no grass (ver. 5). The world is complex, man is complex, God is complex. In complex systems harmony is essential to life,—discord is ruin. The shower can do nothing good without the sun. The sun can only scorch if the rain fall not. Earth can produce no fruit unless both sun and shower combine to aid. II. THE EFFECTS OF DROUGHT UPON THE ANIMAL CREATION. 1. The hind calved in the field, and forsook it (ver. 5). The fact that the hind was in the field proves that pasture had failed on the higher lands. It was not unusual for the hind to drop her calf by reason of fright or grief (Psa. xxix. 9). The maternal instinct in these creatures being strong, it was very unusual for them to forsake their young, and can only be accounted for by the entire failure of the mother to obtain food or drink. 2. The wild asses were in intense agony on account of hunger (ver. 6). These creatures were capable of great endurance, and needed but little to sustain life. III. THE EFFECTS OF DROUGHT UPON THE HUMAN CREATION. 1. The husbandmen were ashamed. 2. The people generally were languishing. 3. The nobles were threatened with death through thirst. IV. THE EFFECTS OF DROUGHT ON THE DEVOUT HEART OF JEREMIAH. 1. He regarded it as a chastisement for sin. 2. He regarded God as their only hope. 3. He earnestly prayed for mercy. Application.—1. In forsaking God, they forsook the fountain. 2. Earth's broken cisterns cannot be a substitute for the Divine. 3. Jesus says, "If any man thirst," &c. (*W. Whale.*)

Vers. 7-9. O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy name's sake.—*The prayer of contrite Israel*.—I. A MOURNFUL FACT ACKNOWLEDGED. 1. Even in the case of God's own people, sin does not pass away and die after it is committed, no, nor even after it is pardoned. 2. The sins of God's people bear testimony against them, an open and public testimony. (1) They witness against them before God. (2) They witness against them to others. They proclaim them to the whole spiritual world to be vile, guilty creatures, undeserving of any one of the many blessings they are receiving; yea, deserving of nothing but Jehovah's utmost abhorrence and displeasure. (3) And our sins, the prophet intimates, testify against us at times to ourselves also. And this appears to be the leading idea in the prophet's words. 3. Our sins are peculiarly apt to bear this secret testimony against us, when we attempt to

draw near to God. A sense of guilt, shame, and self-loathing, takes possession of us, and sometimes well-nigh breaks our hearts. II. A PETITION OFFERED. 1. Its humble boldness. Under other circumstances there would be nothing remarkable in this, but we have here a prayer offered up while sin is accusing and conscience smiting. When our iniquities testify loudly against us, when we feel sin brought home powerfully by the Holy Spirit to our consciences, "There is an end to prayer," we are tempted to say: "with all this guilt and pollution upon us, we must not attempt to go into God's presence." Now one of the hardest lessons we have to learn in Christ's school, is to overcome this tendency in sin to drive us from the Lord. God, as He is revealed to us in the Gospel, is the sinner's God, and what the sinner has to learn in the Gospel is, that as a sinner he may draw near to Him, and find favour with Him, and be accepted by Him, and pardoned, and loved. If your iniquities are testifying against you, do not aim to silence their voice; let no one ever make you believe that God does not hear the witness they bear, and that you need not heed it; but aim at this—to believe all that your sins say against you, and yet in spite of it all to seek God's mercy and trust in it. 2. The lowly submission it manifests. It stands in the original simply, "Do Thou." There can be no doubt but that next to the pardon of her sin, deliverance from her troubles was the blessing the afflicted Church most desired at this time; but she does not ask for it. Her mouth seems suddenly stopped as she is about to ask for it. She feels as though in her situation, with her enormous sins crying out so loudly against her, she must not dare to choose for herself any blessing. All she says is, "Do Thou. Do Thou something for us. Interfere for us. Give us not up. We will bless Thee for anything Thou doest, so that Thou wilt not abandon us." And in a manner like this does every soul pray, that is deeply contrite. It has boldness enough amidst all its guilt to come to God's throne and to keep there, but beyond this it has sometimes no boldness at all. It leaves God to show mercy to it in His own way, and to deal with it after His own will. All it desires is to be treated as His child, and then come what may, it will bless Him for it. III. THE PLEA THE PROPHET URGES IN SUPPORT OF HIS PRAYER. It is the name or glory of God; "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy name's sake." This prayer then, you perceive, is more than a simple prayer for mercy. The publican's prayer in the temple was that. Any really contrite sinner may offer it; he will offer it and offer it often even to his dying hour. But the prayer before us implies a considerable degree of spiritual knowledge, as well as deep contrition. No man will offer it, till he is become well acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ; till he has discovered the wisdom and glory, as well as the grace, of it, and imbibed something of its spirit. (C. Bradley, M.A.) *Man's iniquities testifying against him*:—I. WHAT IT IS FOR A MAN TO FIND HIS INIQUITIES TESTIFY AGAINST HIM IN HIS ADDRESSES TO GOD. 1. Sin is not dead when it is committed. The act is transient, but the guilt is of a permanent nature. 2. When the man draws near to God in the exercise of His worship, sin meets him there; appears to him as a terrible ghost (Isa. lix. 11-13). 3. Sin testifies two things for God against the man. (1) Their unworthiness of any favour from the Lord. (2) Their liability to punishment, yea, to a curse instead of a blessing, so that the soul is often made to fear some remarkable judgment. 4. This witness is convincing. So, in the text, we find the pascal denies not the testimony, but pleads for mercy. 5. Upon this, the gracious soul is filled with holy shame and self-loathing. 6. He is damped, and his confidence before the Lord is marred as to any access to Him, or obtaining favour at His hand. II. HOW COMES IT THAT SIN IS FOUND THUS TESTIFYING AGAINST MEN? 1. It flows from the nature of sin and guilt upon an enlightened conscience. 2. It is a punishment from the Lord for former backslidings and miscarriages. 3. God so orders it, that it may be a mean to humble them, and make them more watchful against sin for the time to come. III. THE PLEA. "For Thy name's sake." 1. We must plead with Him for His Christ's sake; and when guilt stares us in the face, we must look to God through the veil of Christ's flesh. 2. We must plead with Him for His glory's sake. Punishing of sin glorifies God much, but pardoning of sin glorifies Him more. (T. Boston, D.D.) *Sin should be fully confessed*:—I warrant thee thou shalt never go beyond the truth in stating thy sin, for that were quite impossible. A man lying on the field of battle wounded, when the surgeon comes round, or the soldiers with the ambulance, does not say, "Oh, mine is a little wound," for he knows that then they would let him lie; but he cries out, "I have been bleeding here for hours,

and am nearly dead with a terrible wound," for he thinks that then he will gain speedier relief; and when he gets into the hospital he does not say to the nurse, "Mine is a small affair; I shall soon get over it"; but he tells the truth to the surgeon in the hope that he may set the bone at once, and that double care may be taken. Ah, sinner, do thou so with God. The right way to plead is to plead thy misery, thine impotence, thy danger, thy sin. Lay bare thy wounds before the Lord, and as Hezekiah spread Sennacherib's letter before the Lord, spread thy sins before Him with many a tear and many a cry, and say, "Lord, save me from all these; save me from these black and foul things, for Thy infinite mercy's sake." Confess thy sin; wisdom dictates that thou shouldst do so, since salvation is of grace. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Jeremiah a wrestler with the Lord in prayer* :—

I. IN WHAT THE LORD IS STRONG AGAINST THE PROPHET. The sin of the people. II. IN WHAT THE PROPHET IS STRONG AGAINST THE LORD. The name of the Lord.

1. In itself, God's name compels Him to show He is not a desperate hero, a giant who cannot save. 2. In that His name is borne by Israel. (Heim.) *Prayer has within itself its own reward* :—I. CONFESSION. This fitly begins. It is the testimony of iniquity, and that this iniquity is against God Himself. When we are to encounter any enemy or difficulty, it is sin weakens us. Now confession weakens it,—takes off the power of accusation. II. PETITION. "For Thy name's sake." This is the unfailing argument which abides always the same, and has always the same force. Though thou art not clear in thy interest as a believer, yet plead thy interest as a sinner, which thou art sure of. (T. Leighton.)

Pleas for mercy :—How many there are who pray after a fashion in times of great distress. When they are brought to death's door, then they say, "Send for some one that will come and pray at our side." What a wretched position is this, that we should only be willing to think of God when we are in our direst need! At the same time, notice what a great mercy it is that God does hear real prayer even if it be presented to Him only because we are in distress. "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." I. I SPEAK TO THE CHURCH OF GOD AT LARGE WHEREVER IT HAS BACKSLIDDEN, AND TO EACH BELIEVER IN PARTICULAR WHO MAY HAVE DEPARTED FROM THE LIVING GOD IN ANY MEASURE. Note, there are here pleaders guilty. The pleaders seem to say, "Guilty, ay, guilty, for there is no denying it. Our iniquities testify against us." I would that every child of God felt this whenever he has gone astray. In addition to there being no denying it there is no excusing it, for "our backslidings are many." If we could have excused ourselves for our first faults, if possibly we might have offered some extenuation for the fickleness of our youth, yet what are we to say of the transgressions of our riper years? Not only is our guilt past denying and past excusing, but also it is past computation. We cannot measure how great have been our transgressions, and the next sentence may well imply it: "We have sinned against Thee." Well, now, next to this plea of guilty, what do the culprits say? What plea do they make why they should obtain mercy? I observe, first, that they bring no plea whatever which has fallen from themselves in any degree. They do not plead before God, that if He will have mercy they will be better. But still, there is a plea. Oh, blessed plea! the master plea of all: "Though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy name's sake." Now, here is a prayer which will avail for us when the night is darkest and not a star is to be seen. The first name which the backsliding Church here gives to God has a blessing—"O the hope of Israel." Next, observe the Church of God pleads His next merit: "The Saviour thereof in time of trouble." God has saved His people, and the name of God is the Saviour in the time of trouble. Then, next, she does not mention the name that is implied in the words. She says, "Why shouldst Thou be as a stranger in the land?"—one, that is, merely travelling through, who takes little notice of the trouble because He is not a citizen of the country; one that merely puts up for a night in the house, and therefore does not enter into the cares and trials of the family. She does as good as call Him the Master of the house, Lord of the house. But, then, she goes a little further than that, and the plea is this: that He was, whatever they might be, their God. "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy name." The Church says, "Lord, if Thou dost not help us now, the men of the world will say, 'God could not help them, they were brought into such a condition at last that their faith was of no use to them.' Why shouldst Thou be as a mighty man that cannot help?"

II. I WANT TO SPEAK TO POOR TROUBLED HEARTS WHO DO NOT KNOW THE LORD. I cannot take the whole of my text for them, but only a part, and say to them,

I am right glad that you want to find peace with God; right glad that you are unhappy and distressed in soul. You say, "I want peace." Well, take heed that you do not get a false peace. So begin by confessing your guilt. When you have done that, I charge you next, do not try to invent any kind of plea; do not sit down and try to make out that the case was not so bad, or that your bringings up might excuse you, or that your constitutional temperament might make some apology for you. No; have done with that and come with this one plea: "Do it for Thy name's sake. Lord, I cannot blot out my sins; I cannot change my nature; do Thou it. I have no reason why I should hope that Thou wilt do it; but for Thy name's sake." This is the master-key that unlocks every door. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Triumphant prayer*:—I. THE MYSTERIOUS CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE IDEAL OF ISRAEL AND THE ACTUAL CONDITION OF THINGS. The ancient charter of Israel's existence was that God should dwell in their midst; but things are as if the perennial presence promised had been changed into visits, short and far between. Two ideas conveyed: the brief transitory visits, with long dreary stretches of absence between them; and the indifference of the visitant, as a man who pitches his tent for a night, caring little for the people among whom he tarries the while. More: instead of the perpetual energy of the Divine aid promised to Israel, it looks as if Thou art "a mighty man astonished," &c.,—a Samson with locks shorn. II. OUR LOW AND EVIL CONDITION SHOULD LEAD TO EARNEST INQUIRY AS TO ITS CAUSE. 1. The reason is not in any variability of that unalterable, uniform, ever-present, ever-full Divine gift of God's Spirit to His Church. 2. Nor in the failure of adaptation in God's Word and ordinances for the great work they had to do. 3. The fault lies here only: "O Lord, our iniquities testify against us," &c. We have to prayerfully, patiently, and honestly search after this cause, and not to look to possible variations and improvements in order and machinery, &c. III. THIS CONSCIOUSNESS OF OUR EVIL CONDITION AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE CAUSE LEAD ON TO LOWLY PENITENCE AND CONFESSION. We err in being more ready, when awakened to a sense of wrong, to originate new methods of work, to begin with new zeal to gather in the outcasts into the fold; instead of beginning with ourselves, deepening our own Christian character, purifying our own hearts, and getting more of the life of God into our own spirits. Begin with lowly abasement at His footstool. IV. THE TRIUMPHANT CONFIDENCE OF BELIEVING PRAYER. 1. Look at the substance of His petition. He does not prescribe what should be done, nor ask that calamity be taken away, but simply for the continual Divine presence and power. 2. Look at these pleas with God as grounds of confidence for ourselves. (1) The name: all the ancient manifestations of Thy character. Thy memorial with all generations. (2) Israel's hope: the confidence of the Church is fixed upon Thee; and Thou who hast given us Thy name hast become our hope. (3) The perennial and essential relationship of God to His Church: we belong to Thee, and Thou hast not ceased Thy care for us. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The sinner's plea*:—I. THE SINNER'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT. 1. The prophet's confession is precisely such as befits the world at large. 2. With too great reason, also, may it be adopted, even by the best of men. II. THE SINNER'S PLEA. 1. Open to all. Never urged in vain. Application—1. What should be the effect of sin upon the soul? Conviction of sin should not keep us from, but bring us to God. Sin is a just ground for humiliation, but not for discouragement. 2. What shall surely be effectual to remove it from the soul? Prayer: penitential weeping; humble and contrite, fervent and persevering; offered in dependence on God's promised mercies in Christ. (C. Simeon, M.A.) *The name of the Lord a plea for temporal blessings*:—I. We begin with TEMPORAL GOOD THINGS. None indeed are particularised by Jeremiah. All that he asks is comprised in these words, "Do Thou." But any one who observes the context may see what the prophet would have. He would have dew, and rain, and fruitful seasons, for the preservation of man and beast. 1. Temporal good things pertain to the present life. In heaven we shall neither hunger nor thirst, and since we look for a body without animal appetites, duty, interest, and honour call on us to keep these appetites of our present body under subjection. 2. In the present life temporal good things are necessary. Without a competent portion of these men cannot live. The body, which is the workmanship of God, must be fed and clothed; and how great is His goodness in providing for it things that are needful! Let heaven, and earth, and seas, praise the Lord. 3. Temporal good things are promised. Till the purpose of God be accomplished, the present frame of the world, in the riches of His good-

ness, and long-suffering, must be upheld; and promises of upholding, and of the means of upholding it, are made to Christ, for the sake of His body, the redeemed (Isa. xlix. 8; Hos. ii. 22, 23). 4. Temporal good things are produced by the power and goodness of God, operating in material and secondary causes. The heavens and the earth, the sun, the rain, the dew, and the air, have not the power of vegetation and fertility in themselves. They are merely instruments by which the power of God is exerted. 5. Temporal good things are turned away by our iniquities (Jer. iii. 2, 3, v. 24-26). 6. Temporal good things are benefits for which intercession and prayer should be made. In the prayer which our Lord taught the disciples a petition for these appears: "Give us this day our daily bread." II. THE PLEA which appears in the text for temporal good things. It is, you observe, the name of the Lord: "O Lord,—do Thou for Thy name's sake." 1. An honourable plea, and worthy of God, before whom and concerning whom it is used. The glory of His name is the end, and the motive, and the reason of His works; and in doing for it the works like Himself, and independent of considerations of worth in creatures. In the name of the Lord our God every ray of essential and revealed glory meets, and shines forth; and to make this glory the supreme end of His operations and communications, is a perfection which He cannot deny nor give away. This supreme motive He avows, and holds up to the adoration of His people, and jealousy for it is His praise and His honour (Ezek. xxxvi. 22; Isa. xlviii. 9-11; Psa. cxv. 1). 2. A prevailing plea. For His name's sake great and marvellous works have been wrought (Ezek. xx. 9, 14, 22, 44). When the motive in the heart of the Sovereign is the plea in the mouth of the supplicant, confidence of being accepted and heard, confidence modest, humble, reverential, and submissive, imparts joy to the heart of the petitioner, raises in his soul the expectation of hope, and makes his face to shine as if it were anointed with fresh oil. 3. A continual plea, and good throughout all generations, under all dispensations, among all nations, and in all extremities (1 Chron. xvii. 21; Isa. lxiii. 11-16). 4. The supreme plea under which every other plea is subordinated. In the prayers and intercessions of holy men other considerations often appear. Poverty, reproach, affliction, persecution, necessity, and other things, have been pled at the throne of grace. But the name, or glory, of the Lord our God is the supreme and ruling consideration into which other pleas are to be resolved. III. Our pleading the name of the Lord for temporal good things IN THE FACE OF INIQUITY, or when it is testifying against us. In such discouraging circumstances Jeremiah pleaded. The whole body of national evil stood before him; and, with this monster appearing to his eye, and its voice roaring in his ear, he cried, "Do Thou for Thy name's sake." 1. A sense of sin strongly affects the heart and conscience before the Lord. Jeremiah is the mouth of the kingdom, and speaks like a man of feeling. He felt the weight of the public guilt, heard it crying for vengeance, and believed that the Lord was justly offended because the land was greatly defiled. This feeling is not common and natural to man. There were but few in Judah who were suitably affected with the national iniquities, and among ourselves the number of mourners is either diminished or else they are hid in corners and chambers, out of the sight of the public eye and the knowledge of one another. 2. The righteousness of the Lord, in turning away temporal good things because of iniquity, is believed and acknowledged. Of this Jeremiah was persuaded himself, and of this no man was neglected to persuade the nation. In withering seasons, professions of the equity and justice of Providence are in every mouth; but in the lives of many who make these professions, fruit of the lips doth not appear. Fruit of this kind is found only on a few trees of righteousness, which are grafted in Christ, and raised and trained up by the spirit of holiness. 3. The iniquities which provoke the Most High to withhold, or turn away, temporal good things are acknowledged with humiliation and sorrow of heart. Concerning these Jeremiah is not silent. In his intercessory prayer confession holds a distinguished place. His exercise is exemplary, and in similar circumstances should be followed. Reigning and crying sins breaking out, whether in the higher or lower ranks of society, or in both, ought to be acknowledged to be what they are, provocations of wrath and causes of calamity. But to bring men to this reasonable duty is extremely difficult. Confession gives such a stab to self-righteousness, and such a blow to natural pride, that nothing can bring us effectually to submit to it, except the Spirit of God working by His Word in us mightily. 4. The covenant of grace is apprehended, truly and distinctly, in the light of

the Word. To this covenant temporal good things are annexed, and in its administration, promises of these are performed. By the obedience, sufferings, and death of Christ, the condition is fulfilled; and in performing the promises and bestowing the blessings, both of the life which now is and of that which is to come, the justice and holiness of God glorify themselves in the highest. 5. Considerations of the obedience, blood, and intercession of Christ, are presented to the Lord, and opposed to prevailing iniquities. 6. Submission to the will and good pleasure of the Lord of all. Creatures, far less sinners, should never be peremptory in their supplications, nor prescribe to the Sovereign. Pleas for the removal of distress are furnished to us by the Word, and instructions given to use these with reverence and importunity. But beware of limiting the Sovereign, who, by calamity no less than by deliverance, can magnify Himself.

IV. EXHORTATION AND INSTRUCTION. Unto men of prayer we address ourselves in the hearing of all, and through the blessing of God and the working of His Spirit, all will be corrected and instructed. 1. In your exercise and practice let a true sense of sin appear. It is not calling sin names, or fixing upon it the epithets, hateful and abominable, but hating and abhorring it, which the Lord requires. 2. Acknowledge the righteousness of God in withholding some temporal good things, which in the ordinary course of His Providence we looked for at this season. Why doth the Sovereign send upon us hail for rain, and heaps of snow instead of clouds of dew? Why doth He draw out winter to an unusual length, and fill our ear with the howling of shepherds, instead of the singing of birds? Why do not applications to His goodness prevail? Hath He forgotten to be gracious? No. Doth His promise fail? No. Is His hand shortened, that it cannot save? No. Is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear? No. But our iniquities, let it be preached in the valleys, proclaimed in the mountains, and sounded in the dwelling-places of atheism and irreligion—"Our iniquities have separated between us and our God, and our sins have hid His face from us, that He will not hear." 3. Confess unto the Lord these trespasses which are committed against Him in the midst of the land, which provoke Him to withhold good things, and which cause Him to send upon us evil things. Acknowledgment of sin, and supplication for pardon, are always mixed with the prayers and intercessions of His people for temporal good things. 4. In pleading, when iniquities testify against you, keep before you the covenant of peace, to which temporal good things are added. Unless your eye be kept upon this covenant, it will be impossible to understand how God, whose right hand is full of righteousness, glorifies Himself in accepting your persons, sustaining your pleas, fulfilling your petitions, and blessing you with good things. But if the covenant, with its condition, promises, and administration, be considered, and the place which temporal good things possess observed, every seemingly interfering interest, with respect to the perfections and glory of God, will appear to be adjusted and consolidated upon the clearest and firmest principles. 5. With the plea, and every form of the plea, for the benefits of the covenant, introduce the name and office of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having fulfilled the condition, in His obedience unto death, He is constituted, by wisdom and grace, heir, administrator, and dispenser of the blessings. 6. Be submissive and modest in pleading for temporal good things. Of the ways of the Lord we are incompetent judges; and, in all applications upon the name, should submit ourselves to His wisdom and righteousness, and leave to His good pleasure what is to be done. (*A. Shanks.*)

Ver. 8. **O the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble.**—*God and troubled humanity*.—I. WHAT GOD ALWAYS IS TO TROUBLED HUMANITY. 1. The Hope. (1) The Inspirer of all true hope. (2) The Sustainer. (3) The Realiser. 2. The Saviour. (1) The redemption system He has given to the world attests this. (2) The experience of all who had attended to His directions testifies this. Every man that has adopted God's remedial scheme has been saved. II. WHAT GOD SOMETIMES SEEMS TO TROUBLED HUMANITY. "A stranger," &c. 1. When Christlike enterprises are frustrated. 2. When the most useful men are cut down in the very zenith of their life. 3. When prosperity attends the wicked, and adversity the good. 4. When enormous outrages are rampant in society. (*Homilist.*) **Why shouldst Thou be as a stranger in the land.**—*God's withdrawals from His people, and their exercise under them*.—I. WHEN IT MAY BE SAID GOD WITHDRAWS AND BEHAVES AS A STRANGER TO HIS PEOPLE. 1. When He withholds His wonted acts of kindness to them. 2. When He threatens to remove from them the signs

and symbols of His presence. 3. When, though continuing the ordinances and sacraments, He renders them profitless. 4. When the Divine providences are adverse. 5. When He denies them access to Himself. II. WHY THE LORD DEALS THUS WITH HIS PEOPLE. 1. When they fall into gross sin and bring reproach on religion. 2. When they become earthly minded. 3. When they become slothful and formal in duty. 4. When they neglect or slight the Mediator, by whom we have access to God. 5. When they sin under or after great affliction. 6. When they do not cherish and entertain the influences of the Holy Spirit. 7. When they grow hardened and impenitent under provocation. III. WHEN IT MAY BE SAID WE ARE PROPERLY EXERCISED UNDER SUCH A PAINFUL DISPENSATION. 1. When we are truly sensible of our loss, and that our sin is the cause of it. 2. When we place all our happiness in God's favour and presence. 3. When we engage all the powers of our souls to seek after God. 4. When we diligently embrace every opportunity for finding an absent God, and use every appointed means. 5. When we wrestle with Him in prayer to return. 6. When we are not satisfied with the best means, unless we find God in them. IV. WHENCE IT IS THAT THE LORD, BEING AS A STRANGER TO HIS PEOPLE, OCCASIONS THEM SO MUCH CONCERN. 1. Because of the incomparable happiness arising from the enjoyment of His presence. 2. Because of the sad effects attending the loss of His presence. Infer: 1. There are but few true seekers of God among us. 2. The misery of those who are far from God now, and may be deprived of His presence for ever. 3. The sad case of those whom God forsakes, never to return again. (*T. Hannam.*) *A welcome for the stranger* :—When the messenger of Mercy was travelling through the world, he asked himself at what inn he should alight and spend the night. Lions and eagles were not to his mind, and he passed by houses wearing such warlike names; so too he passed by places known by the sign of "The Waving Plume," and the "Conquering Hero," for he knew that there was no room for him in these inns. He hastened by many a hostelry and tarried not, till at last he came to a little inn which bore the sign of "The Broken Heart." "Hero," said Mercy's messenger, "I would fain tarry, for I know by experience that I shall be welcome here." *The Messiah—A stranger among His own people* :—The greatest marvel of all creation is that the Son of God should come to redeem; and next to that is this, that having come, He should be neglected and rejected by those who had so long looked for Him. Here is the greatest wonder in all history: a nation neglecting the realisation of its own dream. Search your histories and see if you can find a parallel case. The old Jewish theocracy aspired to pretensions that Rome, Greece, Persia, and Egypt never dared to dream, to bestow to the world one universal king. And what is that land of Palestine, and what are these Jews who aspire to such pretensions as this? . . . It has no deep thought like India; no genius of stability like China; no sense of beauty like Greece, no high culture like Egypt, no powerful arms like Rome, and yet there is the fact; they speak concerning the kingdom their king should establish. "The Gentiles shall come to Thy light, and kings to the brightness of Thy rising." Yet, marvellous to relate, when she had given her King to the world she refused to crown Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (the hope of Israel—a stranger in the land). George Mac Donald tells in one of his stories of a born-blind lamplighter who illuminated the city at night, but had no sense of what he was doing. Thus the Jews closed their eyes to the great light which they gave to the world. (*Geo. Matheson, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. *Why shouldst Thou be . . . as a mighty man that cannot save?—God rendered powerless by man* :—A strong man may be rendered powerless by a reel of cotton being wound around him. Each thread so brittle, yet all together is irresistible. So a large number of inconsistencies and insincerities may make God powerless to help you, or to work mightily through you to the salvation of others. He may be in the midst of you, and you may be called by His name; great issues for His kingdom and glory may seem at stake; mighty possibilities within your reach! and yet He is as a mighty man that cannot save. There is might enough in God to save the weakest and sinfulness of His children; and you are unsaved because of the limitations you have placed upon Him. 1. You are not absolutely willing to be delivered from your sins. 2. You do not entirely believe in His power and will. 3. You have not definitely handed the whole matter over to Him, and believed that He has accepted the charge. 4. Or—and this is perhaps the deepest reason of all—you have formed your own ideas of Divine truth, and of the possible

Christian life. And having formed your own conception of the true ideal of Christianity, you have thenceforth lived within the limitations of your ideal, which is bounded by human wisdom and human thought. And so you never come to a thorough knowledge of the indwelling of Christ, or what He is prepared to do for you; or, catching a glimpse of it from afar, you are not sufficiently delivered from the reasonings and workings of your mind to give Him that opportunity for which He waits and yearns. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) **O Lord, . . . leave us not.**—*A universal prayer*.—I. FOR ALL SEASONS. 1. Times of joy. Our prosperity will ruin us, if God be not with us. 2. Times of adversity. 3. Times of labour. 4. Times of perplexity. II. FOR ALL SAINTS. 1. All need to pray thus. For all deserve to be abandoned. 2. All must pray thus. For all desire continuance of His presence. 3. All will pray thus. For all know the bitterness of soul consequent upon His withdrawal. III. ALWAYS ANSWERED. 1. For it is according to His will. 2. For it honours His name. (*R. A. Griffin.*)

Vers. 10-16. Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet; therefore the Lord doth not accept them.—*Jehovah's refusal to allow intercession to prevail*.—I. THE LORD'S ANSWER TO THE PROPHET'S PRAYER. 1. He points to the backsliding of the people, for which He now punishes them. 2. He refuses the prophet's prayer because He loathes the people's soulless fastings and sacrifices. 3. He specifies the means by which He will destroy this backsliding people. Battle. Famine. Pestilence. II. THE PROPHET RENEWS HIS ENDEAVOURS TO ENTREAT GOD'S FAVOUR. 1. He lays stress on the fact that they had been deceived. 2. But they are not excused on that account; for they gave credit to lies. (1) God had not commissioned these prophets. (2) Their easy and willing dupes are condemned to ignoring. 3. Seducers should perish with those they seduced. (*C. Keil.*)

Ver. 12. When they fast, I will not hear their cry.—*Fasting rendered offensive*.—I. PIOUS Demeanour is not what God desires, but FAITH. 1. God abominates a double and false heart; and the greater the fervour hypocrites display in external rites, the more they provoke Him. 2. Fasting is observed as giving intensity to prayer. 3. They who fast professedly avow that they deprecate God's disfavour. 4. But God values not outward appearance. II. FASTING is NOT IN ITSELF A RELIGIOUS DUTY, BUT A MERE INDEX TO A HUMBLE SPIRIT. 1. What is intended by fasting? (1) That there may be greater alacrity in prayer. (2) That it may be an evidence of humility in confessing sins. (3) Indicative of a purpose to subdue lust. 2. What is fasting apart from these intents? (1) A frivolous exercise. (2) A profanation of God's worship. (3) A superstition, provoking God's wrath. III. NO VALUE IN FASTING TO MERIT GOD'S FAVOUR. IV. MOCKING PROFANATION WAS INTOLERABLE, AND SHOULD BE PUNISHED. 1. God shows Himself armed with various kinds of punishment. 2. He forewarns that they who had provoked Him should surely suffer. 3. God does not disregard or reject religious signs; but when what they signify is separated from them, there is then an intolerable profanation. (*J. Calvin.*)

Ver. 13. I will give you assured peace.—*Assured peace*.—I. HUMAN LIFE WANTS IT. 1. Uncertainty troubles our life. 2. Delusions embitter our heart. 3. Misgivings weary our soul. II. GOD ALONE CAN GIVE IT. 1. Peace is not a human commodity, but a Divine boon. 2. Peace comes only to Divinely-prepared hearts. 3. Peace is specifically the Saviour's benefaction. III. LYING VOICES OFFER IT. 1. False prophets preach peace still. (1) In our churches, promising it through ceremonies, righteous works, &c. (2) In pleasure's scenes, assuring the gay and frivolous of satisfaction, &c. 2. Beguiled dupes are ensnared still. 3. Yet assured peace is available still. May be found by all (Matt. xi. 28-30). (*W. H. Jellie.*) *Peace*.—Peace is various and versatile. Peace is not mere pleasure, yet there is a pleasure in peace. When there is no longer any effort to be happy, nor any dread of care, pleasure settles to its repose, as a frame that lolls and turns on a luxurious couch by and by folds itself to motionless and dreamy comfort; or as the mountain peak that shot and shafted to its height sublime falls softly off and folds away into the gentle slope, the nooks where lights and shadows play, the curve that modulates the majestic summit to the meek swell of the landscape lowlands, and invests the valley with the mountain grandeur, and mountain grandeur with the placid secret of the lowly vale; the breast that heaved with

pleasure in its confirmed rapture comes to rest. Pleasure is not peace, but in its realisation and fulfilment there is a peace of pleasure. See a little further. Joy is not peace, nevertheless there is a peace of joy in which the mind and heart take counsel with each other. This is delight arriving at repose. Thus, when a strain of music dies away upon the ear, the harmony thrills memory still—the noise ceases, the notes linger and serenade the silence, the silence returns the serenade. Again, pain might be reckoned as the foe of peace, and still there is a peace of pain. Some tranquillities are gendered by adversity alone. The peace found in pain cannot be otherwise discovered nor elsewhere known. When one has borne excruciating pang or undergone sore struggle, and can say, It is familiar now; I have been through the worst of it, and have survived; or where one can even set out about such an undertaking, and although outwardly the infliction or affliction has yet to be encountered, that moment takes on its own radiance, and the mind has upon effective grounds prepared itself for all, anticipated all, looked through all resolutely, braced now and nerved, knitted and compacted; the resolve is half the readiness, the readiness is all the conflict—the endurance is the victory, as of one whose valour makes his foes to tremble, as the Spartan band or the Royal Guard by their very presence put the enemy to flight. When the heart and soul are set in resolution, like a regiment kneeling with fixed bayonets, and so the onset is taken with a will, and the triumph is anticipated in advance, there ensues a serenity which is of itself a triumph, a fortitude which is in itself a conquest and a coronation. It is thus that there can come into the heart the peace of pain. It has distinct varieties. The peace of suffering in physical endurance must not be undervalued. There is such a thing as is indicated by the words, to suffer and be strong, whereby that which in another would enforce an outcry or insist upon a groan—that which even to the same sufferer, at another time, coming by stealth or startling, would utterly unman the nature, has become a manageable trial, to be confronted, to be endured, and to be looked through and through, it may be with bated breath and set teeth, but still at bay, until the paroxysm faints away into the peace, and the strong mastery of the resolve carries the torture of the flesh, and rules the throb of the nerves by its volition. There is a pain peace not to be despised—it may be the peace of peril. Presence of mind is power of help. The war-horse stands motionless while the guns emit their bloody blasts and the carnage overflows. The young hero leaps upon the ramparts, the veteran holds the fort. The peace of peril is the opposite of peril panic. Panic huddled the fleeing, frightened throng, so that none could escape from the blazing building; peace would have found the fire-escape; peace would have opened the back stairs. And thus it is in life at large: panic is peril's peril, but peace is peril's protection—peril's safe control. And of pain peace another branch is peace of sorrow, peculiar to itself. It does not neutralise the grief, it softens and enchants it. When sorrow has undergone its first wild shock, when cries are stilled and tears are dried, a hush that sinks to softer sorrow, as a gale dies to a zephyr breeze, comes in upon the gloomy void, and sorrow in its silence, sorrow in its sanctity, can find sorrow peace—the very peace of pain. And so it is that in all these varieties, and under all vicissitudes like these, the grace within enkindles peace without. And when the Finite is in treaty with the Infinite, the creature in reconciliation with his Maker, the soul, possessed of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, can prove that paradox of life and earth—the peace of God which passeth all understanding. (*II. S. Carpenter.*)

Ver. 20. **We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness.**—*Frank acknowledgment of guilt*:—Next to the merit of not sinning is confessing sin. A learned man has said, "The three hardest words in the English language are—"I was mistaken." Frederick the Great wrote to the Senate: "I have just lost a great battle, and it was entirely my own fault." Goldsmith said, "This confession displayed more greatness than all his victories." Such a prompt acknowledgment of his fault recalls Bacon's course in more trying circumstances. "I do plainly and ingenuously confess," said the great Chancellor, "that I am guilty of corruption, and so renounce all defence. I beseech your lordships to be merciful to a broken reed." (*A. T. Pierson.*) *True repentance avails with God*:—When a man undertakes to repent towards his fellowmen, it is repenting straight up a precipice; when he repents towards law it is repenting in a crocodile's jaws; when he repents towards public sentiment, it is throwing himself into a thicket

of brambles and thorns; but when he repents towards God, he repents towards all love and delicacy. God receives the soul, as the sea the bather, to return it again, purer and whiter than He took it. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 21. *Do not* **abhor us.**—*Marks of a people in danger of the Divine abhorrence.*—I. THE LEADING INDICATIONS OF A PEOPLE EXPOSED TO THAT ALARMING CONDITION WHICH THE PROPHET HERE SO PATHETICALLY DEPRECATES. 1. Unfruitfulness under the means of religious and moral improvement (Luke xiii. 6). When the recipients of so many favours, instead of being fruitful, bring forth no good fruit at all, or fruit that is positively bad; when, instead of acting suitably to such high advantages, they shew that they are insensible of them; when, instead of being devout, they are impious; when, instead of standing in awe of God, they profane His holy name; when, instead of regarding His ordinances, they despise them; when, instead of being humble, meek, and merciful, they are proud, overbearing, and injurious; and, instead of ascribing to the bounteous Giver of all good, the glory that is due to Him for His liberality towards them, by a holy, reverential, and submissive deportment, they disregard His authority:—most assuredly, if there is any justice in the Divine nature, and any discernment in the Divine administration, such a people are “*nigh unto cursing,*” and are rapidly advancing towards that state which is deprecated in the text. 2. A public and general contempt of religion. All things go well so long as God and His service are revered; because there is a firmness, an energy, and a greatness in every effort put forth for the public weal, which, through the blessing of God, can scarcely fail to render it effectual. But, on the other hand, when God is despised; when His existence and authority are treated as merely ideal; when no influence is produced upon human agency by the greatness and purity of His character, or the rectitude and perfection of His counsels; when it acknowledges no higher principle than self-interest, or the gratification of the inferior appetites of our nature—then all things run into confusion. In confirmation of this, we have the remarkable testimony even of the heathen Polybius, one of the most judicious historians of ancient Rome. “*When the Romans,*” says he, “*left off consulting the gods, when they began to disregard the institutions of religion, or to laugh at things sacred, then fell the glory of the empire.*” The wisdom of the senator forsook him, and the heart of the soldier melted at the face of the foe. The State had no friend, because every man was a friend only to himself, and the gods forsook them because they were despised.” 3. Levity and insensibility under the Divine judgments. How natural to conclude, when a child continues thoughtless, perverse, and obstinate, under the frowns of an indulgent parent, that he is fast approaching to destruction: and how just, as well as natural, is the conclusion; since the parent having tried all means, but in vain, to reclaim him, seems in a measure compelled to throw him off, and since the child himself seems bent on renouncing parental protection, were it even forced upon him. And no less just and natural is it to draw a similar conclusion in the case of nations, when they despise the chastenings of Omnipotence. To these He has recourse, only when all other means have proved ineffectual. If, then, when He strikes they feel it not, and instead of being brought to repentance, obstinately persist in their folly and inconsideration, what is to be looked for but their perdition? II. *How* **SUITABLE THE LANGUAGE AND TEMPER OF THE PRAYER IN THE TEXT IS TO US,** “*O Lord, do not* **abhor us** *for Thy name's sake.*” 1. It is expressive of that temper of mind, which is most suited to the guilt which we have contracted, and the dangers to which we are exposed. (1) It supposes, that as children, who have long resisted the kind intentions of our heavenly Father, trifled with His goodness, and abused His grace, we see ourselves about to be cast off by an awful exertion of His justice; and that, deeply alarmed at our situation, sensible of our unworthiness, and that the very fate which we dread, is what we actually merit, we run to Him at the very moment, and cry, O Lord, *abhor us not; cast us not off for ever.* We deserve it, but stay Thy hand. Foolish, and rebellious, and perverse as we have been, we cannot bear the frowns of Thine indignation, or to be finally excluded from Thy favour. (2) It implies the utmost earnestness, and the very feeling of present and immediate repentance. It supposes that the individuals who use it are actually lying low in the dust, under the sense of immediate danger, and calling out for immediate relief. And most assuredly there is no room for procrastinating. 2. It also peculiarly becomes us, because it is enforced by the only argument fit to be urged by guilty creatures,

and the only argument which we can urge with effect. (1) Review all the circumstances in your case. Single out what you conceive to be the most alleviating, and the most favourable—and then say, is there one of these which you can use as an argument why a pure and holy God should not abhor you? (2) But beware of using this language in a cold and formal manner, and without those distressing apprehensions of danger, and those bitter feelings of repentance, which Jeremiah so evidently cherished when he uttered it. This, instead of appeasing the Divine wrath which has gone forth against us, will rather provoke it more than ever; and instead of averting the Divine judgments, will rather accelerate their accomplishment. (*J. Somerville, D.D.*)

VER. 22. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain?—*Impotence of idols*:—Remember it was a time of dearth. The question turned upon the presence of grass; there was no grass, and therefore the hind calved in the field and forsook its own offspring, that it might abate its own hunger, seeking grass in some far-away place. Natural instincts were subdued and overcome, and the helpless offspring was left in helplessness, that the poor dying mother, hunger smitten, might find a mouthful of green herbage somewhere. And the ground was dust; the ploughmen were ashamed, they resorted to that last sign of Oriental desperation and grief, to cover their heads, because there was no rain, no grass; and now the prophet asks, "Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles than can cause rain?" What can the idols do? If they can give rain, let them give it now. Can the heavens themselves give showers—the blue heavens that look so kind—can they of themselves, and as it were by their own motion, pour a baptism of water upon the earth? No. This is the act of the living God, the providence of the redeeming Father, the miracle of love. Thus we are driven in various ways to pray. You never know what a man is religiously, until he has been well tried, hungry a long time, and had no water to drink, until his tongue is as a burning sting in his mouth, until it hardens like metal, and if he can then move his lips you may find the coward trying to pray. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Rainmakers among the heathen*:—In Burmah the inhabitants have a novel form of the sport that elsewhere is commonly called a tug-of-war. In the Burmese game there is a rain party and a drought party, who pull one against the other, the victory of either party being considered to have immediate results as regards the weather. The drought party, however, obtain few victories, for the kind of weather they represent is commonly not so much desired as rain. In the face, therefore, of a strong public opinion the rain party are nearly always allowed to win, the palpable "roping," in the popular notion, being generally followed by a fertilising downpour.—Prayer is the most potent means of obtaining rain, as shown in the case of Elijah.

CHAPTER XV.

VER. 1. Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be towards this people.—*Righteousness, the strength of nations*:—It is of great importance that we distinguish between communities, and the individuals of which communities are composed. When the whole human race shall be gathered before the tribunal of Christ, every man will receive the recompense due to his actions whilst on earth. But nations cannot be judged or punished as nations; so if God is to mark His sense of the evil wrought by communities in their collective capacity, it must be by present retribution. Accordingly we have full testimony given from Scripture and from experience, that although, in the ordinary course of Divine judgment, individuals are not in this life dealt with according to their actions, yet communities may expect to prosper or decline according as they resist or submit to the revealed will of God. The national character must be determined by the character of the majority; and when this character is so debased that the national punishment can no longer be delayed, there may be numbers influenced by a holy and unaffected piety, and warm love of God. And can these faithful ones be instruments in averting or mitigating wrath? Or if they cannot prevail for the deliverance of others, will they not at

lost be saved from all share in the coming disaster? These are interesting questions; and the best answer can be drawn from the words of our text. Moses and Samuel are supposed to stand forth as pleaders for the land; they are too late—pleading is in vain. Still it is evidently implied that at a less advanced stage in national guilt the intercession would have been of avail. Then, moreover, a distinction is evidently drawn between a guilty people and such advocates as Moses and Samuel. The people are to be “cast out”; but we are left to infer that such as Moses and Samuel would not share to the full extent in the national disaster. Let us look more closely into these points. Call to mind that remarkable portion of Holy Writ in which Abraham is represented as pleading for Sodom. If the city would have been spared had these ten righteous lived within its walls, there is incontrovertible proof that godly men are the salt of the earth, and may often be instrumental in preserving communities from utter desolation. It was not without a very emphatic meaning that Christ styled His disciples “the salt of the earth.” By their mere presence in the midst of ungodly men, and yet more, by their prayers and intercessions, may the righteous often arrest vengeance and prevent the utter ruin of a country. The wicked know nothing of their obligations to the righteous. In general, they despise or hate the righteous—either accounting them fools, or galled by the reproof conveyed by their example. If they had what they wish, they would remove the righteous from amongst them, reckoning that they should then have greater freedom in pursuing their schemes, or enjoying their pleasures. And little do they think that these very objects of their scorn and dislike may be all the while their best guardians and benefactors; turning aside from them evils by which they might be otherwise rapidly overtaken, and procuring for them a lengthened portion of Divine patience and forbearance. Little do they think that the worst thing possible for their country and themselves is when there is a rapid diminution in the number of the righteous; every good man who dies and leaves no successor being as a practical withdrawal from that heaven which alone stays the progress of the universal decomposition. Now we have reached the point at which piety ceases to have power in averting evil from others. What does it, then, do for the pious themselves? Intercession time has gone—the judgment time has come; and every man must be dealt with according to his own character. But if righteousness then lose its power to avail with God for others, besides its possessors; and if on this account the righteous may well shrink from such seasons, yet it appears certain that righteousness is as acceptable as ever to God, and that therefore the righteous have nothing to fear individually for themselves. Come plague! come depopulation! if thou art indeed a devoted, consistent servant of God, they shall not touch thee till the time has come which has been fixed by thy merciful Father! “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.” The funeral procession may wend often from their doors, bearing away (it is melancholy to think) those for whose salvation they have long prayed, and for whom they have daily sought a further day of grace; but they themselves shall be unassailed till the day which, in any case, God had fixed for their entry into rest; and thus shall the pestilence, whose ravages in their households did but fit them for higher glory, do only the part of common sickness in freeing them from a corruptible body. And, therefore, may those in whose hearts is “the fear of the Lord,” hear without trepidation what God says about bringing His sore judgments on a land. There are two very important considerations suggested by the subject we have thus endeavoured to discuss. 1. We wish you to observe that he who serves God, serves his country best. 2. We ask you to observe that whatever the advantages which a man derives from having pious relatives, there is a point at which those relatives can afford him no help. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Intercessory prayer.—I. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS AN EXERCISE OF GREAT VALUE. 1. As developing our love to man. Interesting ourselves in his trials, seeking to save him from his sins. 2. As carrying out the Divine precepts. In the spirit of Christ, in the fellowship of life. 3. As following after noble examples. 4. As obtaining great blessings for others. II. INTERCESSORY PRAYER CAN BE OFFERED ONLY BY GOOD MEN. 1. He must not be under the sin against which he prays. 2. He should know by experience the value of the blessing he craves for another. 3. He must be willing to join effort with prayer. III. INTERCESSORY PRAYER HAS SOME LIMITATIONS EVEN WHEN OFFERED BY THE BEST OF MEN. This is evident—1. From Scripture. 2. From observation. IV. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS A GRAND DISTINCTION AND PROVISION OF THE GOSPEL. We have—1. The best

of intercessors (Heb. vii. 25). In office, sympathy, work, influence. 2. Praying for the best of blessings. Salvation, preservation, comfort, glory. 3. Taking up the case of every soul that trusts Him. 4. Always successful. (*W. Whale.*) *Intercession rejected*:—The Hebrews had justly a very high opinion of Moses. How proudly they boasted, "We are the disciples of Moses!" As the late Dr. R. W. Dale has pointed out, "More than Luther is to Germany, more than Napoleon is to France, more than Alfred, or Elizabeth, or Cromwell, or William III. is to England, Moses was to the Jewish people—prophet, patriot, warrior, law-giver, all in one." Yet even so great a servant of God as Moses together with the famous seer Samuel, would avail nothing in intercession for the Jews at this time. My mind, saith the Lord, could not be toward this people.

Vers. 6-9. *Thou hast forsaken Me.—God forsaking and God forsaken*:—**I. A GOD-FORSAKING PEOPLE.** Conviction by God Himself of this great folly and sin. In chap. ii. 13, the charge is more complete. Creation is called upon to express surprise at a folly so conspicuous. 1. "Thou"—who oughtest to have been unto Me a loyal and loving people, testifying of My power and grace, and proving by separation from the nation your preference for the living and true God. 2. "Hast forsaken"—not simply forgotten, or disobeyed, but of deliberate choice hast taken other gods, and disregarded Jehovah. 3. "Me"—who called Abraham, &c. **II. A GOD-FORSAKEN PEOPLE.** 1. Always retrograde. Unless they repent and obey God, there is no way forward and upward. 2. Always in danger of destruction. If we forsake the mercy, we inherit the misery. 3. Always exposed to terrors and disasters. 4. Always drifting into languor, premature decline, shame, and death. (*W. Whale.*) *How men forsake God*:—A rule I have had for years is to treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal friend. It is not a creed, a mere empty doctrine, but it is Christ Himself we have. The moment we receive Christ we should receive Him as a friend. When I go away from home I bid my wife and children good-bye; I bid my friends and acquaintances good-bye; but I never heard of a poor backslider going down on his knees and saying, "I have been near You for ten years. Your service has become tedious and monotonous. I have come to bid You farewell. Good-bye, Lord Jesus Christ!" I never heard of one doing this. I will tell you how they go away; they just run away. (*D. L. Moody.*)

Ver. 6. *I am weary with repenting.—The Almighty weary with repenting*:—**I. GOD REPENTING.** God condescends to designate His conduct by that name. The expression may be inadequate and defective, but still language had nothing better to describe the idea, nor human experience to represent the fact. When God is pleased to speak of Himself as pitying, repenting, grieving for man's sake, what is evidently intended is, that so intense is His love for man, that were His infinite nature capable of these creature passions, His love would show itself in these very forms. **II. GOD PROVOKED TO A DEGREE THAT HE CAN REPENT NO MORE.** He is "weary with repenting": worn and tired out with having to cancel threatened sentences so often—as a potentate of earth might be at finding that every fresh display of patience in his subjects masked but deeper hatred to his rule, and every amnesty he declared was but a signal for raising the standard of rebellion anew. What can man do, to move the Author of his being to regard him in this way? We must not speculate; we must let the great God speak for Himself; we must try to gather out of other Scriptures what those things are which are said to weary God, wear out His patience, make Him tired of His forgivenesses, reprieves, and revoked sentences. 1. Among these provocations we may note hypocrisy and allowed formality in religious duty (Isa. i. 13, 14). 2. We may make God weary by presumptuous and unwarranted calculations upon His mercy (Mal. ii. 17). 3. Another thing Scripture teaches us wearies, puts God out of patience, is unbelief, a restoring to creature trust and dependencies, a want of simplicity and unreservedness in accepting His promises, as if we thought He would not pay them in full, or did not mean them to be taken by us, in all their length and breadth, and depth and worth. 4. The awful limit prescribed in the text may be reached, and the Divine forbearance tasked one step too far, by provocations after mercies. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) *Jehovah weary with repenting*:—The fact that God is "weary of repenting" shows—1. That God had often turned from His threatenings, and dealt in mercy with the people. 2. That the Divine mercy had been frequently abused, and the people

had gone back again to their sins. 3. That not a change in His being, but only a change of relationship, is expressed by the word "repent." 4. That judgment is alien to God's heart, whereas mercy is His delight. 5. That when God is met with persistent ingratitude, and men relapse continually into sin, He must eventually punish them. 6. That the operations of the Divine mind can only be expressed in human language with difficulty and limitation. 7. That we should be careful not to trifle with or abuse the patient long-suffering of God. (*W. Whale.*) *Divine judgments and man's relation to them*.—Famine, pestilence, revolution, war, are judgments of the Ruler of the world. What sort of a ruler, we ask, is He? The answer to that question will determine the true sense of the term—the judgment of God. The heathen saw Him as a passionate, capricious, changeable Being, who could be angered and appeased by men. The Jewish prophet saw Him as a God whose ways were equal, who was unchangeable, who was not to be bought off by sacrifices but pleased by righteous dealing, and who would remove the punishment when the causes which brought it on were taken away; in other words, when men repented God would repent. That does not mean that He changed His laws to relieve them of their suffering, but that they changed their relationships to His law, so that, to them thus changed, God seemed to change. A boat rows against the stream; the current punishes it. So is a nation violating the law of God, it is subject to punishment, judgment. The boat turns and goes with the stream; and the current assists it. So is a nation which has repented and put itself into harmony with God's law; it is subject to a blessing. But the current is the same; it has not changed, only the boat has changed its relation to the current. Neither does God change—we change; and the same law which executed itself in punishment now expresses itself in reward. (*W. Brooke.*)

Ver. 9. *Her sun is gone down while it is yet day.*—*Beautiful, but brief* :—

I. *HER LIFE WAS LIKE THE SUN IN ITS SHINING.* 1. Gloriously bright with faith and joy. 2. Blessedly useful in diffusing light. 3. Constantly comforting, by its warmth of love and hope. 4. Christianly generous, always giving. 5. A centre of attraction, in the house, in the class, in the social circle, and in the Church. II. *HER DEATH WAS LIKE THE SUN IN ITS SETTING.* 1. Gradual. 2. Beautiful. 3. Peaceful. 4. To rise again. III. *HER SUNSET WAS EARLY IN THE DAY OF LIFE.* 1. In the prime and beauty of being. 2. In the midst of work. 3. It seems unnatural, and suggests questions. 4. It is an interposition of God in His providence, doubtless wise and loving. 5. It leads us from the creature to the Creator. 6. It suggests that we be all ready, always ready. (*W. Whale.*) *Premature sunset* :—I. *IN NATURE.* 1. Would be unnatural. 2. Would be injurious to all life. 3. Would make us less confident as to the unerring regularity of nature's law. II. *IN HISTORY.* Many cases in which nations have fallen, not with decrepitude of age, but through early and self-wrought ruin. III. *IN INDIVIDUAL LIFE.* The young, the immoral, the unprincipled in character generally. Obedience to God gives a long day and beautiful sunset. (*Ibid.*) *The Christian's sun* :—I. *THE CHRISTIAN HAS A SUN.* A sun is a globe which keeps other globes in connection with it in their proper spheres and at their assigned work, and which imports light and heat to them and to all the creatures which inhabit them. In a sense, all men have a sun to which they look for present and future good. But it differs with different men. With some it is nature; some, the traditions of their fathers; some, fancied superior morality; and the portion of good to every man, with regard to its character and intent, is determined by the capability and quality of his sun. Oh, how miserably off must be all who depend on the finite! The Christian does not. His sun is Jesus as set forth in Holy Writ. From Him every true believer has the light and heat of spiritual life, and through Him he gets into his place, and is put to his appropriate work in creation (*John* i. 1-14, viii. 12, xii. 40). Receptivity is the beginning of that state of mind which, if rightly followed up, issues in the likeness, love, and enjoyment of God; and as Jesus, the source to which the Christian looks for lasting, ennobling good, is infinite, his felicity and glory will be for ever enlarging. II. *THE CHRISTIAN IS SUNNIFIED BY HIS SUN.* He is a retainer, as well as a receiver, of its beneficent outflow. All the colours, and all the shades of colours, and every form of animal and vegetable life, are owing to the retention and appropriation of solar rays. The wealth, and beauty, and blessed activity of earth arise in this way. In like manner, the rays of the world's spiritual Sun—the divinely inspired record of the history of incarnate Deity—must be kept and fittingly used if His fruits are

to be enjoyed. **III. THE CHRISTIAN SUNNIFIES OTHERS.** He is a reflector and spreader of the brightness and goodness of his sun. "Ye are the light of the world." The globes which emit light and heat as well as have them, the animals which add usefulness to life, and the flowers which are fragrant besides being beautiful, are highest in the scale of existence and of greatest worth. To those Christians who are active besides being pious, who spread the Gospel in addition to living it, who enrich and bless others as well as seek to be enriched and blessed themselves, are the most like Jesus, the most dear to the Father, the most useful to men, the most honoured in the Church. Their death is a calamity to others, but auspicious to themselves. Apply the subject—1. To sinners. Get spiritual light and life while you can. 2. To saints. Prize and make good use of your privileges. Diffuse your light. 3. To Christian workers. Be not weary in works of faith and labours of love. The more light you spread, and the more men you illumine, the greater your joy now, the greater your blessedness hereafter. (*W. J. Stuart.*) *Death the setting of the sun* :—I. The sun, in setting, **DISAPPEARS FROM VIEW.** As the great central orb is lost to our part of the world as he sinks beneath the horizon, so man is lost to the view of earth as he descends to the grave. The "places that knew him know him no more." II. The sun in setting **OBEYS ITS LAW.** "The sun knoweth his going down." Death is a law of nature. It is as natural for the body to die as for the sun to go down. III. The sun in setting is **OFTEN GORGEOUS.** Often have we seen the monarch of the day ride down in a chariot of glittering gold. Many a man has died under a halo of moral splendour. Like Stephen, they have seen the heavens open, and reflected the celestial rays as they came down. IV. The **SETTING SUN WILL RISE AGAIN.** So with man in death. He does not go out of existence: he only sinks from view, and sinks to rise again in new splendour. Conclusion—Let us fulfil our mission as the sun does his, move in our little circle in harmony with Divine law, enlightening, vivifying, and beautifying all, and then death need have no terror for us. Our path will be as a "shining light," &c. (*Homilist.*) *Sunset at noonday* :—These words are illustrative of death in life's meridian. They remind us of—**I. PREMATURE DARKNESS.** Sunsetting is the harbinger of night. 1. In nature. We do not expect sunset until eventide. 2. In morals. The departure of moral integrity. This sun should never set. 3. In physical life. Death is sunset to the aged, at night; to the young, at noon. 4. Unexpected darkness is unanticipated sorrow to community, family, individual. **II. UNCOMPLETED WORK.** "Man goeth forth unto his work." Ordinarily, man has work enough to last all day; when called away prematurely, he leaves part untouched. So in life's aggregation. In life's morning his work is largely preparatory for mightier accomplishments of his post-meridian. **III. FRUSTRATED DESIGN.** Man lives in the future—(1) intellectually, (2) socially, (3) religiously. Setting suns of life. Permanently overwrought powers. Commercial disasters. Succumbing to evil. In each case failure to realise the hope. **IV. A SPEEDIER ENJOYMENT OF REST.** Darkness suggests night; night suggests repose. As in the physical, so in the soul's life. "Blessed are the dead," &c. "There remaineth therefore," &c. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *Death in the midst of life* :—I. **THE SUN AS AN EMBLEM OF THE SAINTS OF GOD.** When we contemplate the great orb of day we are impressed—1. With his greatness and elevation. This greatness and elevation fitly represents the true character of the Christian, contrasted with what he was, with what others are around him. Knowledge makes a man great. Grace of God elevates and lifts up to heaven. "I will set him on high," &c. 2. Natural glory and magnificence. The most glorious of all the heavenly bodies. "The king's daughter," &c. (*Psa. xlv. 13.*) See this strikingly set forth (2 Cor. iii. 18). 3. As the great diffuser of light and beauty. The Christian is first the recipient of light, and then he is called to shine. "Arise, shine," &c. "So let your light shine," &c. 4. As the chief source of fertility and fruitfulness. Where Christians live there is knowledge, benevolence, happiness, and life. Look at all our institutions of temporal and moral goodness. **II. THE SETTING OF THE SUN AS A STRIKING REPRESENTATION OF THE MORALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN.** 1. The going down of the sun is a usual and therefore expected event. So sure as he arises we know he will go down. Man is born to die, &c. "I know that Thou wilt bring me to death," &c. "The living know," &c. 2. The period of the going down of the sun is very diversified. Look at the short winter's day and the long summer's day. So in life,—every age is alike mortal, &c. But the text speaks of the sun going down while it is yet day—prematurely. How often is this the case. 3. The

going down of the sun is often peculiarly splendid and beautiful. How characteristic of the good man's death! 4. The sun goes down to arise and shine on another horizon. (*J. Burns, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. **A man of strife.**—*Men of progress, men of strife*:—I. BECAUSE OF NONCOMPLIANCE WITH POPULAR SINS. Always some interested in doing wrong, and maintaining evil among the people. Those who will not conform, especially such as speak and labour against sin, are considered men of strife. II. BECAUSE THEY ARE IN ADVANCE OF THE AGE. They look at all matters from a more elevated standpoint, and seek to bring the people up to their level. III. BECAUSE THEY ARE EARNEST AND ENERGETIC. Some can be indifferent; true souls cannot be. IV. BECAUSE ALL GOOD WORK CAUSES STRIFE. Evil has to be conquered, the devil to be cast out. No curse will peaceably give place to a blessing. V. BECAUSE THE FIELD OF BATTLE IS THE PATH OF GLORY. Salvation is finally for "him that endureth to the end." "Fight the good fight of faith." (*W. Whale.*)

Ver. 12. **Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?**—*The northern iron and steel*:—In order to achieve a purpose there must be sufficient force. The weaker cannot overcome the stronger. In a general clash the firmest will win. You cannot cut granite with a pen-knife, nor drill a hole in a rock with an auger of silk. We shall apply this proverb—I. TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD INDIVIDUALLY. 1. Many Christians are subjected to great temptations and persecutions; mocked, ridiculed, called by evil names. Persecuted one, will you deny the faith? If so, you are not made of the same stuff as the true disciple of Jesus Christ; for when the grace of God is in them, if the world be iron, they are northern iron and steel. 2. We are frequently called to serve God amid great difficulties. Will you say, there is no converting these dark and obdurate souls? Is the iron to break the northern iron and steel? Look at Mont Cenis Tunnel, made through one of the hardest rocks; with a sharp tool, edged with diamond, they have pierced the Alps. As St. Bernard says: "Is thy work hard? set a harder resolution against it; for there is nothing so hard that cannot be cut with something harder still." 3. To labour with non-success, and to wait, is hard work. It is a grand thing for a Christian to continue patiently in well-doing. II. Applicable to the cause of God in the world—TO THE CHURCH. What power, however like to iron, shall suffice to break the kingdom of Jesus, which is comparable to steel? 1. We hear it said that Romanism will again vanquish England; that the Gospel light, which Latimer helped to kindle, will be extinguished. Atrocious nonsense, if not partial blasphemy. If this thing were of men, it would come to nought; but if it be of God, who shall overthrow it? 2. Others foretell the triumph of infidelity. That the gates of hell are to prevail against the Church; that the pleasure of the Lord is not to prosper in His hand. Who but a lying spirit would thus lay low the faith and confidence of God's people? III. Apply the principle to the SELF-RIGHTEOUS EFFORTS WHICH MEN MAKE FOR THEIR OWN SALVATION. 1. The bonds of guilt are not to be snapped by a merely human power. 2. Yet that were an easy task compared with a man renewing his own heart. 3. Do you think you can force your way to heaven by ceremony? Come, sinner, with thy fetters; lay thy wrist at the cross-foot, where Christ can break the iron at once. IV. Applicable to all persons who are making SELF-RELIANT EFFORTS FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. 1. Our preaching—we try to make it forcible—how powerless it is of itself! We plead, reason, seek goodly words, &c., but the northern iron and steel remain immovable. Though all the apostles reasoned with them, they would turn a deaf ear. 2. The best-adapted means cannot succeed. A mother's tears, as she spoke to you of Jesus; the pleadings of a grey-headed father over you—no power to change your heart! The Gospel, though put to you very tenderly by those you love best, leaves you unsaved still! You have been sick, near death, within an inch of doom; yet even the judgments of God have not aroused you. V. THIS TEXT HAS A VERY SOLEMN APPLICATION TO ALL THOSE WHO ARE REBELS AGAINST GOD. Fight against God, would you? Measure your adversary, I charge you. The wax is about to wrestle with the flame, the tow to contend with the fire. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Nothing more to be done*:—It is impossible to explain these words to the satisfaction of all. The general explanation, according to a large consensus of opinion, is that the prayer of the prophet cannot break the inflexible purpose of Jehovah. Jeremiah is

still concerned for his countrymen, and he will still pray, though he has been told that if the mightiest intercessors that ever lived were to lift up their heads in devoutest argument they would not be listened to, for heaven was offended, and mighty in just indignation. Now the question is put, not by Jeremiah, but by another: "Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?" Is there any iron in the south that can stand against the iron of the north? Has not the iron of the north been proved in a thousand controversies, and has it ever failed? Who will smite that northern iron with straw? Who will break it with a weapon of wood? Who will set his own frail hand against an instrument so tremendous? The argument, then, would seem to be—Why pray to me for these people? It is as iron applied to the iron of the north, which has been seen to fail in innumerable instances: all the prayers that can now be offered to heaven would be broken upon the threshold of that sanctuary and fall back in fragments upon the weary intercessor; the day has closed, the door is shut, the offended angel of grace has flown away on eagle pinions, and the sister angel of mercy can no longer be found: pray no more for Jerusalem. Thus the Lord dramatically represents Himself; and in all this dramatic reply to the interrogations and pleadings of earth there is a great principle indicated; that principle is that the day closes—"My Spirit shall not always strive with men." These are awful words. If a man had invented them, we should have denied their truthfulness and their force; but when we hear them as from above we confirm them, we say, It is right, we do not deserve to be heard; if we had to assign ourselves to a fate, we dare not plant in the wilderness of our solitude one single flower; we have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things we ought to have done; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. **Remember me, and visit me.**—*The desire to be remembered*:—Jeremiah desires many things; but the thing he asks first, as including all the rest, is that God would not let him drop out of sight and thought. I. THE PERPETUALLY RECURRING PHRASE, "GOD KNOWS," EXPRESSES A MOOD OF THOUGHT COMMON TO RATIONAL CREATURES. 1. A craving everywhere to be remembered. From the lips of the dying, from friends of whom we are taking farewell, fall the words, "Remember me." Ambitious minds, not content that their memorial should be kept in a few hearts, labour that their names may be remembered by multitudes. Oblivion appeals us. 2. The moralist can easily show the vanity of this desire, and the emptiness of the end. What good will it do you, he asks, to be remembered when out amid Australian wilds or on parched Indian plains? or what harm to be forgot? 3. Enough for us, that God so made us that, by the make of our being, we desire to be kindly remembered. II. THE PROPHET SHOWS US THE RIGHT DIRECTION IN WHICH TO TRAIN THIS DESIRE. Pointing to the heaven above, he bids us seek to be remembered there. 1. The thought that such a prayer may be offered to God, teaches us a great deal of His kindness, condescension, thoughtful care. 2. It was while looking on the kindly human face of Christ, that the whole heart's wish of the poor penitent thief went out in the "Lord, remember me!" 3. It was in special clearness of revelation of God's love, that the Psalmist was emboldened to say, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me." III. THE ENCOURAGING VIEW OF THE HEARER OF PRAYER IMPLIED IN THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET'S PETITION. 1. He was not staggered, as he drew near in prayer, by intruding doubt whether the Almighty would listen to his poor words or consider his heart's desires. 2. It is not presumption, but faith, that speaks here. 3. Ponder for your comfort that God "thinketh upon" you; "knoweth your frame," &c. IV. IN SUCH INDIVIDUALITY OF PRAYER THERE IS NO SELFISHNESS. It is not the wish to be distinguished above, but to be remembered even as the other members of the family. It is but that when Christ, the great Intercessor, speaks to Almighty God for Himself and His brethren of mankind, saying, in name of all, "Our Father," the poor sinner should not be left out. V. MARK WHAT SIMPLE TRUST IN GOD'S WISDOM AND KINDNESS IS IMPLIED. 1. Everything is asked in that. Enough, just to put oneself under God's eye, just to get God to think of one at all. 2. It is assumed that if God remembers us, it will be in love. 3. God's remembrance is practical. He comes to our help. 4. Doubtless there is a season in the history of the unconverted man in which he can have no real desire that God should remember him: he rather desires to keep out of God's sight and remembrance. 5. Yet the prayer expresses the first reaching

after God of the awakened soul. (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*) *Jeremiah's prayer* :—

I. THE PROPHET'S PRAYER. 1. "Remember me," O Lord! (1) There is a sense in which God may be said to remember His people so as to take particular knowledge of them, and all that pertains to them. He remembers their persons, knows their exact number, and not one of them shall be lost (*Isa. xlv. 21, 22, xlix. 14-10*). He remembers their frailties and infirmities, how unable they are to bear affliction without His support, and hears the gentle whisper and the secret groan with parental tenderness (*Jer. ii. 2, 3*). He remembers all their endeavours to serve and please Him, however weak and imperfect they have been; and in instances where they pitied and relieved any of His needy and afflicted ones, without the prospect of reward, and from love to Him, He will bring it to remembrance, and return it all into their bosom (*Heb. vi. 10*). All the prayers of His people are come up as a memorial before Him, and shall not be forgotten. Sooner or later they shall all be answered, whether they live to see it or not; for God sometimes answers the prayers of His people, after they are gone to their graves, in blessings on their connections and posterity. (2) The Lord not only remembers His people so as to know and notice them, as He does His other works; but in a special manner, so as to delight in them to do them good, and feel a satisfaction in them. He taketh pleasure in the prosperity of His servants, and will exert Himself on their behalf. He will so remember them as to direct them in their difficulties, succour them in their temptations, guard them when in danger, and bring them out of trouble. 2. "And visit me." This implies that where God graciously remembers any one, He will also visit them. Of the Lord's visits to His people, it may be observed—(1) They are promised, and He will fulfil His word. Thus it was with respect to that long-expected and much-desired one, at the incarnation (*Luke i. 54, 55, 78, 79*). The same may be said of all His visits to His people: they are not casual, but determined. And as they are at a fixed time on God's part, so they are most seasonable on ours: they are made when we most need them, and when He shall be most glorified by them. (2) They are free and voluntary and on our part wholly undeserved: they are what we seek, but cannot claim. (3) Divine visits are often short and transient, like the sheet that was three times let down from heaven while Peter was praying upon the house-top, and almost immediately taken up again. The manifestations of Divine love are often like a land-flood—sudden, overflowing, and soon spent; but the love itself is a boundless ocean, an ever-flowing stream. (4) However short the Divine visits are, they are often repeated, and are peculiar to the favourites of heaven. They impart life to our graces, vigour to our services, and comfort to our souls. (5) They are powerful and influential, always bringing peace and comfort to the soul.

II. CONCLUDING REMARKS. 1. Though God hath promised His presence with His people, yet He may for a time withhold the manifestation of it (*Job xxiii. 8, 9; Lam. i. 16*). Such departures are very distressing, though but temporary; and those who have been most indulged with the Divine presence are most affected with its withdrawment; while those who have never experienced the former are insensible and unconcerned about the latter. 2. When God forbears His visits, His people are apt to think that He has forgotten them (*Psa. xxxi. 12, lxxxviii. 14, 15*). 3. To be remembered and visited of God is a blessing infinitely to be desired; and those especially who fear they are forgotten by Him feel it to be so (*Psa. lxxiii. 25*). 4. Those who desire God's presence must seek it by earnest prayer. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *Prayer* :—**I. DIVINE KNOWLEDGE IS NO HINDRANCE TO PRAYER.** 1. "Thou knowest"—(1) My character. (2) My condition. (3) My need. 2. Yet, though Thou knowest, yea, because Thou knowest, I will pray to Thee. **II. DIVINE CONDESCENSION AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER.** 1. Remember me. 2. Visit me. 3. Vindicate me. **III. HUMAN NEED A STIMULUS TO PRAYER.** Poor, persecuted, and in peril, where could he go for help? He is driven to God by trouble, and drawn by loving-kindness. **IV. THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE SUGGEST TOPICS FOR PRAYER.** Poverty, weakness, affliction, persecution, temptation—the sins and sorrows of others. **V. CONSCIOUS SINCERITY GIVES FREEDOM IN PRAYER.** "I have suffered for Thy sake." **VI. THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST GIVES EFFICACY TO OUR PRAYER.** (*W. Whale.*) **Take me not away in Thy long-suffering.**—*The long-suffering of God* :—**I. THE NATURE OF THIS LONG-SUFFERING.** 1. It is part of the Divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. The Lord is full of compassion, slow to anger. (1) Long-suffering differs from mercy in respect to the object; mercy respects the creature as miserable: patience, or long-suffering, respects the creature as criminal;

mercy pities him in his misery; long-suffering bears with the sin, and waits to be gracious. (2) Long-suffering differs also from goodness, in regard to the object. The object of goodness is every creature, from the highest angel in heaven to the meanest creature on earth; goodness respects things in a capacity, or in a state of creation, nurseth and supporteth them as creatures. Long-suffering considers them as already created and fallen short of their duty; goodness respects persons as creatures; long-suffering, as transgressors. 2. Since it is a part of goodness and mercy, it is not insensibility. God's anger burns against the sin, whilst His arms are open to receive the sinner. 3. As long-suffering is a part of mercy and goodness, it is not constrained or faint-hearted patience. 4. Since it is not for want of power over the creature, it is from a fulness of the power over Himself. 5. As long-suffering is a branch of mercy, the exercise of it is founded on the death of Christ. II. HOW THIS LONG-SUFFERING OR PATIENCE IS MANIFESTED. 1. In His giving warning of judgments before they are commissioned to go forth. 2. In His unwillingness to execute His threatened judgments, when He can delay no longer. 3. In that when He begins to send out His judgments, He doth it by degrees. 4. By moderating His judgments. "He rewardeth us not according to our iniquities." 5. In giving great mercies after provocations. 6. When we consider the greatness and multitude of our provocations. III. THE GROUND AND REASON OF THIS LONG-SUFFERING TO US-WARD. 1. As a testimony of His reconcilable and merciful nature towards sinners. 2. That sinners may be brought to repentance. 3. For the continuance of His Church (Isa. lxxv. 8, 9). 4. That His justice may be clear when He condemns the impenitent. 5. In answer to the prayers of His people, His long-suffering is exercised towards sinners. "To conclude—I. How is the long-suffering of God abused? 2. Is the Lord long-suffering? How much better, therefore, is it to fall into the hands of God, than into the hands of man; the best of men. 3. We may infer from the Lord's long-suffering towards sinners, the value of the soul; He not only died to redeem it, but waits with unwearied patience and forbearance to receive it. 4. If the Lord be thus long-suffering to us-ward, who have so long and repeatedly rebelled against Him, ought not Christians to exercise forbearance and long-suffering one towards another? (Eph. iv. 1-6.) (*Pulpit Assistant.*) A promise of better things:—Thomas Scott, the commentator, tells the following incident: "A poor man, most dangerously ill, of whose religious state I entertained some hopes, seemed to me in the agonies of death. I sat by his bed for a long time, expecting to see him expire; but at length he awoke as from a sleep, and noticed me. I said, 'You are extremely ill.' He replied, 'Yes, but I shall not die this time.' I asked the ground of this strange confidence, saying that I was persuaded he would not recover. To this he answered, 'I have just dreamed that you, with a very venerable-looking person, came to me. He asked you what you thought of me. 'What kind of tree is it? Is there any fruit?' You said, 'No; but there are blossoms!' 'Well, then, I will spare it a little longer.' This dream so exactly met my ideas as to the man's state of mind, and the event so answered his confidence by recovery, that I could not but think there was something peculiar in it. I have since learned that after many backslidings the man became a decidedly religious character—and his case furnishes a most striking instance of the long-suffering and tender mercy of our God!"

Ver. 16. *Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.*—*The soul's discovery and use of the words of God*:—I. THE SOUL'S DISCOVERY OF THE WORDS OF GOD. "Thy words were found." 1. In their truth. "He that believeth hath the witness"—i.e., the thing witnessed, the testimony—"in himself." He feels the reality of the words of God. They are substance, not shadow, to him. 2. In their meaning. The words of God are not designed to act upon us as an ignorant charm. They are necessarily full of the mind of God. Sympathy with the mind of God is therefore indispensable for understanding them. 3. In their immense importance. 4. In their intense applicability. 5. In their impressive power. "Demonstration of the Spirit." II. THE SOUL'S USE OF THE WORDS OF GOD. "I did eat them." As the mouth receives food for the body, so faith for the soul. 1. The believing soul loves the words. With its regenerated taste it relishes them keenly, finds them to be bread of God, better even than angels' food. 2. The believing soul dwells on the words; meditates upon them day and night. 3. The believing soul turns the words into the nourishment of the spiritual life. For its appetite is wholesome. It desires the sincere milk of the Word, that

it may grow thereby. And it does. III. THE DELIGHTFUL EFFECT OF THE SOUL'S DISCOVERY AND USE OF THE WORDS OF GOD. "Thy word was unto me the joy," &c. This is owing to—1. The suitableness and comprehensiveness of its provision. 2. The preciousness of its grace. 3. The grandeur of its discoveries. Of God, His attributes, providence, Church, heaven. 4. The elevated piety and purity of its tone. Conclusion—Would you be able to express yourselves thus? Remember, then, that God's words are spread before your eye, and spoken to your ear, like any other words, to be inquired into, if you would understand them; to be attended to and detained in your memory, if you would experience their intended and beneficial effects. But remember also, that they are but the textbook of the heavenly Teacher; and do not fail to implore His gracious teaching. (*H. Angus, D.D.*) *The secret food and the public name*:—It was good advice of a venerable divine to a young man who aspired to be a preacher, when he said to him, "Don't become a minister if you can help it." The man who could very easily be a tradesman or a merchant had better not be a minister. A preacher of the Gospel should always be a volunteer, and yet he should always be a pressed man, who serves his King because he is omnipotently constrained to do so. Only he is fit to preach who cannot avoid preaching, who feels that woe is upon him unless he preach the Gospel, and that the very stones would cry out against him if he should hold his peace. I. In the description of Jeremiah's SECRET LIFE, which consists of his inward reception of the Word of God (which description will answer for ourselves), we have three points. 1. The finding of it—"Thy words were found." (1) We read the Word. Here it is: God's Word is all here, and, if we would find it, we must read it earnestly. As the habit of having a time for prayer is good, so also is the habit of reading the Scriptures. Yet it is a mischievous practice to read a great deal of the Bible without time for thought; it flatters our conceit without benefiting our understanding. The practice of always reading the Bible in scraps is also to be deprecated. (2) But we have not found God's Word when we have read it, unless we add to it an understanding of the Word. Marrow bones, who can feed on them? Split them, take out the marrow, and then you have luscious food. Merely verbal utterances, even though they be the utterance of the Holy Spirit, cannot feed the soul. It is the inward meaning, the truth that is revealed, which we should labour after. (3) To find God's Word means sometimes the discovery of select and appropriate words to suit our case. "Thy words were found." You know when you have lost your key, and your cupboard or your drawer cannot be opened, you send for a locksmith, and he comes in with a whole bunch of keys. First he tries one—that does not fit; then he tries another—that will not do; and the good man perseveres, perhaps with twenty keys, it may be with fifty. At last he gets the proper key, which springs the lock, and he opens your treasure for you. Now Scripture to us is much of the same nature. We have many promises in the time of trouble, and it is a great blessing to find the promise that suits our case. (4) "Thy words were found"; that is, I felt I had got a hold of them; I knew I had got them; I had discovered them—they were Thy words to my inmost soul. They have come to us with a power that no other words ever had in them, and we cannot be argued out of our conviction of their superlative excellence and Divine authority. We have found the words of our heavenly Father: we know we have, for children know their own father's voice. 2. A second view of the inner life must now be considered. "Thy word was found, and I did eat it." (1) By that term is signified, first, the prizing of God's Word. When Jeremiah received a sentence which he knew came from God's mouth he prized it, he loved it so that he ate it; he could not lay it aside; he did not merely think of it; he loved it so that he put it into his very self. (2) The term eating implies, moreover, that he derived nourishment from it. It is delightful to sit down and suck the soul out of a text, to take it and feel that not the letter only but the inner vitals of the text are our own, and are to be received into the very nature of our spirit, to become assimilated with it. (3) But the figure of eating means more, it sets forth an intimate union. That which a man eats gets intertwined with his own self, his own personality. The diligent believer when he knows the Word, learns it so well that he assimilates it into his own being. Let me illustrate this by a fact which is notable in a lower sense in certain natural persuasions. When Galileo was convinced that the world moved, they put him in prison for it, and in his weakness he recanted, and said he believed it stood still and that the sun moved, but the moment he got away from his persecutors he stamped his foot, and said, "But it does move, though." And so he who

knows the truth as it is in Jesus has even a higher persuasion than that which ruled Galilee. He cannot belie the truth: he has got it so into himself that he cannot give it up. 3. Notice, then, the third glimpse into the inner life. "It was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." Nothing makes a man so happy as the Word of God. Nothing makes him so full of delight and peace of soul as feeding upon the Word. II. THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS OUTWARD LIFE, as he is mentioned here—"I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts." 1. The condition of Jeremiah was one which he had attained by his conduct. He was so continually preaching about Jehovah, so constantly insisting upon Jehovah's will, and going upon Jehovah's errands, that they came to call him "Jehovah's man," and he was known by Jehovah's name. Now the man who loves God's Word, and feeds on it, and rejoices in it, will so act that he will come to be called a Christian. He will not only be so, but he will be called so. Men will take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus. To be called "Jehovah's man" was an honour to Jeremiah; and to be called by any of these nicknames, which signify that we belong to God, is an honour to aspire after and not to be regretted. May we all win some opprobrious name, and wear it as our title of holy chivalry. 2. But this is a name, in the second place, which is involved in the profession of every Christian. "I am called by Thy name, O Jehovah, God of hosts." Of course you are so called, if your profession be true. Oh, that we remembered always that we are Christians, and therefore must always act up to the name that is named upon us. God grant you, friends, that, in the power of the eating of God's Word, you may be constrained to act ever as becometh those upon whom the name of Christ is named. 3. Once more, this word may be used in the sense which arises out of the Gospel itself. "I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts: I belong to Thee. When they gather up the nations, and they say, 'This man belongs to Babylon, and that man to Assyria, and that man to Egypt,' I belong to Thee, and am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts." What a comfort this is—we who believe in Christ belong to God. We are His portion, and He will never lose us. "They shall be Mine," saith the Lord, "when I make up My jewels." You are poor: but you are Christ's. Does not that mitigate your poverty? You are sick: but you are God's. Does not that comfort you? The poor lamb lies in the cold field, but, if it belongs to a good shepherd, it shall not die. The sheep is sick, or it has wandered; but, if it belongs to an Omnipotent Shepherd, it shall be healed and it shall be brought back. The name of Christ being named upon us is the guarantee of our present comfort and of our future security. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

God's Word found and eaten :—I. WHAT WAS THE PRIZE WHICH JEREMIAH DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS HAVING FOUND? It was the Word of God. "Thy words," says he, "were found"—just as a man, on digging in the ground, might find beyond his hopes a treasure there; or as a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls, might find unexpectedly one of greater price than any he was looking for. When men find the Word of God, they find also their duty and calling. They make a grand discovery of the will of God concerning them. II. WHAT USE HE MADE OF THIS DISCOVERY. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them." So then he made the words of God his food—he made a meal of them—not only did he "hear, read, mark, and learn," but he "inwardly digested them." It is dealing with them as the hungry man does with food. It is converting the Word of God into wholesome nourishment. The Word is thus "hid in the heart," as the food we eat is in the body, and becomes, as it were, a part of us—the very life-blood of the soul. III. THE HAPPINESS WHICH HE ACQUIRED IN CONSEQUENCE. "Thy Word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." A noble testimony this to the efficacy of God's Word. How sweetly it went down (Cant. vii. 9);—how blessed its effects upon the prophet's heart, when "joy and rejoicing" were the consequences! David also "ate" God's words; and what is his account of it? (Psa. cxix. 103, xix. 10.) Hear what is the voice of the whole Church without exception (Cant. ii. 3). Not a single member of Christ's Church but is ready to declare with the prophet that the precious Word of God, when fed upon by faith, is "the joy and the rejoicing of his heart"—his "songs in the house of his pilgrimage." (A. Roberts, M.A.)

Divine revelation :—I. AS A DIVINE WORD. What is the Word? Not the book we call the Bible, that is but the record of the revelation. Jesus Christ is emphatically the Logos. The fullest, brightest, strongest Word of God is this. A true word answers two purposes. 1. By it the speaker reveals his own soul. 2. By it the speaker exerts his influence. II. AS A DIVINE WORD APPROPRIATED. 1. Something more than to possess its record. 2. Some-

thing more than the mere understanding of its contents. 3. Something more than the mere transfusion of it into the realm of emotions. It is to convert it into the ruling spirit of life. III. As a Divine Word ENJOYED. 1. The joy of moral satisfaction. 2. The joy of renewed strength. Conclusion—Thank God for His Word. Study it in nature, history, consciousness, and especially in Jesus Christ. Peruse, ponder, and prize this wonderful Book, containing the pearl of great price. (*Homilist.*) *The influence of the Bible conducive to personal happiness*:—The Bible may be compared to a medicine: man is the patient, misery is the disease, and the Scriptures are presented to us as a remedy. Are they such? I. THE TRUTH OF THIS PROPOSITION. 1. The Scriptures received into the mind remove the misery arising from remorse and the apprehension of punishment, and introduce into the heart the feeling of delight connected with reconciliation with God, a peaceful state of conscience, and the hope of everlasting life. A missionary was discoursing in one of the South Sea Islands to some of the inhabitants of those benighted regions, and this was his text, "God so loved the world," &c. The attention of one of the islanders was arrested: he began to interrogate the preacher. "What!" said he, "is that true? Is it so? Road that again!" The missionary read it a second time. (I heard the statement from his own lips.) "What! God so love us, as to send His Son to die for us! and are we to have everlasting life in the world to come—is that true?" "It is true," replied the preacher: "there is no ground whatever to question it." The man's mind was filled with amazement, and with sensations of repentance on account of sin, and wonder and joy on account of his salvation occupied his breast: he retired to weep, he retired to meditate, he retired to pray to God, and to praise his Creator's name. What happiness comes into the soul when the soul is assured of eternal life! 2. The Bible preserves us from the state of misery arising from bad and ungovernable passions, and introduces the delights connected with a holy state of heart. 3. The Bible received into the heart by faith turns the afflictions of life into real mercies, and renders them at once bearable and beneficial. 4. The Bible welcomed into the soul by faith removes the sting of death, and turns the monster from a dreadful curse into a blessing of no small magnitude. I was acquainted with a gentleman, many years ago; he was of a sceptical turn of mind, and, as a consequence, not very attentive to religion. He was following a very lucrative profession, and unexpectedly exhibited the symptoms of a fatal disease. He fully expected he should die in the course of a few months. He found no support in scepticism; none whatever. And the lash of conscience began, for having neglected the Scriptures, and not having fairly and candidly investigated their claims. This filled him with great remorse; for he felt that if the Bible should be true, he would certainly be condemned for his negligence and his want of candid examination. He resolved, as long as life should last, that he would study the sacred volume, and inquire into its claims. His health was restored to him, and after devoting all his leisure time, for about twelve months to reading the Scriptures, and books connected with them, and explanatory of them, and pointing out their claims and their evidences, the result was a firm conviction, that the Bible was from God. He was induced then to begin to act upon it. He went abroad; he was one night in the river Ganges, and suddenly, while fast asleep, a cry was raised that the boat was sinking; and so it was—there were holes in the keel, and the stern of the boat was brought under water in the night season by the men, who went and slept, and the boat was gradually filling, and in a few minutes more all would have sunk like a stone or lead to the bottom of the river. His first impression was, I have not an hour to live. There was a tumultuous feeling in his mind, yet had he sufficient composure to reflect upon the difference of his feelings then, and what they were when he anticipated death some years prior. His impression and conviction was, that he should be in heaven in an hour; and oh! the support of the Gospel in that moment. Subsequently, he was seized with the Asiatic cholera, and life was in suspense. Similar support was again experienced. A Brahmin was by his side; and he took occasion to say, "Now you see the support that the Christian experiences in the season of extremity: my life is in suspense: for me to live is Christ; for me to die is gain." II. SOME OBJECTIONS WHICH STAND IN THE WAY OF ITS PRACTICAL ADOPTION. There are some who will not, like Jeremiah, "eat" the words of God—that will not receive Him into their heart; therefore they do not share in this holy joy. Some will say, "I cannot wholly satisfy my mind that this book is from God: I have doubts, and doubts which amount to what is considerable; so that I cannot enjoy the book in con-

sequence of these sceptical ideas. How should I get rid of them ? " I would say, in order to get rid of these doubts act conscientiously : do not act in a manner inconsistent with what you believe to be the will of God : do not live in wilful sin. " If any man will do the will of My Father, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." So said Christ. Act according to your own conscientious views of holiness, and you will find scepticism disappear. Let me entreat you to read the Bible, read the whole of it, if you are troubled with sceptical thoughts. Dr. Johnson said that no honest man could be a deist, if he had had opportunity to study the evidence : if he read through the evidence, and through the Bible, he could not continue a deist, as the evidence was so clear and so conclusive. Hume's name was mentioned to him, that he disbelieved the Bible. Dr. Johnson replied, " Hume, I know, made the confession to a clergyman in the bishopric of Durham, that he had never read the New Testament carefully." There are some sceptics who read a little here and a little there ; but they do not get a complete view of the subject ; and they read rather to find something to object to, something they may lay hold of. The conduct of such men has been compared to that of the Athenian, who had a palace to be sold by auction : he took a brick out of one of the walls of the palace, and at the auction mart he said, " Here is a sample of my palace." How absurd ! A brick out of the wall to be a sample. But so some men take here a text and there a text—a brick taken out of the wall—and what do they know about the entire edifice ? Give the Bible throughout a candid and complete perusal ; and read books which are explanatory, written in a spirit of candour and intelligence. But let me add, to put your sceptical thoughts to flight, I think you will find prayer to be the most powerful thing of all, and the most rapid way to scatter your doubts. " He hath the witness in himself." When a man begins to pray to God, God answers him, if he prays sincerely, and God gives him a new heart and makes him a new man. Then he begins to argue in this way, " Why the Bible has changed my heart, the Bible has made me holy, the Bible has made me happy ; what want I with further witness ? " (*H. Townley.*)

Hidden manna :—I. A MEMORABLE DISCOVERY. What is meant by finding God's words ? 1. A thing found has usually to be sought for. Happy is he who reads or hears the Scriptures, searching all the while for the hidden spiritual sense (*Prov. ii. 4, 5*). 2. To find God's Word means that we have been made to understand them (*1 Cor. iii. 14*). The Bible is a dull book till illuminated ; a tantalising riddle till you get the key ; but, the clue once found, it absorbs our attention, delights our intellect, and enriches our heart. 3. Means to appropriate it as belonging to yourself. Reading a will is not interesting till you find you have a part in it. II. **AN EAGER RECEPTION.** What is meant by eating them ? 1. An eager study. Greedy for the truth. My soul hungered even to ravenousness to be fed upon the bread of heaven. 2. Cheerful reception. My soul was in love with the Word. 3. An intense belief. Not questioning it, but living upon it. 4. The language means, besides, both the diligent treasuring up of the truth, and the inward digestion of the same. III. **THE HAPPY CONSEQUENCES.** 1. Hold the truth in its entirety and harmony, and then it will be joy to your heart. 2. The Word of God would have given no joy had he not been obedient to it. 3. Yet there are certain choice truths in God's Word, especially joy-giving : the doctrine of election, to know that you are called and predestinated ; and of the immutability of Divine love. IV. **A DISTINGUISHING TITLE.** 1. The name of the Lord of hosts was reviled in Jeremiah's day, yet he felt it an honour to be associated with the Lord in this contempt. Oh ye who love the Lord Jesus, never shun the scandal of the Cross ! 2. Some do not count it a fair thing to bear the name of the Most High. It is a disgrace to any man that his Lord should die for his soul on Calvary and yet he be afraid to wear His livery. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Enjoying God's Word :—I. A HIGH VALUATION FOR THIS WORD. Prized as God's Word, and sought under that character. Love to the Word of God is a sure sign of a gracious heart. 1. It partakes of the Divinity of its Author. 2. It is adapted to the nature of its subject ; suited to man. 3. It has produced most astonishing effects. (1) Have you found this Word ? (2) Has it found you ? II. **A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ITS POWER.** " I did eat it." 1. Religion is the life of the soul, as the soul is the life of the body. Truth is the sustenance of the moral man. Divine truth must be incorporated with the elements of the intellectual nature, or we perish. 2. When you come to the Word, remember that Divine influence alone can make it effectual. As you say grace before meat, let your reading be preceded by prayer. III. **A CONSCIOUS PARTICIPATION OF THE HAPPINESS IT**

PRODUCES. "It was the rejoicing of my heart." How does it promote joy ? 1. By the light it imparts to the understanding. It gives decision to the judgment; fully occupies the mind upon the noblest subject; engages faculties and powers in God's service. 2. By the relief it gives to the conscience. In the hope of pardon and acceptance. 3. By the exercise it affords to the best affections of the heart. The pleasures of benevolence are genuine pleasures; allied to the happiness of God Himself. 4. By the consolations and hopes under sorrow. **IV. A SENSE OF CONSECRATION.** "I am called by Thy name." Improvement—It reproves—1. Those who never seek. 2. Those who are content with knowledge without experience. 3. Those who are strangers to religious peace and joy. 4. Those who neither own God's name, nor are owned of Him. (*S. Thodey.*) **God's Word found, eaten, and enjoyed :—I. GOD'S WORD FOUND.** 1. It comes to us through nature. 2. It comes also through our own spiritual being, in its instinctive yearnings. 3. In the fullest sense, it has come through Christ. 4. Also through prophets and apostles—in the written Word. **II. GOD'S WORD EATEN.** 1. This is more than to possess its record. To have a full larder will not sustain life nor give strength. 2. It is more than an intellectual understanding of the contents of Scripture. The mere analysis of food will not give sustenance. 3. Positively, it is to turn it into the principle of life by assimilation. **III. GOD'S WORD ENJOYED.** 1. The joy of satisfaction. 2. The joy of strength renewed. (*John Oswald.*) **Found, eaten, and enjoyed :—I. AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY WAS MADE.** 1. Words are the representatives of thought. Have great power to move men's minds. 2. Words derive much of their power from the mind which utters them. God's words are a hammer, a fire, a sword, a balm, a saving and sanctifying power to men who receive and obey them. 3. That which is found must previously have existed. God's Word exists, whether men find it or not. He who finds it is wise, rich, happy. **II. A PECULIAR METHOD OF APPROPRIATION WAS MADE.** 1. It implies soul hunger. Caused by stress of duty, pressure of persecution, and multiplied sorrows. 2. It affirms that God's words are soul food. Wholesome, nourishing, savoury, saving. **III. A DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE WAS REALISED.** Joy and rejoicing—1. In what the Word revealed of God. 2. In the way that revelation met his utmost need. 3. In the knowledge of salvation there unfolded. 4. In the prospects to which the attention of God's servants was directed. **IV. AN EMPHATIC PUBLIC TESTIMONY WAS GIVEN.** "I am called by Thy name," &c. 1. God's name was called upon him. As the saving power, and source of hope and joy, the name of Christ has been called upon us. 2. He was called by God's name. We, by Christ's. 3. He was strengthened by God in all his works. Application—1. The Word discovered—a treasure. 2. The Word in the heart—a joy. 3. The Word on the lips—a message. 4. The Word in the hand—a weapon. (*W. Whale.*) **Feeding on God's truth :—**"Understandest thou what thou readest ?" That is the main point. The butterflies flit over the garden, and nothing comes of their flitting; but look at the bees, how they drive into the bells of the flowers and come forth with their thighs laden with the pollen and filled with the sweetest honey for their hives. This is the way to read your Bible: get into the flowers of Scriptures, plunge into the inward meaning, and suck out that secret sweetness which the Lord hath put there for your spiritual nourishment. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **How to make the Bible our own :—**"Thy words were found, and I did eat them." In the absence of his father, a little boy attended the Sabbath School of a Dutch Reformed minister. On the father's return he went upstairs and finding his son reading the Word of God, he asked him, "What book are you reading ?" He replied, "The Bible." "Where did you get it ?" "In yonder Sabbath School." He then took the Bible from him and committed it to the flame, saying, "If you ever go to the Sunday School again, I'll give you such a thrashing as you have never had." Having ascertained that the Bible was burned, his son said to him, "Father, you have burned my Bible; but you cannot burn out of me those chapters I have committed to memory from the Gospel of John." (*W. Bazendale.*) **Joy in God's Word :—**"I have many books," says Mr. Newton, "that I cannot sit down to read; they are indeed good and sound, but, like halfpence, there goes a great quantity to a little amount. There are silver books, and a very few golden books; but I have one book worth more than all, called the Bible, and that is a book of bank-notes."

Ver. 17. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers.—*Christians delight not in godless company :—*It is better and safer to ride alone than to have a thief's

company; and such is a wicked man, who will rob thee of precious time, if he do thee no more mischief. The Nazarites, who might drink no wine, were also forbidden to cut grapes whereof wine is made, so we must not only avoid sin, but also the causes and occasions thereof, among which is bad company. (*J. Spencer.*) *The difficulty of maintaining purity in evil company:*—That is a sound body that continues healthful in a pest-house. It is a far greater wonder to see a saint maintain his purity among sinners, than it is to behold a sinner becoming pure among saints. Christians are not always like fish, which retain their freshness in a salt sea; or like the rose, which preserves its sweetness among the most noisome weeds; or like the fire, which burns the hottest when the season is coldest. A good man was once heard to lament, "that as often as he went into the company of the wicked he returned less a man from them than he was before he joined with them." The Lord's people, by keeping evil company, are like persons who are much exposed to the sun, insensibly tanned. (*T. Secker.*)

Ver. 18. *Why is my pain perpetual?*—*The function of pain:*—This piteous lament may fitly represent the anguished cry of suffering humanity, from age to age. In all lands, under all skies, in all times, the same mournful wail is heard,—a ceaseless dirge of woe, day and night, from ten thousand times ten thousand hearts, struggling with adversity, battling with disease, staggering under the weight of sorrow or suffering. "Why is my pain perpetual?" It would almost seem that men had abandoned the attempt to solve these problems; for by common consent, pain and disease, suffering and sorrow, are called "mysteries,"—"dark and inscrutable mysteries." But they are not all darkness and incomprehensibility. These "mysteries" are also "masteries"—masterful forces in the education and exaltation of humanity. Have you ever considered what kind of a world this would be if there were no pain here, no sick-beds, no sorrow-stricken homes? Have you ever reflected that these "inscrutable mysteries" are the chosen instrumentalities for fashioning the highest types of character, both in the sufferer himself and in those who minister to his suffering? Pain and disease did, it is true, come into the world as the attendants and servants of sin; but it is pity indeed if we have not learned that the Lord has made them His ministers and His servants, even as He made the thorns and thistles, the labour and the sweat, which resulted from the Fall, the means of the development of the faculties and powers of man, the fountains of progress and civilisation. The earth was once a stranger to pain, and it will be again; but in the former case sin had not entered, and so perhaps pain was not needed; and in the latter, sin will be abolished because the lesson of pain will have been fully learned. Had there never been pain and suffering, what a different world it would have been! All marsh and meadow; all plain and prairie; no towering cliffs and yawning chasms; no heaven-kissing Mont Blanc; no thunderous Niagara; no valley of the Yosemite—a dead-level world! Those lofty heights of heroism and patience which now delight the eye in the retrospect of the past, would sink into monotonous stretches of commonplace lives. Those names writ large by the pen of history, and made radiant by the light of self-forgetting devotion, would disappear with the pain or the suffering or the calamity that made them great. We may, therefore, thank God for pain, for suffering, for sorrow. Whichever has been our lot, depend upon it we are, or if not, we ought to be, the better, the wiser, the richer, for it. If we take it patiently, as the good will of our good God, then will it prove a blessing. Then will sorrow be the crucible in the hands of the Divine Master, wherein the dross of the soul will be purged away, and the gold refined. But let us not make the mistake of supposing that tribulation—this threshing of the soul—in any of its forms necessarily produces the results which I have described. These are the peaceable fruits which the gracious Father desires and designs that they should bring forth. These are what they are fitted to produce. But we must remember that the material to be fashioned in this case is a free, self-determining human soul, whose freedom cannot be violated without destroying its very essential fibre. The effect, then, of trial and affliction, whether bodily or mental, depends upon the way in which it is received. It may embitter, instead of sweetening, the spirit. It may harden, instead of softening, the heart. And then the gracious purpose of Him who chasteneth not in wrath, but in mercy, will be frustrated and turned aside by the perversity of man. To strengthen our faith, then, let us recall some of the utterances of those holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,—passages in which the casual connection between

suffering and holiness is distinctly stated. Saith the wise man, "The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts." Saith the afflicted patriarch, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Saith the prophet in the name of the Lord, "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined," &c. Our Lord said, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches," and added, "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it," &c. St. Peter, the foremost of the apostles, writes, "Though now for a season . . . ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations," it is that "the trial of your faith," &c. St. James bids us "count it all joy" when we fall into divers temptations," &c. St. Paul exclaims, "We glory in tribulation," "knowing that tribulation worketh patience"; and again, "Our light affliction," &c.; and yet again, "Though our outward man perish," &c. And that inspired writer who penned the sublime Epistle to the Hebrews, declares with emphasis that "whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth," &c., giving as the reason, that chastisement produces "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." Side by side with their words let us place the deeds, the examples, of these holy men of old. One can see in the mirror of their writings, as well as in the record of their lives, that these chosen ones were, like their Divine Master, "made perfect through suffering," or at least that their sufferings and afflictions had led them far up the path whose goal is perfection. The intensity of their conviction glows and burns on every page. When they assert the purifying effect of suffering, we feel that they are testifying out of the fulness of a personal knowledge. They speak that they do know, and testify that they have seen and felt in their own hearts and lives. But not these holy men of old alone. Men and women of our time, too, a noble army, have ascended with Jesus into the holy mount by the same arduous path, leaving us an example that we should follow their steps. How often have we seen the purifying power of pain and loss, of sorrow and trial! How often have we marked in the life of some patient sufferer the gradual unfolding of the Christlikeness, till at length the crown of thorns has been changed into a mitre of glory, on which we could trace the words, "Perfect through suffering!" You may, therefore, strengthen your wavering faith, O sufferer! in the beneficent purpose of this, God's strange economy, by lifting your eyes to the great "cloud of witnesses" who have trod the same rough and thorny path. Your suffering, whatever its form, whatever its intensity, is not "without your Father." You are in His hands. He does not forget you; He will never leave or forsake you; He only designs "thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine." Look intently, O sufferer! and you will see pain slowly transfigured before your gaze till it takes on the very features of Him of whom the prophet said, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." You are suffering, moreover, it may be, not for your own benefit alone, but for that of others. There is a principle of vicariousness in human suffering. Let me illustrate. A poor traveller falls ill of fever all alone in the South-American swamps. There he lies for days in a wretched hut, quenching his thirst with the waters of a pool close at hand. At last this pool dries up; and with extreme difficulty, the sick man crawls to another, half a mile distant. Its water is so bitter he can scarcely drink it; but he must drink it, or die of thirst. That afternoon he could not think why he felt stronger than for many weeks. Next day he drank more abundantly of the bitter pool; and still, the more he drank, the stronger he grew, till he was entirely restored; then he found that a tree had fallen into the water, which gave it its bitterness, and gave it also its power of cure. And this is the way in which one of the most important medicines now in use was discovered,—a medicine which has saved thousands and thousands of lives which must else have perished. Even so hath God appointed that some of us should drink the bitter waters of affliction or of pain, that others may be given spiritual health and salvation. (*R. H. M'Kim, D.D.*) *Uses of pain:*—Some plants owe their medicinal qualities to the marsh in which they grow; others to the shades in which alone they flourish. There are precious fruits put forth by the moon as well as by the sun. Boats need ballast as well as sail; a drag on the carriage-wheel is no hindrance when the road runs downhill. Pain has, probably, in some cases developed genius, hunting out the soul which otherwise might have slept like a lion in its den. Had it not been for the broken wing some might have lost themselves in the clouds, some even of those choice doves who now bear the olive-branch in their mouths, and show the way to the ark. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Blessing of pain:*—Above all things let us learn this lesson

from the example of Princess Alice—the quickening, purifying, bracing power of pain. In every trial that she had to undergo—and perhaps these trials were more than ordinarily severe and frequent—we see how her character developed and strengthened. To her each trial was as an April storm to a young plant or tree, lending new vigour to the roots, new power to its growth, so that when the sun shines the buds are seen to expand and blossom—those same buds which, without the rain-cloud, would have shrivelled and died. Every time she was called upon to give up what she most deeply cherished, she counted, with faith and gratitude, the blessings that remained to her. “Thus do we learn humility,” she said with quivering lip. “God has called for one life, and has given me back four. How then should we mourn?” These words she pronounced when she lost her darling little “Sunshine,” as she called her, her sweet “May-Blossom,” little guessing that in a few short weeks she would be called upon to enter the same valley of the shadow of death. (*Miss Mary Gladstone in the “Contemporary.”*) *Chronic pain*:—Pascal, the great mathematician and moralist, said, “From the day I was eighteen, I do not know that I ever passed a single day without pain.” *Wilt Thou be altogether unto me as a liar.*—*God misjudged*:—Here the prophet overfreely expostulateth with God as less faithful, or less mindful, at least, of the promised preservation. This was in a fit of diffidence and discontent, as the best have their outbursts, and the greatest lamps have needed snuffers. The Milesians, saith the philosophers, are not fools, yet they do the things that fools use to do. So the saints do oft as wicked ones, but not in the same manner and degree. (*John Trapp.*)

Vers. 19, 20. If thou shalt take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth.—*The personal factor in our thought of God and man*:—If Jeremiah at the time he wrote these words had been asked our modern question, “Is life worth living?” he would have returned a negative answer. For here you have the significant spectacle of a prophet of the Lord cursing the day of his birth. He finds that he is a man of strife and contention to the whole earth; every one curses him, he says, though he has not given men cause to do so. And God is not keeping His word with him either. “Why is my pain perpetual?” he cries, “and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? Wilt Thou,” he says to God, “be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?” The prophet cries out for revenge upon his persecutors. Let us admit at once that he was plunged deeply into disappointments. The sense of the Divine pressure in life had come to him early. When he first felt that he must do some great work for God he was very young, and he felt his youth as an objection to undertaking the work. The consciousness of duty and the consciousness of unfitness were there together as they have often been in men. Great geniuses have often begun to show themselves very early, but it is also true that in going on they have had much to unlearn and much to cancel, and they have had to bear the shattering of many dreams. A youth inspired from such heights must needs be bitterly disappointed on the planes of practical life. It was so with Jeremiah. What it was that brought him under the pressure of the higher things so early we do not know. It has been conjectured, and Professor Cornill favours the conjecture, that he had descended from Abiathar, the high priest of David, whom Solomon banished to Anathoth. ‘Jeremiah was brought up there, we know, and his father was a priest. If the conjecture is right, the tale of banishment, the story of the hardship, would come down from sire to son, and the old family virtues and heroisms would be told the children of each generation. In young Jeremiah these found responsive soil, and his enthusiasm was kindled. The *lad* set out to be a reformer; he was going to put the world right! Now it is certain beforehand that he will meet with terrible disappointments, and not at all unlikely that they will sometimes be so severe that he will curse the day of his birth. That is what befell Jeremiah, as it has befallen others since. In these verses he is in the depths of misery. He notes the sins he has *not* been guilty of: he has not exacted usury, for example; he recalls how zealous he had been for God: he had found the Divine words and eaten them, assimilated them and made them his own, and had found joy in them. But all to no purpose; everybody was against him; every one cursed him. But now, here is the significant thing: in the midst of all this, just when he was seeing all men and God in the worst possible light, another thought struck him—the thought that, after all, perhaps it was he himself who was most at

fault. Thus saith the Lord: "If thou becomest again Mine, thou shalt be My servant, and if thou wilt separate thy better self from the vile, thou shalt still be as My mouth." What had Jeremiah been doing in his pessimism? He had been allowing the personal factor too much room. Listen: "Revenge me upon my persecutors; take me not away in Thy long-suffering"—as if he said: "Do not be so merciful and patient with them as to let them kill me; take care of me even if they be killed." "Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of throttling," he once said. This was not Jeremiah's character, not his better self; this was his mood when stung with disappointment. And this mood was bad; it was what my text calls "the vile." The personal factor was so large that it cast men and God into deep shadow. Jeremiah saw so much of himself, his own virtue, his own failure, that he saw men worse than they were, and God almost as a gigantic untruth. But a great character conquers such moods, and Jeremiah conquered them. It was through his better self that the word of the Lord came to him, and Jeremiah saw that he, in thinking so much of himself, had ceased to be his true self, and had lapsed out of God's service, and that if he wanted to speak again as the mouth of God, and to do God's work, he must separate the precious from the vile, the better self from the baser self in his own nature. Now we are living in an age when pessimism is said to be very prevalent; men take gloomy views of things. I think it is true that when we are pessimistic about things in general the fault is mostly in ourselves. Unreasonable selfishness in some form or other is at the bottom of most pessimism; we allow the personal factor to make a larger claim than the universe is prepared to acknowledge, and we grow sullen at the refusal. 1. This may be the case, and often is in the nobler form of intellectual pursuits, and often in the grosser form of material pursuits. Through philosophy we see some men become pessimistic. They think, and think, they tell us, but the mystery increases, and they despair of thought altogether: the universe is a riddle, and no one can guess its meaning. Now, it is a fine thing to see a man in quest after truth, and it is very honourable in him to make the fullest and frankest inquiry into the nature of things. But, nevertheless, the pessimism, the despair, the wretchedness even here is due to an unreasonable claim on the part of the individual. Is it not rather irrational to suppose that you can uncover the final secret? If that privilege were granted to you, what interest would there be in the world to you or to anyone else? "It is the glory of the Lord," said an old writer, "to conceal a thing," and there was more philosophic insight in the saying than in any number of moderns who whimper and cower before the Great Unknown. Cut down your demands to something like what is reasonable, and then your inquiries will give you much-prized gains—things to rejoice and sing over, and not to break your heart about. There is a peace of mind to be got from knowing what is not possible to us, and accepting the fact like men. If man could fully understand God, he would be God. Let him know his own place and fill it like a man. 2. But it is through the material pursuits many grow pessimistic. Many people's thought of God and their neighbours is gloomy simply because they claim too much room for themselves in the world. There are men who are very prosperous in money matters, and in getting position and power, and yet who are always dissatisfied, only because self is their God—the greatest tyrant in the world, never satisfied. It is astonishing how much adversity and disappointment men can bear when they are thinking of another, or others, and how little when thinking of themselves. 3. And out of this arises one other truth—namely, that you must take yourself in hand, and separate the precious from the vile, the better from the baser, in order to be again the servant of the living God, and the exponent of Divine truth. Whenever you see all the world in shadow, all men bad, and doubt even God, be sure it is you who need reforming. There is badness in the world, badness in men, and circumstances may be very trying, but if you are rightly minded, and rightly hearted, you can hope and conquer. It would be a good thing for each of us in melancholy or in bitter moods to stop speaking of the faults of others, and the wrongs of the world, and the problems of God, and ask, "What's wrong with me?" Every man's biggest problem is himself. Not that the circumstances were not trying—they were very trying; not that others had no faults—they had, perhaps, great faults; but faith in God is possible in the worst of situations, so long as we are humble, and in manly relation to our sorrow. When unworthy feelings come in, separate the vile, release the better self, and you will

yet be God's servant, and speak for Him. A clean personal life will give you a strong hold on truth, even in the midst of trouble; a pure mind will give you access to Divine reality, though your circumstances might be terribly hard, and though all men reviled you. Mark: Jesus does not say that the circumstances will change; and all that God says to Jeremiah is that he shall be His servant again, and speak for Him. If you separate the better self from the vile, it does not follow that you will create outward success, but you shall go on with your work, and your work shall be a speech for God. I believe that God speaks to us in nature, but I grant that I do not always understand. The notes of the speech are discordant. In the world of man, too, there is much that staggers one. But there is one fact in which I always read the mind of God—this act of separating the precious from the vile in man. Whenever I make an effort to expel something bad, I know I am acting for God; whenever I seek to put down anything that is unworthy, to overcome any animosity or uncharitableness, to make my better nature supreme, I have no doubt of God then. There we find His mind, there we get the beatific vision, and there we equip for the world's work. Will you remember that God says to each one of us, "If thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt again be My servant"? Pure life is a clear vision of God for you, and a definite speech for God by you. Nothing speaks like it. A clean soul reflects God as a clear river reflects the sky. You will be yourself an exponent of the eternal in separating the good from the bad in your own life. They mingle strangely—the base with the noble, the false with the true; and their persistent separation speaks of the eternal purpose of redemption. And I am glad of another word in this text. It is the little word "again"—"If thou becomest again Mine." We know what it is to lapse—to feel the relation to God gone; indifference holds us in its icy grasp, where all was once enthusiasm. Let me emphasise this little word—"again." It opens a door; it marks a possibility; it is a Father's voice coming out after you into the darkness. There is a restoring power at work; you may be reunited consciously to God; you may feel Him again to be the Greatest Reality in your life. (*T. R. Williams.*) *The essential distinction between saints and sinners:—*

I. THERE IS AN ESSENTIAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN SAINTS AND SINNERS. 1. The inspired writers divide all mankind into two, and but two classes, and distinguish them by very different and opposite appellations. They call the saints the precious, but sinners the vile. They call saints the godly, but sinners the ungodly. They call saints the children of God, but sinners the children of the wicked one. They call saints the elect, but sinners the reprobate. They call saints vessels of mercy, but sinners vessels of wrath. 2. God does that for saints which He does not do for sinners; He regenerates saints, but not sinners; gives a new heart to saints, but not to sinners; softens the hearts of saints, but hardens the hearts of sinners; and gives a spiritual discerning of spiritual things to saints, but not to sinners; so there must be an essential distinction between them. 3. God has made promises of good to saints, but none to sinners; which proves they are essentially different in their moral characters. 4. God has threatened that evil to sinners, which He has not threatened to saints.

II. WHY MINISTERS SHOULD, IN THEIR PREACHING, CONSTANTLY EXHIBIT AND KEEP UP THIS GREAT MORAL AND ESSENTIAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THOSE WHO HAVE, AND THOSE WHO HAVE NOT THE LOVE OF GOD IN THEM. 1. This is necessary, in order to preach the Word of God intelligibly to their people. 2. It is necessary, in order to give pertinent and profitable instruction to their hearers. 3. Ministers must distinguish saints from sinners, in order to preach faithfully, as well as profitably. Application—1. It is utterly a fault in ministers, either designedly or undesignedly, to keep the essential distinction between saints and sinners out of sight. 2. In the view of this subject, we may see how easy it is for ministers to lead people insensibly into great and fatal errors. They may do so, by not mentioning or not explaining the essential distinction between saints and sinners; or by not mentioning or not explaining the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel which flow from this distinction; while, at the same time, they preach some valuable truths. 3. If there be an essential distinction between saints and sinners, then sinners are very liable to be fatally deceived and corrupted by those who lie in wait to deceive and destroy. Saints have an antidote against the poison of error, that sinners are entirely destitute of. Saints are lovers of God and of His Word; they desire the sincere milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The

hearts of all good men are attached to Divine truth. But sinners are lovers of their own selves, and haters of God, and equally haters of His Word. 4. The best way the ministers of the Gospel can take to guard their people against every species of error and errorists, is to make and keep up the essential distinction between saints and sinners. 5. The people may easily discover the real sentiments of ministers by their preaching. 6. There may be a great deal of good preaching in the land, and at the same time, a great want of good preaching. How many ministers do not take forth the precious from the vile, nor cause their hearers to see and feel the difference! 7. This subject calls upon saints to walk worthy of their high and holy calling. They are called the precious, the holy, the godly, the excellent of the earth. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Unstained character:*

—The degree of impurity in any precious stone is just the measure of its depreciation. The initial act of their formation is separation. "The dark drift of the inland river, or stagnant slime of inland pool and lake, divides or resolves itself, as it dries, into layers of its several elements: slowly purifying each by the patient withdrawal of it from the anarchy of the mass in which it was mingled." Thus begin both the crystallisation of the gem and the life of the Christian. "Come out, and be separate! Take forth the precious from the vile," is the call of the Lord to His saints. For our call is to saintliness; and as the unseen foundations of the New Jerusalem are of as precious stones as the dazzling walls, so the part of our life and character which is hidden from the eyes of the world is to be as clear and unstained as that which all see and admire. Keep thyself pure, thou child of God. (*W. Y. Fullerton.*) *Righteous zeal encouraged by Divine protection:*—I. GOD'S DIRECTION TO THE PROPHET, AND IN HIM TO ALL THAT DO HIS WORK IN SUCH A SEASON AS THIS DESCRIBED. "Let them return to thee, return not thou to them." Plausible compliances of men in authority, with those against whom they are employed, are treacherous contrivances against the God of heaven, by whom they are employed. 1. It cannot be done but by preferring the creature before the Creator, especially in those things which are the proximate causes of deviation. Two principal causes I have observed of this crooked walking. (1) Fear. (2) That desire of perishing things, which hath a mixture of covetousness and ambition. II. THE SUPPORTMENT AND ASSISTANCE PROMISED. "I will make thee to this people a brazen and a fenced wall." Now the Lord will do this—1. Because of His own engagement. 2. For our encouragement. III. THE OPPOSITION WHICH MEN CLEAVING TO THE LORD IN ALL HIS WAYS SHALL FIND, WITH THE ISSUE AND SUCCESS OF IT. "They shall fight against thee, but shall not prevail." The words may be considered either as a prediction depending on God's prescience of what will be; or a commination from His just judgment, of what shall be. In the first sense the Lord tells the prophet, from the corruption, apostasy, stubbornness of that people, what would come to pass. In the second, what for their sins and provocations, by His just judgment, should come to pass. I shall take up the latter only, namely, That it is a commination of what shall be for the further misery of that wretched people; they shall judicially be given up to a fighting against Him. Now the Lord doth this—1. To seal up a sinful people's destruction. Eli's sons hearkened not, because the Lord would slay them (1 Sam. ii. 25). 2. To manifest His own power and sovereignty in maintaining a small handful, oftentimes a few single persons, a Moses, a Samuel, two witnesses against the opposing rage of a hardened multitude. Use—1. Let men, constant, sincere, upright in the ways of God, especially in difficult times, know what they are to expect from many, yea, the most of the generation, whose good they intend, and among whom they live; opposition and fighting is like to be their lot; and that not only it will be so because of men's lusts, corruptions, prejudices; but also it shall be so, from God's righteous judgments against a stubborn people; they harden their hearts that it may be so, to compass their ends; and God hardens their hearts that it shall be so to bring about His aims; they will do it to execute their revenge upon others, they shall do it to execute God's vengeance upon themselves. 2. Let men set upon opposition make a diligent inquiry, whether there be no hand in the business, but their own? whether their counsels be not leavened with the wrath of God, and their thoughts mixed with a spirit of giddiness, and themselves carried on to their own destruction? (*J. Owen, D.D.*) *The ministry of the Word:*—1. A ministry of Divine authority. 2. A ministry of Divine revelations. 3. A ministry of wise discrimination. 4. A ministry often opposed by those to whom it is sent. 5. A ministry requiring much courage. 6. A ministry

which will be Divinely vindicated. 7. A ministry which lifts up Christ as the Saviour of men. (*W. Whale.*) *The power of rebuke*.—I. THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY INCLUDES AN OFFICE OF COMMINATION. If the messengers of heaven, when among the outcasts of mankind, who, in ignorance of God, have gone astray from virtue, speak more of virtue than of wrath; when they stand among those who, being well informed in matters of religion, use the grace of the Gospel to palliate their vices, the messages of wrath must be most on their lips. II. THE TENDENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IS TO MOVE DOWN FROM ITS REMEDIAL FUNCTIONS TO BECOME AN OFFICE OF DELECTATION. 1. Furnishing intellectual entertainment; uttering, as matters of gorgeous eloquence, the appalling verities of eternal justice. Nature forbids such an incongruity, and the renovating Spirit refuses to yield the energy of His power to the sway of a mere minister of public recreation. 2. Affording spiritual entertainment; by exhibiting the conceits and ingenuities of mystic exposition; by painting in high colours the honours and privileges of the believer, and allowing professors of all sorts to appropriate the fulsome description; or by pealing out thunders of wrath against distant adversaries, rather than at the impure, unjust, rapacious and malicious around. III. IT BEHOVES PREACHERS TO BEWARE OF THE INDURATING EFFECT OF ACUSTOMED PHRASES AND FORMS OF WORDS. Such conventional phrases conceal from the mind the ideas they should convey; hence preachers should continually endeavour to break up the mental incrustations which are always spreading themselves over the sensitive surface of the sails. This is especially necessary in reference to matters wherein the drowsy formalities of language tend directly to augment the stupefying influence that belongs to all vicious indulgences. IV. IT IS A PRESSING DUTY OF THE MINISTER OF RELIGION TO MAINTAIN IN VIGOUR THE SPIRIT HE NEEDS AS THE REPROVER OF SIN AND GUARDIAN OF VIRTUE. It is easy to teach the articles of belief, to illustrate the branches of Christian ethics, to proclaim the Divine mercy, to meet and assuage the fears of the feeble and sorrows of the afflicted. But to keep in full activity the power of rebuke, demands rare qualities. To speak efficaciously of the holiness and justice of God, and of its future consequences; to speak in modesty, tenderness, and power of the approaching doom of the impenitent, must be left to those whose spirits have had much communion with the dread Majesty on high. V. THREE INDISPENSABLE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE VIGOROUS EXERCISE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER FOR THIS POWER OF REBUKE. 1. Such a conviction of the truth of Christianity as shall render him proof against assaults from within and without. Fatal to his influence as a refuter of sin must be a lurking scepticism in the preacher's breast. The infection of his own doubts will pass into the heart of the hearer, and will serve to harden each transgressor in his impenitence. 2. A resolute loyalty to the Divine administration. Such loyalty will break through the mazes of much sophistry, will support the servant of God when assailed by more fallacies than he can at the moment refute, and enable him to cleave under all obloquies and embarrassments to what he inwardly knows must in the end prove the better cause. 3. An unaffected and sensitive compassion towards his fellow-men. The end of all reproof is mercy. If there were no redemption at hand, it were idle or cruel to talk of judgment. (*Isaac Taylor, LL.D.*) *Ministerial obligations*.—My text refers us to three distinct characters of the pastoral office—to be the servant of God; to be the mouth of God; and to be the guide whom the people shall follow. And these involve three several duties, in which the pastor's own personal responsibility is closely linked with the solemn responsibilities of his office—that of preparing his own heart to seek the Lord; that of discriminating the "precious from the vile" in his instruction and conversation; and that of guarding himself and his flock against all declension after the ways of them who depart from God. I. A DIVINE ADMONITION AS TO PERSONAL RELIGION. "To stand before," implies the office of one who stands in the presence of his sovereign, ready to execute His commands. It is the highest order of dignity and of service to which a subject can be called. He enjoys the privilege of constant access to the presence of majesty, a knowledge of the high affairs of government, and a share in the splendours of courtly life. Such is the relation in which a minister of true religion stands to the court of Heaven, in order that he may bring near a people prepared for the Lord, to whom, when they have received his message, he may say, "Ye are a chosen generation," &c. See, then, the unspeakable importance of personal religion in one who shall perform such a ministration. He that would cause the people to hear the words

of God must habitually listen to the voice of God in his own conscience, as often as he turns aside—who is not conscious of too frequently doing so?—saying, “If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me.” And then with confidence—the confidence of one who comes from a nearer access to the throne on high—he may go forth to his charge, and say, having the words of God in his mouth, “Turn ye, turn ye at My reproof.” II. A DIVINE DIRECTION. “If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth.” The prophet may seem to have been charged with having, in some respect, mistaken his duty. In the view he took of his personal trials he had lost sight of the principal object of his ministry, namely, to cause the precious to come out from the vile. In times like the present, there may be an undue regard to the trials of the Church at large. From a just and pious jealousy of the dangers to which it is exposed, or by which it has been affected as a community, we may lose sight of the especial end of our ministry. In our reasonable remonstrance with unreasonable foes, and from just indignation at the treachery or declension of pretended friends, we may overlook the faithful use of the word “for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” In our zeal to mark an open enemy, or to discriminate an unsound adherent, we may forget the true flock of Christ; or in our eager co-operation with mere defenders of our Church polity, we may put aside from our own view, and obscure from the view of others, the real distinction which must ever be admitted in the doctrine of visible Church communion between the precious and the vile. III. A DIVINE CAUTION: “Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.” No object or consideration must induce the prophet to identify himself with their apostasy: he must take a decidedly contrary course. He must so order his life and conversation, his doctrines and his admonitions, that those who desire to return unto God may see in him the way and pattern. In this, as in every age of the Church, no inconsiderable portion of those who profess themselves its members are yet under the influence of that love of the world which is opposed to the love of God. To counteract the tendency of this spirit, rests greatly with the clergy. It is their duty more strictly to define the Christian character by precept and example, and more clearly to exhibit Christian truth, than to allow those who pursue so inconsistent a course to indulge in vain confidence as to their religious state. The clergy at least ought to define the boundary between the world and the people of God. If they are negligent in doing so, it cannot but be obscured. If they pass the boundary, they lead many across it who probably never return. The clergy are pre-eminently the “salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour,” woe to the Church, and “woe to them by whom the offence cometh”; “Let them return unto Thee; but return not Thou unto them.” (*W. Wilson, D.D.*)

A ministry of discrimination.—I. WHAT IS SUPPOSED. 1. The vast importance and responsibility of the work assigned to ministers with a view to the welfare of their people. Ministers are to take the precious from the vile; to separate the wheat from the weeds; to distinguish the dross from the gold. 2. That there are some essential distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error. 3. That there is a standard of truth. As the office of a judge is not to make but declare the law, so that of a minister is not to burden the ears of people with his own doubtful disputations, but to declare the whole counsel of God. 4. That these characters are closely intermingled, and that there is a great disinclination in mankind to have the truth fully told them, and to be brought to the decisive test. 5. That it is of the utmost consequence to both parties that the separation should be made. Take forth the precious from the vile, and the most advantageous results will immediately accrue to each. (1) Is it not desirable to the children of God to know that they are so—that they are heirs according to the promise—that they are precious in His sight and honourable? (2) If the distinction be valuable to the precious, it would be scarcely less advantageous to the vile themselves. To be robbed of the cloak of a false profession would be no loss, for we know it does them no honour and brings them no peace. II. WHAT IS DEMANDED OF MINISTERS WITH A VIEW TO THIS SOLEMN DISCRIMINATION? 1. A plain and decisive exhibition of the truth as it is in Jesus. We are to contend earnestly for the faith—to vindicate it from the blasphemies of the infidel, the perversions of the worldling, the mistakes of the Pharisee, and the corruptions of the Antinomian. 2. A fearless application of Scripture truth. (1) To the careless and thoughtless. (2) To the apostate. (3) To the young. (4) To the aged. (5) To the precious. (6) To the vile. 3. To

point ourselves and our hearers to the only Agent who can make the Word effectual. III. WHAT IS PROMISED? "Thou shalt be as My mouth." The accredited and approved servant—to speak in accordance with His will—be the organ of His clemency—all His authenticated messages crowned with success. Mighty and blessed such a ministry. (*S. Thodey.*) I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee.—*Divine assistance promised to Church governors:—*I. GOD'S QUALIFICATION OF JEREMY TO BE AN OVERSEER IN HIS CHURCH. "I will make thee a brazen fenced wall." 1. A wall implies enclosure. God did not think fit to leave His Church without enclosure, open like a common, for every beast to feed upon and devour it. Commons are always bare, pilled, and shorn, as the sheep that feed upon them. And our experience has shown us, as soon as the enclosures of our Church were plucked up, what a herd of cattle of all sorts invaded it. It contained, as commons usually do, both multitude and mixture. 2. A wall imports fortification. No city can be secure without it. It is, as it were, a standing inanimate army; a continual defence without the help of defenders. Something must encircle the Church, that will both discriminate and protect it. And the altar must be railed in, not only for distinction, but defence. And such a thing is a church governor, a well-qualified bishop. Which title that he may make good and verify, there are required in him these three qualifications—(1) Courage, which leads the way to all the rest. A wall, nay, a brazen wall, will not sometimes prove a defence if it is not well manned. Every churchman should have the spirit of a soldier. (2) Innocence and integrity. A brazen wall admits of no cracks and flaws. The enemies of the Church may fear your power, but they dread your innocence. It is this that stops the open sepulchre, and beats back the accusation upon the teeth of the accuser. (3) Authority; it is to be a fenced, as well as a brazen wall. The inward firmness of one must be corroborated by the exterior munitions of the other. Courage is like a giant with his hands tied, if it has not authority and jurisdiction to draw forth and actuate its resolution. II. THE OPPOSITION THAT THE CHURCH GOVERNOR, THUS QUALIFIED, WILL BE SURE TO MEET WITH IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF HIS OFFICE. 1. They will assault their governors with seditious preaching and praying. To preach Christ out of contention is condemned by the apostle; but to preach contention instead of Christ, certainly is most abominable. 2. Their second way of fighting against the officers of the Church will be by railing and libels. 3. They may oppose the governors and government of the Church by open force: and this is fighting indeed; but yet the genuine, natural consequent of the other: he that rails, having opportunity, would rebel; for it is the same malice in a various posture, in a different way of eruption; and as he that rebels shows what he can do, so he that rails does as really demonstrate what he would do. III. That, as in all fights, we see THE ISSUE AND SUCCESS, which is exhibited to us in these words, "But they shall not prevail against thee." 1. Moral causes will afford but a moral certainty; but so far as the light of this shines, it gives us a good prospect into our future success. For which is most likely to prevail, a force marshalled into order, or disranked and scattered into confusion? A force united and compacted with the strength of agreement, or a force shrivelled into parties, and crumbled into infinite subdivisions? 2. But besides the arguments of reason, we have the surer ground of Divine revelation. God has engaged His assistance, made Himself a party, and obliged His omnipotence as a second in the cause. (*R. South, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

VERS. 14, 15. I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers—*Larger providences:*—Thus epochs are made; thus new dates are introduced into human history; thus the less is merged in the greater; the little judgment is lost in the great judgment, and the mercy that once appeared to be so great seems to be quite small compared with the greater mercy that has healed and blessed our life. This is the music, and this is the meaning of the passage. What is experience worth? It is worth exactly what we make of it; it will not follow us, and insist upon being looked at and estimated and

applied ; it is, so to say, either a negative or a positive possession ; we can make it either, according to the exercise of our will and inclination. How often we vow not to forget our experience ; yet it is stolen from us in the night-time, and we awake in the morning empty-handed, empty-minded, beggared to the uttermost point of destitution. We write our vows in water ; who can make any impression on the ocean ? whole fleets have passed over the sea, not a track is left behind where the waves were sundered ; they roll together again, as if with emulous energy they seek to obliterate the transient mark of the intrusive ships. It is so with ourselves. Let no man think he has sounded the whole depth of God's providence in this matter of punishment or of benediction and blessing. History has recorded nothing yet ; history is getting its pen ready for the real registration of Divine ministry in human affairs. No judgment has yet befallen the world worth naming, compared with the judgment that may at any moment be revealed. Do not mock God ; do not defy Him or tempt Him : what you have had is but the sting of a whip ; He could smite you with a thong of scorpions. Rather say, God pity us, God spare us ; remember that we are but dust ; a wind that cometh for a little time and then passeth away : smite us not in Thine hot anger, O loving One ; in wrath remember mercy. We do not know what plagues God could send upon the earth. Be not presumptuous against the Divine government ; do not say, God cannot do this, or send down that judgment ; if He forbear, it is because His mercy restrains, not because His judgment is impotent. By a natural accommodation of the passage, we may be led into quite another line of thinking and illustration : " Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said . . . but " ; and between these words we may put in our own experience, and our own commentaries upon life and destiny. Thus : Behold, the days come that it shall no more be said that we have a Creator, but we have a Redeemer. Men shall not talk about creation. There are some men who are content to talk about one infinitesimal speck of creation ; they have not learned the higher philosophy, the fuller wisdom, the riper, vaster law. They are gathering what they can with their hands ; they are first the admirers, secondly the devotees, and thirdly the victims of the microscope. They have made an idol of that piece of glazed brass ; they who mock the heathen for worshipping ivory and stone and tree and sun, may perhaps be creating a little idol of their own. Behold, the days come when men shall no longer talk about the body, but about the soul. It is time we had done with physiology. If we have not mastered the body, what poor scholars we have been ! And yet how far men are from having mastered it in the sense of being able to heal it ! Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when men shall no more talk about human deliverance, or deliverance from human extremity, but they shall talk about liberation from diabolic captivity ; they shall say they have been loosed from their sins, they have been disimprisoned and set at liberty as to the dominion of their passions and desires and appetences ; they shall speak about the higher emancipation, and everywhere men shall be eloquent about the Deliverer who drew the soul from Egyptian and Chaldean tyranny, and gave it liberty and joy in the Holy Ghost. The whole subject of human speech shall be changed ; men shall not talk about Egypt, but about Canaan ; they shall not talk about the law, but about the higher law ; they shall not talk about the outward, but about the inward. Thus dates are introduced into human history. The time will come when men will not speak about being born, but about being " born again." Your birthday was your deathday,—or only the other aspect of it. Date your born-again day from the beginning, the morning of your immortality. Drop the lower theme, seize the higher ; dismiss the noise, and entreat the music to take full possession of your nature. Behold, the day is come, saith the Lord, when men shall no longer talk about prayer, but about praise. The old prayer days will be over ; they were needful as part of our experience and education, but the time will come when prayer will be lost in praise ; the time will come when work will be so easy as to have in it the throb and joy of music ; the time will come when it will be easy to live, for life will carry no burden, and know the strain of no care ; the days of anxiety will be ended, solicitude will be a forgotten word, and the companionship of God and His angels shall constitute our heaven. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's care over His people* :—A crew of explorers penetrate far within the Arctic circles in search of other expeditions that had gone before them—gone and never returned. Failing to find the missing men, and yet unwilling to abandon hope, they leave supplies of food carefully

covered with stones, on some prominent headlands, with the necessary intimations graven for safety on plates of brass. If the original adventurers survive, and on their homeward journey, faint, yet pursuing, fall in with these treasures, at once hidden and revealed, the food, when found, will seem to those famished men the smaller blessing. The proof which the food supplies that their country cares for them is sweeter than the food. So the proof that God cares for us is placed beyond a doubt; the "unspeakable gift" of His Son to be our Saviour should melt any dark suspicion to the contrary from our hearts. (*W. Arnot.*)

Ver. 16. I will send for many fishers; . . . I will send for many hunters.—*Fishers and hunters* :—These refer to the successive invaders of Judea. As to "hunters," see Genesis x. 9. Nimrod, "the mighty hunter," the first founder of an empire on conquest. The Chaldees were famous in hunting, as the Egyptians, the other enemy of Judea, were in fishing. (1) "Fishers" expresses the ease of their victory over the Jews as that of the angler over fishes. (2) "Hunters" indicates the keenness of their pursuit of them into every cave and nook. It is remarkable the same image of "fishers" and "fish" is used in a good sense of the Jews' restoration, implying that just as their enemies were employed by God to take them in hand of destruction, so the same shall be employed for their restoration (Ezek. xlvii. 9, 10). So, spiritually, those once enemies by nature (*fishermen* many of them literally) were employed by God to be the heralds of salvation, "catching men" for life (Matt. iv. 19). (*A. R. Fausset, M.A.*)

Vers. 18. And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double.—*The double effect of sin* :—We may illustrate the evil of sin by the following comparison. "Suppose I am going along a street, and were to dash my head through a large pane of glass, what harm would I receive? "You would be punished for breaking the glass." "Would that be all the harm I should receive?" "Your head will be cut by the glass." "Yes! and so it is with sin. If you break God's laws, you shall be punished for breaking them; and your soul is hurt by the very act of breaking them." (*F. Inglis.*)

Vers. 19-21. O Lord, my strength, and my fortress.—*What God is to His people* :—One of the Puritans was accustomed to describe prayer as the flight of the lonely man to the only God. There is such prayer here. This man is very lonely. He is like a speckled bird, set on by all the birds of the flock. He looks right and left, but there is no man to care for his soul; then he addresses himself to God in these touching words: I. **MY STRENGTH.** The Psalmist spoke of God as the strength of his life. The Apostle of love said that little children could overcome the world, because He that was in them was greater and stronger than he that was in the world. "God is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" II. **MY STRONGHOLD.** A stronghold is what holds strongly. A keep is that which keeps. We keep God's deposit, which is His Gospel: God keeps our deposit, which is ourselves. And none, man nor devil, can snatch us away. III. **MY REFUGE IN THE DAY OF AFFLICTION.** The night darkening the sky drives the chicks to the hen's wings; so affliction drives us to God. "In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." Do you wish to know Him thus? See that you do not burden yourself by your endeavours. Be still and know. Enter into the still and peaceful land of inward spiritual fellowship. Commune with your own heart. Be a child before Him, innocent, unaffected, unrestrained. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Safe from trouble* :—Travellers tell us that they who are at the top of the Alps can see great showers of rain fall under them, but not one drop of it falls upon them. They who have God for their portion are in a high tower, and thereby safe from all troubles and showers. (*G. Swinnoek.*) **The Gentiles shall come unto Thee from the ends of the earth.**—*Heathenism and its prospects* :—I. THE CONFESSION WHICH THE GENTILE NATIONS ARE HERE PROPHETICALLY DESCRIBED TO MAKE. "Surely our fathers have inherited lies," &c. Need I say, that the produce of "lies" must be "vanity and things wherein there is no profit"? It may be granted, that if we only esteem things by the partial and short-sighted standard of this present world, falsehood may sometimes bring its gain; there are pleasures of falsehood and gains of falsehood. But then the pleasures of sin are but for a moment; the day is shortly coming, when falsehood shall be found as a rope of sand, as a quicksand on which any structure may have been based; and there-

fore if it be true that the heritage of the heathen is a heritage of "lies," it will follow that it is a heritage of "vanity, and things wherein there is no profit."

II. THE PURPOSES OF GOD RESPECTING THESE IDOLATERS. You have here the repetition of God's purpose. He is not satisfied with stating once, "I will cause them to know," but He adds a second time, "I will cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that I am the Lord." There is a distinctness and a certainty upon this matter which is most refreshing to a humane and considerate mind. The intimation of this design is here presented to us as the distinct purpose of God. "Therefore"—since man admits that he has inherited lies, since he sees that he is destitute of any resources in himself, and since the allotment which father has given to son during many an elapsing century, since all the property that could descend from sire to son as ages rolled away was only "falsehood, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit"—since all that this accumulated mass of human skill and industry bestowed, was based on falsehood—now that the confession is made,—"I will cause this people to know My hand and My might." And how was the hand of God to be known? Was it to be the hand of power, crushing to perdition the sinner whose heart was disaffected and his intellect degraded? No; He was to stretch out His hand to heal and to save. There is no power so great, and no power so beautiful in nature, as this hand of God, when it is stretched out to heal. There are needful accompaniments of this wonderful accomplishment of Divine mercy and love to man. There are the ministers of His Gospel. By the instrumentality of these human communications, does the Spirit of God act; and when therefore God says, "And they shall know that I am Jehovah," it is meant that to these nations shall be sent the records of the Scriptures; that to them shall go the heralds of peace; that among them shall the voice of mercy be heard; that amidst their thronged population shall the accents of salvation come forth, from lips which He has touched with a coal from the altar, and made to be the bearers of kind sayings to their poor suffering and degraded sinners. This is God's declaration. III. THE GENEROUS CONSOLATION WHICH THE MIND OF THE PROPHET DERIVES FROM THIS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S GRACIOUS DESIGN IN FAVOUR OF THESE GENTILES. "O Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction." When beat down by sorrow, when prostrate in calamity, when standing amidst the decay of national comforts, and amidst the manifestation of God's righteous judgments, he turned for rest to God; God was his strength, God was his fortress; God opened to him an asylum whither the wicked could not follow him, whither Satan could not follow him. (*G. T. Noel, M.A.*) Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods?—*God-making* :—Is not that impossible? From a certain point of view it is utterly impossible, and yet from another point of view it is the very thing men are doing every day in the week. Questions cannot always be answered literally. There may be a moral explanation under the literary definition. Who does not make himself gods as he needs them?—not visible god, otherwise they might bring down upon themselves the contempt of observers, and the contempt of their very makers; but ambitions, purposes, policies, programmes, methods of procedure,—all these may be looked upon as refuges and defences and hidden sanctuaries into which the soul would go for defence and protection when the tempest rages loudly and fiercely. A subtle thing is this god-making. Every man is at times a polytheist—that is, a possessor or a worshipper of many gods. The Lord could never bring the mind of His people directly and lovingly to the reception of the One Deity. It would seem to be the last thought of man that there can be, by metaphysical necessity, only one God. There cannot be a divided Deity. Yet it is this very miracle that the imagination of man has performed. He has set all round the household innumerable idols which he takes down according to the necessity of the hour. He knows he is intellectually foolish, morally the victim of self-delusion, practically an utterly unwise and impracticable man; yet somehow, by force not to be put into equivalent words, he will do this again and again, yea he takes to himself power to fill up vacancies, so that if any clay god or imagined idol has failed him he puts another in the place of the one that did not fulfil his prayer. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1. *The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond.*—*The deep-seated character of sin.*—I. WHAT IS SIN? If you ask the Pharisee of old what sin was—"Well," he said, "it is eating without washing your hands; it is drinking wine without having first of all strained out the gnats, for those insects are unclean, and if you should swallow any of them they will render you defiled." Many in these days have the same notion, with a variation. We have read of a Spanish bandit, who, when he confessed before his father-confessor, complained that one sin hung with peculiar weight upon his soul that was of peculiar atrocity. He had stabbed a man on a Friday, and a few drops of the blood of the wound had fallen on his lips, by which he had broken the precepts of holy Church, in having tasted animal food on a fast day. The murder did not seem to arouse in his conscience any feeling of remorse at all—not one atom—he would have done the same to-morrow; but an accidental violation of the canons of mother Church excited all his fears. Singular, indeed, are the ideas which many men have of transgression. But such is not God's view of sin. Sin is a want of conformity to the will of God; sin is disobedience to God's command; sin is a forgetfulness of the obligations of the relation which exists between the creature and the Creator. This is the very essence of sin. Injustice to my fellow-creature is truly sin, but its essence lies in the fact that it is sin against God, who constituted the relation which I have violated. It is a great and intolerable wrong that, being created by God, we yet refuse to yield to His will. It is right that He who is so good to us should have our love: it is sin that, living upon God's goodness, we do not return to Him our heart's affection. It is right that, being sustained by Divine beneficence from day to day, we should give to Him constant thankfulness; but, being so sustained, we do not thank Him, and herein lies the very soul of sin. Now, in the light of this truth, let me ask the believer to humble himself very greatly on account of sin. That I have not loved my God with all my heart; that I have not trusted Him with all my confidence; that I have not given to Him the glory due unto His name; that I have not acted as a creature should do, much less as a new creature is bound to do; that, receiving priceless mercies, I have made so small a return—let me confess this in dust and ashes, and then bless the name of the Atoner who, by His precious blood, hath put even this away, so that it shall not be mentioned against us any more for ever. II. HOW IS THE FIXEDNESS OF SIN WHICH IS DECLARED IN THE TEXT PROVED? The prophet tells us that man's sinfulness is as much fixed in him as an inscription carved with an iron pen in granite. How is this fixedness proved? It is proved in two ways in the text, namely, that it is graven upon the table of their heart, and secondly, upon the horns of their altar. It clearly proves how deeply evil is fixed in man, when we reflect that sin is in the very heart of man. When a sin becomes intertwined with the roots of the affections, you cannot uproot it; when the leprosy eats deep into the heart of humanity, who can expel it? It becomes henceforth a hopeless case, so far as human power is concerned. Since sin reigns and rules in man's affections, it is deep ingrained indeed. The second proof the prophet gives of the infixedness of human sin is, that it was written on the horns of their altars. These people sinned by setting up idols and departing from Jehovah: we sin in quite another way. When you get the unconverted man to be religious—which is a very easy thing—what form does the religion take? Frequently he prefers that which most gratifies his taste, his ears, or his sight. If your heart is touched, that is the worship of God; if your heart is drawn to God, that is the service of God; but if it is the mere ringing of the words, and the falling of the periods, and the cadence of the voice that you regard, why, you do not worship God, but on the very horns of your altars are your sins. You are bringing a delight of your own sensuous faculties and putting that in the place of true faith and love, and then saying to your soul, "I have pleased God," whereas you have only pleased yourself. When men become serious in religion, and look somewhat to the inward, they then defile the Lord's altar by relying upon their own righteousness. Man is much like a silkworm, he is a spinner and weaver by nature. A robe of righteousness is wrought out for him, but he will not have it; he will spin for himself, and like the silkworm, he spins, and spins, and he only spins himself a shroud. All the righteousness that a sinner can make will only be a shroud in which to

wrap up his soul, his destroyed soul, for God will cast him away who relies upon the works of the law. In other ways men stain the horns of their altars. Some do it by carelessness. Those lips must be depraved indeed which even in prayer and praise still continue to sin. The horns of our altars are defiled by hypocrisy. You may have seen two fencers practising their art, and noticed how they seem to be seeking each other's death; how they strike and thrust as though they were earnestly contending for life; but after the show is over, they sit down and shake hands, and are good friends. Often so it is in your prayers and confessions; you will acknowledge your sins, and profess to hate them, and make resolutions against them, but it is all outward show—fencing, not real fighting—and when the fencing-bout is over, the soul shakes hands with its old enemy, and returns to its former ways of sin. Oh, this foul hypocrisy is a staining of the horns of the altar with a vengeance! III. WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF THIS? First, we must never forget the fall. We are none of us to-day as God made us. The human judgment is out of balance, it uses false weights and false measures. "It puts darkness for light and light for darkness." The human will is no longer supple, as it should be, to the Divine will; our neck is naturally as an iron sinew, and will not bow to Jehovah's golden sceptre. Our affections also are twisted away from their right bent. Whereas we ought to have been seeking after Jesus, and casting out the tendrils of our affections towards Him, we cling to anything but the right, and climb upon anything but the true. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint." Human nature is like a magnificent temple all in ruins. In addition, however, to our natural depravity, there come in, in the second place, our habits of sin. Well may sin be deeply engraven in the man who has for twenty, forty, fifty, or perhaps seventy years, continued in his iniquity. Put the wool into the scarlet dye, and if it lie there but a week, the colour will be so ingrained in the fabric that you cannot get it out; but if you keep it there for so many years, how shall you possibly be able to bleach it? You must recollect, in addition to this, that sin is a most clinging and defiling thing. Who does not know that if a man sins once, it is much easier to sin that way the next time, nay, that he is much more inclinable towards that sin? I may add that the prince of the power of the air, the evil spirit, takes care, so far as he can, to add to all this. He chimes in with every suggestion of fallen nature. He will never let the tinder lie idle for want of sparks, nor the ground lie waste for want of the seeds of thorns and thistles. IV. WHAT IS THE CURE FOR ALL THIS? Sin thus stamped into us, thus ingrained into our nature, can it ever be got out? It must be got out, or we cannot enter heaven, for there shall by no means enter within those pearly gates anything that defileth. We must be cleansed and purified, but how can it be done? It can only be done by supernatural process. Your only help lies in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became the Son of Man that He might lift the sons of men up from their natural degradation and ruin. How does Jesus Christ then take away these deeply-inscribed lines of sin from human nature? I answer, He does it first in this way. If our heart be like granite, and sin be written on it, Christ's ready method is to take that heart away. "A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you." Next to that, inasmuch as the guiltiness of sin is as permanent as sin itself, Jesus Christ is able to take our guilt away. His dying upon the Cross is the means by which the blackest sinner out of hell can be made white as the angels of God, and that, too, in a single instant. The Holy Spirit also comes in: the new nature being given and sin being forgiven, the Holy Ghost comes and dwells in us, as a Prince in his palace, as a God in his temple. Do I hear any say, "Then, I would to God that I may experience the Divine process—the new nature given, which is regeneration, the washing away of sin, which constitutes pardon and justification, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, which insures final perseverance and complete sanctification. Oh, how can I have these precious things?" Thou mayst have them, whoever thou mayst be, by simply believing in Jesus. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The iron pen recording sins:*—When Bishop Latimer was on trial for his life, a trial which ended in his being burned at the stake, he at first answered without duly considering how much a single unguarded word might cost him. Presently he heard the pen of a secretary, who was seated behind the tapestry, taking down every expression which fell from his lips. It would be well for us all to remember that there is a pen now recording behind the curtain of the skies, our every evil deed and word and thought, and that for all these things God will bring us into judg-

ment. The iron pen suggests two thoughts. 1. The record which it makes is deep and indelible. So, also, with the items which are filling up page after page in the book of God's remembrance. A wealthy English landlord was once guilty of an act of tyrannical injustice to a poor, helpless widow, who rented a small cottage from him. The widow's son, whose blood boiled with indignation when he witnessed this, grew up to be a distinguished painter, and he portrayed the scene, and placed it where the eye of the cruel landlord must rest upon it. When the hard-hearted oppressor saw it, he turned pale, and trembled, and offered any sum for it, that the terrible picture might be destroyed. 2. The iron pen with its diamond point does not wear out. Be the record of one's sins as long as it may, that record will assuredly be made. It is a moment of profound interest in the life of an antiquarian, when he drags forth from the sands of Egypt some ancient obelisk, on which the iron pen has engraved, so many ages ago, the portraits of those who, in the shadowy past, acted their part on the crowded theatre of a bustling world. This, however, is as nothing, compared with the disclosures of that day, when, from the stillness and silence of the grave, shall be brought out into the dazzling light of noon, tablets covered with the sculptured history of the soul; a history which no power nor skill can then erase. And thus the prophet would teach us, by the striking figure of the iron pen with its diamond point, that sin is no trifling thing; that one single violation of the Divine law does not pass unnoticed; and that they who die with the guilt of sins unrepented of, and unpardoned, resting on their souls, have nothing to expect but the outpouring of God's terrible wrath. Vainly do we apologise for our shortcomings, on the ground of our natural bias to sin; or that the power of temptation proved too strong for us to resist. Forewarned, we ought to have been forearmed. Alas! who can contemplate his own sins against light and knowledge, against the strivings of conscience and the earnest pleadings of the Holy Spirit; who can count up his broken vows, and his contradictions of solemn confessions before God, and not tremble at the thought of the black catalogue which the iron pen has been writing down against him! When the great plague raged in London, in 1666, it was common to write over every infected house, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" Should the same inscription now be made over every abode where the plague of sin has entered, which of our habitations would not require to be thus labelled? (*J. N. Norton, D.D.*) *The inward registrar*:—Manton says: "If conscience speaketh not, it writeth; for it is not only a witness, but a register, and a book of record: 'The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and the point of a diamond' (Jer. xvii. 1). We know not what conscience writeth, being occupied and taken up with carnal vanities, but we shall know hereafter, when the books are opened (Rev. xx. 12). Conscience keepeth a diary, and sets down everything. This book, though it be in the sinner's keeping, cannot be razed and blotted out. Well, then, a sleepy conscience will not always sleep; if we suffer it not to awaken here, it will awaken in hell; for the present it sleepeth in many, in regard of motion, check, or smiting, but not in regard of notice and observation." Let those who forget their sins take note of this. There is a chiel within you taking notes, and he will publish all where all will hear it. Never say, "nobody will see me," for you will see yourself, and your conscience will turn king's evidence against you. What a volume Mr. Recorder Conscience has written already! How many blotted pages he has in store, to be produced upon my trial. O Thou who alone canst erase this dreadful handwriting, look on me in mercy, as I now look on Thee by faith. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Sin ineradicable*:—The mind of man has been compared to a white sheet of paper. Now it is like a white sheet of paper in this, that whatever we write upon it, whether with distinct purpose or no, nay, every drop of ink we let fall upon it, makes an abiding mark, a mark which we cannot rub out, without much injury to the paper; unless, indeed, the mark has been very slight from the first, and we set about erasing it while it is fresh. In one of the grandest tragedies of our great English poet, there is a scene which, when one reads it, is enough to make one's blood run cold. A woman, whose husband had made himself King of Scotland by means of several murders, and who had been the prompter and partner of his crimes, is brought in, while in her sleep, and continually rubbing her hands, as though she were washing them, crying ever and anon, "Yet here's a spot. . . . What! will these hands ne'er be clean? . . . here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." In these words there is an awful power of truth. We can stain our souls; we can dye them,

and double-dye them, and triple-dye them; we can dye them all the colours of hell's rainbow; but we cannot wash them white. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten them, all the fountains of the great deep will not wash one little spot out of them. The usurping Queen of Scotland had been guilty of murder; and the stain of blood, it has been very generally believed, cannot be washed out. But it is not the stain of blood alone; every stain soils the soul; and none of them can be washed out. Every little speck of ink eats into the paper; every sin, however small we may deem it, eats into the soul. If we try to write over it, we make a deeper blot; if we try to scratch it out, the next letters which we write on the spot are blurred. Therefore is it of such vast importance that we should be very careful of what we write. In the tragedy which I was quoting just now, the queen says, "What's done cannot be undone." This amounts to the same thing as what I have written, in the sense in which I am now calling upon you to consider these words. What's done cannot be undone. You know that this is true. You know you cannot push back the wheels of time, and make yesterday come again, so as to do over afresh what you did wrongly then. That which you did yesterday, yesterday will keep: you cannot change it; you cannot make it less or greater; if it was crooked, you cannot make it straight. You cannot turn back the leaves in the book of life, and read the lesson you have grabbed over again. That which you have written, you have written: that which you have done, you have done; and you cannot unwrite or undo it. (*J. C. Hare.*) *Sin leaves its marks*:—Even pardoned sins must leave a trace in heavy self-reproach. You have heard of the child whose father told him that whenever he did anything wrong a nail should be driven into a post, and when he did what was good he might pull one out. There were a great many nails driven into the post, but the child tried very hard to get the post cleared of the nails by striving to do right. At length he was so successful in his struggles with himself that the last nail was drawn out of the post. The father was just about to praise the child, when, stooping down to kiss him, he was startled to see tears fast rolling down his face. "Why, my boy, why do you cry? Are not all the nails gone from the post?" "Oh yes! the nails are all gone, but the marks are left." That is a familiar illustration, but don't despise it because of that. It illustrates the experience of many a grey old sire, who, looking upon the traces of his old sins, as they yet rankle in his conscience, would give a hundred worlds to live himself back into young manhood, that he might obliterate the searing imprint of its follies. Have you never heard of fossil-rain? In the stratum of the old red sandstone there are to be seen the marks of showers of rain which fell centuries and centuries ago, and they are so plain and perfect that they clearly indicate the way the wind was drifting, and in what direction the tempest slanted from the sky. So may the tracks of youthful sins be traced upon the tablet of the life when it has merged into old age,—tracks which it is bitter and sad remorse to look upon, and which call forth many a bootless longing for the days and months which are past. (*A. Mursell.*)

Vers. 5-8. *Cursed be the man that trusteth in man.*—*The difference between trusting in the creature and the Creator*:—I. THE FOLLY AND EVIL OF TRUSTING IN MAN. To "trust in man," in the sense of our text, is to expect that from creatures which can only come from the Creator: to confide in them, not as mere instruments, but as efficient causes; to look to them so as to look off from God; to cleave to them so as to depart from Him. 1. Idolatrous in its principle. 2. Grovelling in its aim. It looks no higher than present good, and things altogether unworthy of an immortal spirit. 3. Unreasonable in its foundation. It supposes that man can do what God cannot. 4. Destructive in its issue. "He shall be like the heath in the desert,"—worthless, sapless, fruitless; "he shall not see when good cometh,"—shall not enjoy it; "but he shall inhabit the parched places," &c. He shall prosper in nothing. (1) The frustration of his projects and hopes. (2) The melancholy state of his soul. (3) The unhappy end of his career. II. THE WISDOM AND BENEFIT OF TRUSTING IN THE LORD. Jehovah is his hope. He seeks and expects his all from Him. To know, love, and enjoy Him,—behold his chief good,—the object of his hopes,—his highest and ultimate end. Now this conduct is the complete contrast of the other. 1. It is pious in its principles. 2. Elevated in its aim. 3. Rational in its foundation. 4. Glorious in its issue. "Blessed is the man," &c. "For he shall be like a tree," &c. (1) The success of his enterprises. (2) The settled comfort

and satisfaction of his soul. (3) The loveliness and dignity of his character. (4) The usefulness of his life. (5) His eternal felicity. Application—1. It is a great mistake to suppose the rich and gay happy; the poor and pious miserable. 2. An entire renunciation of creature confidence, and an unreserved dependence on God, can alone secure the Divine favour and our own felicity. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Trust—right and wrong*:—I. MAN, AS A GROUND OF TRUST.

1. In what consists this dependence upon man for the salvation of the soul? (1) In being led by the example of others to the commission of sin and neglect of God. (2) In looking for that rest in the creature which is only to be found in God. (3) In depending on our own good works, in part, for our justification before God. (4) In taking our religion from the opinions of men, instead of the Word of God. (5) In resting in the means of grace. 2. See the consequences of trusting in man. "Cursed," &c. He that does so shall be—(1) Useless "as the heath in the desert." (2) Miserable. "Shall not see when good cometh." (3) Solitary, or forsaken of God. "Shall inhabit a salt land not inhabited." (4) Cursed by Jehovah Himself. "Lord, is it I?"

II. JEHOVAH, AS A GROUND OF TRUST. 1. What is meant by trusting Jehovah? With the light of this dispensation, we may safely say it embraces dependence on the atonement of Christ; and implies—(1) Knowledge of it, as a fact and doctrine of Scripture. (2) Approval of it, as adapted to our circumstances. (3) Personal reliance on it for salvation;—a "confident venture" of our souls upon it. 2. The blessedness of trusting in Jehovah. (1) Nourishment. "Planted by the waters." A Christian's source of strength is out of himself. (2) Stability. "Spreadeth out his roots." (3) Comfort. "Shall not see when heat cometh." "Shall not be careful in the year of drought." (4) Adornment. "His leaf shall be green." Beauty of the woods in early spring. "A Christian is the highest style of man" (Titus ii. 10; 1 Pet. iii. 4). (5) Fruitfulness. "Neither shall cease from yielding fruit." (*Edward Thompson.*) *The blessing and the curse*:—Two contrasted types of experience, or laws of life, are brought before us—the one a life of trust in man, and the other a life of trust in God. These two types of experience are contrasted with each other—not primarily, with respect to their outward moral characteristics. The thought that our attention is first of all called to is, that these two lives stand in a contrasted relation to God. The man who lives the first of the two lives that are described here is represented as assuming and maintaining an attitude of independence of God; and the man who leads the second of these two lives is represented as living in a state of consciously recognised dependence upon God. The one finds his resources in self; the other finds his resources in Deity. Now these two lives are not only contrasted with each other, first of all, as to this their essential characteristic, but they are also contrasted as to their result in respect to the personal happiness and enjoyment which belongs to each. The one is represented as a life lived under a curse, and the other as a life lived under a blessing. Either your experience may be described, in the words of Paul, "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"; or else you are living a life of which nothing of the kind can be affirmed, and, therefore, a life in which you are practically cut off from all direct communication with your Maker by sin and unbelief. And if the latter be your condition, you are at this moment, in spite of all your privileges, actually under the ban of God's curse and the frown of His wrath: one or other of these two cases you may be sure is yours. You will observe that in the first sentence of our text the prophet utters a curse on the man that trusteth in man; and he says this before he goes on to speak of the heart departing from the living God. This trust in man renders it impossible for the man who entertains it to trust in the living God; and it is, I am persuaded, just because, before we can really and honestly trust in the Father through the Son, it is absolutely necessary for us to turn our back upon all other forms of confidence, that so many lose the enjoyment of this blissful life of faith, and make proof in their own miserable experience of the blight and desolation of a life of practical unbelief. We are not prepared to strip ourselves of our false supports and of our fatal self-confidence, and thus we are not in a position to trust ourselves to the living Father through the Son. Consider some of these various forms of false confidence which it is absolutely necessary for us to abandon before we can enter upon the enjoyment of this life of faith. First, if I am to live by faith in God, I must make up my mind to have done with living by faith in the world. If

I am to trust God at all, my trust in God must be exclusive of all other confidence. Or, again, it is possible that our confidence is reposed upon human systems—perhaps it may even be religious systems—which, practically, are allowed to take the place that belongs to God in the heart. How many a man one meets with who will tell us that he has opinions of his own. That may be, my brother, but the point is whether those opinions of yours coincide with God's facts; for opinions of our own may be the cause of mortal injury to us, if it should so happen that those opinions of our own are in direct opposition to facts. Or perhaps it is that we base our confidence on the opinions of other people. Some will tell you that they are earnest Church folks, others will state that they are conscientious Nonconformists; some that they are strong Catholics; some that they are decided Evangelicals. God calls upon us to trust to Himself, and to nothing but Himself; and when we substitute for personal trust in the living God confidence in any kind of system, whatever that system may be, or in any mere doctrine, whatever that doctrine may be, we are cut off by that attitude of heart from the possibilities of the life of faith. Perhaps you will ask, "Well, but why should my trust in doctrine, or my trust in ritual, or my trust in churchmanship, preclude me from trusting in God too?" Just because these things are not God; and, as I said a few moments ago, you cannot trust God and not-God at the same time. But we must consider yet another and still more frequent case. There are a large number of persons who are strangers to the life of faith—not so much because they are wedded to any particular system on which they have based their confidence, as because they are reluctant to renounce their confidence in themselves. Now, we never really begin with God till we come to an end of ourselves. A considerable number of persons trust in their own quiet, even respectability. They really cannot see that they do anything to be distressed or alarmed about. What means all this hue and cry—this red-hot excitement or attempt to get up a red-hot excitement—these frequent services going on hour after hour all day long—these after-meetings—these invitations to earnest inquirers? What does it all mean? The explanation of it all lies in the fact that you ask for an explanation. Let a man be dissatisfied with himself, let a man have a low opinion of himself, and then he will be ready to receive good from any kind of instrumentality, and a very commonplace sort of instrumentality will probably be used to bring that man to the attainment of that spiritual benefit which his case requires. But let a man be sunk in the sleep of self-complacency—let a man be going on leading a calm, quiet, easy, regular life; but, observe, a life which is not a life of conscious, personal faith in God, but, on the contrary, a life of self-reliance, and therefore a life of self-complacency; and he is as much under the power of the great deceiver as it is possible for a man to be. And of all the undertakings which lie before the Divine Spirit, it seems to me that the very hardest undertaking which even God Himself can engage in is that of penetrating this impervious armour of self-complacency, and of bringing such an one to feel his need of salvation, and to seek and to find that salvation on God's own terms. If these, then, are some of the barriers to our leading a bright and happy life of faith, we shall perhaps, by God's blessing, be the more disposed to avoid or have done with them as we dwell for a little on the contrast offered between these two forms of life. Let us look at these pictures. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; for he shall be like a tree planted by the waterside, that spreadeth out her roots by the river." Observe, the tree is dependent, not upon a chance shower, but upon a perennial supply. The river is always flowing, and the tree has stretched out its roots beside the river, and so is in a position continuously to draw for itself from the river all the sustenance and all the moisture which it requires. Christian, if thou art a real Christian, here is thy picture. Thy roots are struck down into God. Thou art dependent upon no mere casual visitation of Divine mercy. It may be very advisable, from time to time, that extraordinary efforts should be made to reach the careless and to awaken the unconcerned, but thou, true child of God, art not dependent upon these for thy life and health. Thou hast struck down thy roots into the river, and there thou standest—uninjured by prevalent drought, unscathed by the fiery rays of the sun, thy leaf green, thy fruit never-failing. Is this your case? Are you drawing your life-supplies from God? There are two ways in which the Christian grows. He grows in personal holiness of life and conversation, but he only grows in outward conduct, because he also grows in the knowledge and love of God. Upon the depth and reality of his relation

with God, his moral and religious character will depend. As God becomes more and more to him "a living, bright reality," so his personal life and character become more fully developed, and the beauty of the Lord will be exhibited in his conduct. As the result of the establishment of these relations with God, the supply of all the necessary wants of the soul is insured, and it has nothing to fear from the trials and disappointments of life: the tree planted by the waters shall not see when heat cometh. Observe, the prophet does not say that it shall be exposed to no heat, but that it shall not be injured by it. Let us ask ourselves, Are we growing in the knowledge of God? Are we getting fresh revelations of His character and His ability to meet and satisfy our every spiritual need? Oh, how vast is our spiritual wealth in Him, and how many a fear and misgiving might not be saved, if we would only acquaint ourselves with Him and be at peace. And this leads us on to the second feature mentioned here, "it shall not be careful in the year of drought." Happy the Christian man who realises his full privileges in this respect, and lives in the enjoyment of them! Happy the man of business on our own Stock Exchange, who, in the midst of all the vicissitudes of a commercial life, can leave himself calmly in the hands of God, and while the year of drought which has so long been affecting our own and other lands fills others with despair, enjoy a blessed immunity from anxiety, because he knows that he is planted by the waterside. Happy the mother who can cast all the cares of her family upon Him who careth for her, and leave them there, not fretting and fuming when things do not go as she would wish them, not cankered by cares or worried by troubles, but trusting Him in whom she finds the true calm of life to draw her ever the nearer to Himself by all its changeful circumstances! But further, the leaf of such a tree is described as being always green. The leaf of the tree shows the nature of the tree, and just so the profession we make should show what our religious character is. Now, it is a grand thing to have a fresh and green profession, so to speak! Once again we read, "Neither shall cease from yielding fruit." The Christian will always be a fruitful tree, because he is planted by the water. There will be no lack of fruitfulness when living in full communion with God. Some of us, perhaps, have had an opportunity of looking at that wonderful and famous vine at Hampton Court. A more beautiful sight you can scarcely see in all England than that vine when it is covered all over with the rich, luscious clusters of the vintage. Report attributes its extraordinary fertility to the fact that the roots, extending for a very considerable distance, have made their way down to the Thames, from whence it draws continuous moisture and nourishment. Such a sight is presented to the eyes of God by the Christian who lives in God, planted by the riverside. The fruits of good works will manifest themselves, not one here and another there, but in a rich and lifelong vintage that will not fail. God Himself reaps a harvest from such a life which redounds to His own glory, and is productive of blessed consequences to mankind. Such is the one picture; now let us glance at the other. "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man." We have left the grapes of Eshcol behind us now—we have turned our backs upon the land that flows with milk and honey. We are making our way towards the bare stretch of arid, desert waste. The smile of God's favour rests no longer upon the miserable being, but the frown of His wrath broods over him; and the thunder of God's curse is sounding in his ear, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Departeth from God! Ah, it all lies there! As the satisfaction of the saint arises from the closeness of his relations with God, so the want and wretchedness of the sinner arise from his separation from Him. The wilderness begins where conscious fellowship with God ceases. "He shall be like the heath in the desert." As you wander over the dreary waste of barren sand, your eye falls upon a poor, miserable-looking, half-withered, half-dead thing, that still struggles to maintain its woe-begone and sickly existence. There it lingers on wretchedly, cut off from all surrounding vegetation, scarcely living and yet not finally dead, but devoid of all the freshness and luxuriance of life, shrivelled and parched and desolate-looking in a salt land and not inhabited. Far away in the distance there you can see the green tree that is planted by the waterside only just in sight; but here there is no kindly river, no kindred forms of vegetation, in solitude and drought it measures out its dreary existence. In this miserable object, man of the world, see a picture of yourself. Solitude and thirst! in those two characteristics of this woeful picture, you have faithfully represented to you the characteristic elements of your own present experience.

and the dread foreshadowing of what its end must be. Thirst and solitude, yes, thou knowest something of that even now, for is there not already within thee a desire that nothing earthly can satisfy—a sense of inanity and want? Verily thou dwellest in a parched and salt land. A mighty famine reigns within thy soul, and thou hast begun to be in want. An irrepressible, an urgent desire now goads thee on from one effort to another, if, haply, thou mayest escape from thy own miserable self-consciousness and lose the sense of thy own want amidst the excitements of thy life. But it is there all the time—this inward thirst, and thou canst not escape from it; and remember the salt land which thou now inhabitest is but the way to, and the dread anticipation of, that salt land of doom to which the sinner is to be banished; and the thirst which even now tortures thy agonised heart is but the prelude to the thirst of hell. Thirst and solitude! yes, and thou knowest something of this last also. How solitary and lonesome already is that poor heart of thine. The plain, simple truth is, that in his inner life the man of the world is always alone—the solitude which sin brings with it has already commenced, and already you are shut out from the true enjoyments of social intercourse; you are lonely, even in the very midst of numbers, and desolate even in the very heart of your family. And in that loneliness you have a prelude to the utter loneliness which lies beyond—the desolation, the solitude, the loss of all, when he who has wandered from the love of God is shut out from the world of love, and given over to that dark region where love cannot come; the loneliness of him who leaves the society of heaven behind him, and finds instead only the weeping and the wailing and the gnashing of teeth. (*W. Hay Aiken, M.A.*)

The sin of trusting in man.—I. WHEN WE MAY BE CHARGED WITH THIS. 1. When we fortify ourselves in sin, by human refuges and supports (*Isa. xxviii. 15, 16, xxx. 1, &c.; Obad. iii. 4.*) 2. When we look for that rest in the creature, which is only to be found in God (*Jer. ix. 23, 24.*) 3. When we seek to please men more than God. Not as Moses, Daniel, Peter. 4. When we use unlawful means to rid ourselves of trouble (*Jonah i. 2, 3.*) 5. When we form our religion by the opinions of men instead of God's Word (*Matt. xv. 1-9; Gal. ii. 11-13.*) 6. When we lean on ourselves instead of Jesus Christ (*Phil. iii. 3-7.*) II. THE WRETCHEDNESS OF SUCH A DISPOSITION AND CONDUCT. 1. God will take out the enjoyment of what he possesses (*Eccles. vi. 1, 2.*) 2. The object of his hope shall be removed, or turned against him (*Psa. xli. 9.*) 3. God will leave him to his own corruptions and Satan's temptations (*Hos. iv. 17.*) 4. Guilt shall make him a torment to himself. Judas. 5. When blessings come, he shall not perceive them (*Luke xix. 41-44; Acts xiii. 38-41.*) 6. Death shall snatch him from his enjoyments (*Luke xii. 1, &c.; Acts xii. 1, &c.*) (*H. Foster.*) *The danger of trusting in man*.—I. He that trusts in man is cursed in the weakness on which he relies. "The strong shall be as tow." In general, God employs weak and inconsiderable ones to break the arm of flesh; thus, the shouts of the Israelites, and the blowing of horns, brought down the walls of Jericho, and reduced it to the dust: the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, lay along the valley of Moreh like grasshoppers for multitude, and yet the sudden display of only three hundred lamps, and the sounding of as many trumpets, put them all to flight: the champion of the Philistines defied the whole army of Israel, yet a shepherd boy overcame him with a sling and stone. So with all earthly strength on which man builds himself up; the moment God speaks the word it melts away. 2. He that maketh flesh his arm is cursed also in the shortlived nature of his ground of confidence. How often does man, in the very noonday of his journey through life, feel his heart sink within him on finding that the distant places, which in the morning of life he had looked forward to as fresh and beautiful, are but as the parched heath or thirsty sand; he thinks of the days of boyhood, when an untried world promised happiness and security, and sighs on learning the hard lesson, that neither is to be had on this side of the grave. 3. Deceitfulness is moreover part of that curse which those may expect to reap, and that abundantly, who trust in man and make flesh their arm. Put God out of the question; let there be no recognition of any other than human obligations, and you have no security in the faithfulness of the nearest or dearest friend. 4. There is a curse also in the bitterness of disappointment. This is what makes the wretched old worldling like the parched heath; friends, or children, or other relatives, have either died or forsaken him, or his riches have slipped out of his hands and flown away; all his worldly plans and schemes have failed; he has no love of God in his heart to bear him up against so many cruel disappointments, and the bitterness of his spirit has therefore increased

day by day, till he is completely soured ; he feeds on his morose temper, and in turn it preys upon him ; the curse eats into his vitals, drying up every little show of better feeling which would have kept his heart still green and salt ; he hates and suspects every one ; the world is looked upon by him as one great lie, and of the truth he knows nothing ; or the things wherein he foolishly expected to find happiness, have proved incapable of affording it, even while he had them in his possession. (C. O. Pratt, M.A.) *The folly of trusting in any creature :—*As a

traveller overcome by a storm, having sought the shelter of some fair-spread oak, finds relief for some time, till suddenly, the fierce wind tears some strong branch, which, falling, hurts the unsuspecting traveller ; so fares it with not a few who run for shelter to the shade of some great man. "Had I served my God," said poor Wolsey, "as faithfully as I served my king, He would not have forsaken me now." He shall be like the heath in the desert.—*The heath in the desert :—*

I. AGAINST WHOM THIS CURSE IS DENOUNCED. 1. Those who do not realise their dependence on God for all true happiness, but think it lies in worldly gain. 2. Those who trust in man and make flesh their arm, and neglect to fix all dependence on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 3. Those who depend on a form of godliness without the power, and, excepting a little animal sympathy, remain cold as ever. II. HOW THESE RESEMBLE THE HEATH IN THE DESERT. 1. In barrenness and deformity. 2. In being desolate, forsaken, and unblest. 3. While the holy land is refreshed with dew from heaven, the desert remains parched as before. 4. Showers falling on desert heath only promote the growth of deformed shrubs ; and the influence of heaven falling on this class calls forth a more fatal resistance of the Holy Spirit. 5. The heath cannot be made fruitful ; and all God's visitations fall unregarded on many. 6. It is plain that, while many obey the Gospel call, others remain desolate and uncheered by any heavenly influence. (E. Griffin, D.D.) *The heath in the desert and the tree by the river :—*The prophet puts before us two highly-finished pictures. In the one, the hot desert stretches on all sides. The fierce "sunbeams like swords" slay every green thing. Here and there a stunted, grey, prickly shrub struggles to live, and just manages not to die. But it has no grace of leaf, nor profitability of fruit ; and it only serves to make the desolation more desolate.

The other carries us to some brimming river, where everything lives because water has come. Dipping their boughs in the sparkling current, and driving their roots through the moist soil, the bordering trees lift aloft their pride of foliage and bear fruits in their season. So, says Jeremiah, the two pictures represent two sets of men ; the one, he who diverts from their true object his heart-capacities of love and trust, and clings to creatures and to men, "making flesh his arm and departing from the living God" ; the other, a man who leans the whole weight of his needs and cares and sins and sorrows upon God. We can make the choice which shall be the object of our trust, and according as we choose the one or the other, the experience of these vivid pictures will be ours. I. THE ONE IS IN THE DESERT ; THE OTHER BY THE RIVER. The poor little dusty shrub in the desert, whose very leaves have been modified into prickles, is fit for the desert, and is as much at home there as the willows by the water-courses with their rush vegetation in their moist bed. But if a man makes that fatal choice, of shutting out God from his confidence and his love, and squandering these upon earth and upon creatures, he is as fatally out of harmony with the place which he has chosen, and as much away from his natural soil as a tropical plant amongst the snows of Arctic glaciers, or a water-lily in the Sahara. You, I, the poorest and humblest of men, will never be right, never feel in native soil, with appropriate surroundings, until we have laid our hearts and our hands on the breast of God, and rested ourselves on Him. Not more surely do gills and fins proclaim that the creature that has them is meant to roam through the boundless ocean, nor the anatomy and wings of the bird witness more surely to its destination to soar in the open heavens, than the make of your spirits testifies that God, none less or lower, is your portion. As well might bees try to get honey from a vase of wax flowers as we to draw what we need from creatures, from ourselves, from visible and material things. Where else will you get love that will never fail nor change nor die ? Where else will you find an object for the intellect that will yield inexhaustible material of contemplation and delight ? Where else infallible direction for the will ? Where else shall weakness find un-failing strength, or sorrow adequate consolation, or hope certain fulfilment, or fear a safe hiding-place ? II. THE ONE CAN TAKE IN NO REAL GOOD ; THE OTHER CAN FEAR NO EVIL. (See R.V., ver. 8.) "He cannot see when good comes." God comes, and I would rather have some more money, or some woman's love, or a big

business. So I might go the whole round. The man that cannot see good when it is there before his nose, because the false direction of his confidence has blinded his eyes, cannot open his heart to it. You are plunged, as it were, in a sea of possible felicity, which will be yours if your heart's direction is towards God, and the surrounding ocean of blessedness has as little power to fill your heart as the sea to enter some hermetically sealed flask dropped into the middle of the Atlantic. Turn to the other side. "He shall not fear when heat cometh," which is evil in these Eastern lands, "and shall not be careful in the year of drought." The tree that sends its roots towards a river that never fails does not suffer when all the land is parched. And the man who has driven his roots into God, and is drawing from that deep source what is needful for his life and fertility, has no occasion to dread any evil, nor to gnaw his heart with anxiety as to what he is to do in parched times. Troubles may come, but they do not go deeper than the surface. It may be all cracked and caked and dry, "a thirsty land where no water is," and yet deep down there may be moisture and coolness. **III. THE ONE IS BARE; THE OTHER CLOTHED WITH THE BEAUTY OF FOLIAGE.** The word translated "heat" has a close connection with, if it does not literally mean, "naked," or "bare." Probably it designates some inconspicuously-leaved desert shrub, the particular species not being ascertainable or a matter of any consequence. Leaves, in Scripture, have a recognised symbolical meaning. "Nothing but leaves" in the story of the fig-tree meant only beautiful outward appearance, with no corresponding outcome of goodness of heart, in the shape of fruit. So I venture, here, to draw a distinction between leafage and fruit, and say that the one points rather to a man's character and conduct as being lovely in appearance, and in the other as being morally good and profitable. This is the lesson of these two clauses—Misdirected confidence in creatures strips a man of much beauty of character, and true faith in God adorns soul with a leafy vesture of loveliness. "Whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report" lack their supreme excellence, the diamond on the top of the royal crown, the glittering gold on the summit of the Campanile, unless there be in them a distinct reference to God. **IV. THE ONE IS STERILE; THE OTHER FRUITFUL.** The only works of men worth calling "fruit," if regard be had to their capacities, relations, and obligations, are those done as the outcome and consequence of hearts trusting in the Lord. The rest of the man's activities may be busy and multiplied, and, from the point of view of a godless morality, many may be fair and good; but if we think of him as being destined, as his chief end, "to glorify God, and (so) to enjoy Him for ever," what correspondence between such a creature and acts that are done without reference to God can there ever be? At the most they are "wild grapes." And there comes a time when they will be tested; the axe laid to the root of the trees, and these imperfect deeds will shrivel up and disappear. Trust will certainly be fruitful. There we are upon pure Christian ground which declares that the outcome of faith is conduct in conformity with the will of Him in whom we trust, and that the productive principle of all good in man is confidence in God manifest to us in Jesus Christ. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) **Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord.**—*The felicity of Divine trustfulness*:—I. He is blessed WITH A VITAL CONNECTION WITH THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE. His soul is rooted in the fountain of life. 1. His intellect is rooted in God's truths. 2. His sympathy is rooted in God's character. 3. His activity is rooted in God's plan. II. He is blessed with MORAL FRESHNESS AT ALL TIMES. He has permanent beauty. There are two reasons why the most beautiful evergreen tree in nature must fail. 1. Because it is limited in its own essence. No tree has unbounded potentialities; though it live for centuries it will grow itself out, exhaust all its latent force. Not so with the soul. It has unending powers of growth. 2. Because it is limited in its supplies. The river at its roots may dry up; the nutriment in its soil it may exhaust. Not so with the soul; its roots strike into the inexhaustible fountain of life. Its leaf shall be green,—ever green. III. He is blessed WITH MORAL CALMNESS IN TRYING SEASONS. The position of such a tree is independent; its roots have struck deep into the eternities, and it defies the storms of time. IV. He is blessed WITH MORAL FRUITFULNESS WITHOUT END (*Gal. v. 22*). A good man is ever useful, an ever productive tree to the hungry, an ever welling fountain to the parched, an ever burning lamp to the benighted. (*Homilist.*) *The blessedness of trust*:—I. LOOK AT MAN AS FITTED FOR TRUST. He is simply the most dependent creature in the world. In a hundred ways man is more dependent than any other animal that lives. Of all creatures he comes into the world the most utterly helpless, as if his weakness should be impressed upon his earliest being. By far the greater part of

all other living things are at once able to take their place and care for themselves. See the child in its mother's arms unable to do anything for itself, needing continual care and tenderest pity and constant provision. See, too, how in the case of man this dependence is prolonged immensely beyond that of any other being. The child of three or four years is vastly more helpless than any other creature of three or four months, and for many years after that the child needs to be provided for in a thousand ways. It is not too much to say that of the allotted span of human life one-quarter is spent in complete dependence upon others for food and clothing and shelter and teaching. Again, in the case of every other creature this dependence is quickly forgotten. Nature makes haste to sever the tie that binds the parent to the offspring, but in the case of the man it is prolonged until the reason can perceive it and the memory of it is made imperishable. Why this helplessness? Does it not involve a heavy burden upon the busy and toiling? Where, then, is the compensation? It is this, that out of this dependence grows the Divine relationship of father, mother, and child,—that blessed trinity in unity. So out of his littleness is born his nobility; and he is fashioned in helplessness that he may learn the blessed mystery of trust. Look at a further unfolding of this truth. The dependence of which we have spoken does not end with childhood. Strange as it may seem, yet it would be true to say that the man is more dependent than the child. Increased knowledge brings increased care. Greater strength brings greater need. The dependence of the child becomes the dependence of the man upon his brothers. Contrast man for a moment with the other creatures in his need of organisation, combination, co-operation. What thousands of hands must toil for us that our commonest wants may be met. To how many am I debtor for a crust of bread! And here again, let us ask, What is the purpose of this dependence? Is not man often hampered by it? Does it not open the door for arrogance and pride, for cruel bondage and slavery? But do you not see how by this very dependence man is to learn further the mystery and blessedness of trust? And dependence is to develop the further nobleness that binds men into a brotherhood. But the needs of childhood which are met by the parents, and the needs of man which are met by his fellow-man, are not all nor even most of all. Besides these are a thousand wants, deep, mysterious, and pressing more heavily than any others. No other creature has a future. Of all else a present want is the only suffering; a present supply is the satisfaction. But to us the future is ever most of all. The past is gone away behind us; the present is ever slipping from us; the future only seems to be ours. For the very food he eats man is compelled ever to be looking forward. What is reason but a clearer sight of our helplessness? The forward-looking creature, looking whither? Who can help him here? Only man has a sense of death. All roads lead to the grave. Here no parent can help the child: no man can help his neighbour. What then can he make his trust? Again, only man has a consciousness of sin. A whole world's altars and temples and sacrifices are its doleful confession: we have sinned! Now for these greater needs, is there no remedy,—no rest? What is the good of all else if here the man is to be forsaken? II. AND HERE IS GOD REVEALED THAT HE MAY BE TRUSTED. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord." Does trust need power? Here is the Almighty. Lo, He sitteth upon the throne of the universe and all things serve Him. Does trust demand the unchanging, the everlasting? Does trust need wisdom? Here is all that my want can ever desire. But these attributes, whilst trust demands them all and whilst they make trust blessed, do not win my trust. My heart needs more. And blessed be God, a great deal more is given. Trust needs love. And yet one thing more is needful to perfect trust. Trust is born of fear: and fear is born of sin. How can I who have sinned against God draw near to Him? Till that question is answered God is but a terror to me. Love may pity: love may weep: but true love cannot hush up and hide my sin. Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. My sin is not hidden. It is brought out into the very face of heaven and hell: and there its penalty is met and satisfied. Have you found this blessedness? (*M. G. Pearson.*) *Trusting in the Lord*.—I. WHAT IT IS. 1. The object. (1) He who always was. (2) He whose being is in and of Himself (Acts xvii. 25–28). (3) He who gives being and fulfilment to His Word (Exod. vi. 1–4; Jer. xxiii. 7, 8). (4) He who is our kinsman by incarnation (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; Isa. xxviii. 16; 1 Tim. iii. 16). 2. The disposition of the heart toward this object. "Trusteth Me," i.e.—(1) Knows. (2) Approves. (3) Relies on. (4) Waits for. II. THE BLESSEDNESS, OR PRIVILEGES, OF SUCH A MAN. 1. He shall lay faster hold on God and religion. 2. He shall not feel the

weight of trials. 3. He shall hold fast his profession when others drop off. 4. He shall be sustained in old age and death. 5. He shall not cease from yielding fruit—(1) Under trials; (2) In death; (3) To eternity. (*H. Foster.*) *Trust in God*.—**I. TRUST IN GOD IS AN HONOUR WE OWE TO THE SUPREMACY OF THE DIVINE NATURE, AND IT IS A DEGREE OF IDOLATRY TO PLACE IT ON ANY OTHER BEING.** 1. This duty implies positively an entire resignation to the wisdom, a dependence on the power, and a firm assurance of the goodness and veracity of God. 2. Negatively this duty implies that we should withdraw our confidence from all inferior beings; and in order to this we must begin at home, put off all trust in ourselves, our parts, abilities or acquisitions, how great or how many soever they may be. **II. CONSIDER WHEN THIS TRUST IS GROUNDED AS IT OUGHT TO BE, OR WHAT CONDITIONS ARE REQUIRED ON OUR PART TO ASSURE OUR CONFIDENCE IN THE FAVOUR AND PROTECTION OF GOD.** The most important qualification for a successful performance of these duties, is a sincere obedience to the laws of God, an unfeigned devotion of the heart to His service, a steady adherence to the faith, and a purity and holiness of life agreeable to the precepts of our religion. **III. THE BLESSEDNESS OF HIM WHO CAN THUS TRUST AND HOPE IN THE LORD.** He relies on a wisdom who sees the utmost consequence of things, on a power which nothing can obstruct, on a goodness of infinite affection to his happiness, and who has bound Himself by promise never to fail those who trust in Him. If this God be with us, who or what can be against us? But if He be angry, all our other dependencies will profit us nothing, our strength will be but weakness, and our wisdom folly; every other support will fail under us when we come to lean upon it, and deceive us in the day when we want it most. (*John Rogers, D.D.*) *On trust in God*.—**I. WHAT IS A JUST CONFIDENCE IN GOD?** This duty implies an humble dependence on Him for that protection and those blessings which His supreme perfections both enable and incline Him to bestow on His creatures; a full conviction of His goodness and mercy; and a steady hope, that that mercy will, on all occasions, in all our dangers and necessities, be extended to us, in such a manner as to His wisdom appears most conducive, if not to our tranquillity in this life, to our everlasting felicity in the next. This duty can hardly be so far misapprehended as to repress the efforts of industry, or be supposed to supersede the necessity of due care and application to the employment and duties of our respective stations. For we have no grounds to expect that God will provide for our interests, if we are improvident ourselves; or that He will, by a particular interposition, favour the idle and the negligent. Let the duty and business of to-day be our concern; the event of to-morrow we may trust to God. **II. WHEN OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD IS WELL GROUNDED.** Our confidence must rise or fall, according to the progress or defects of our obedience. Conscious of right intentions, and approved by our own heart, we may approach the throne of grace with superior assurance. If our heart in some degree condemn us, we may have our intervals of diffidence and apprehension; but, if, unreclaimed, we go on still in wickedness, and persist in determined disobedience; should we then trust in God, it were, in the most literal and criminal sense, to hope against hope. Till we repent, and return to duty, we can have no expectations of favour, no confidence in our Maker; nor can we lift up our eyes to heaven with any hopes of mercy and forgiveness there. **III. THE HAPPINESS RESULTING FROM A WELL-GROUNDED DEPENDENCE ON GOD.** He whose conscience speaks consolation, and bids him confide in his God, confides in a wisdom which sees the remotest issues of all events, on a power which ordereth all things, and on a goodness which ever consults the well-being of His creatures. And though this gives him no absolute insurance against evils, no privilege of exemption from calamities and afflictions; yet he feels the weight of them much abated by internal consolations. He acquiesces in all the dispensations of heaven, submits with humble resignation to the severities of providence; assured that God alone can know what is best, what is most expedient in his present circumstances, and what most instrumental to his future felicity. In the darkest night of affliction, some light will spring up, some beam of joy dart upon his mind, from this consideration, that the God whom he serves is able to deliver, and in His own good time will deliver him out of all his troubles, or reward him with joys unspeakable in His own blissful presence. (*G. Carr.*) *Making God our trust*.—**I. THE SOUL'S RIGHT AND ONLY TRUST.** 1. We owe it to the supremacy of the Divine nature. 2. Entire resignation to God's wisdom and will. 3. Entire withdrawal of our trust from all inferior things. 4. Sincere acceptance of Christ as our Saviour. 5. Sincere effort to live a holy and pious life. **II. THE BLESSEDNESS WITH WHICH GODLY TRUST IS CROWNED.** This may be seen by contrast with the unbeliever,

1. The objects of the unbeliever's trust are uncertain and insignificant; the believer's, certain and glorious. 2. The one inadequate and perishing; the other, all-sufficient and abiding. 3. The one bears a burdened conscience and a character ill at ease; the other enjoys peace and rest. 4. The one regards God as his foe, and resembles the inferior objects of his trust; the other regards God as his friend, enjoys His protection and fellowship and resembles Him. Learn—I. Not to be deluded by inferior things. 2. Seek this blessing by submission to God's will in a crucified Saviour. (*E. Jerman.*) *Shall not God be trusted?*—Manton says, "If a man promise, they reckon much of that; they can tarry upon man's security, but count God's Word nothing worth. They can trade with a factor beyond seas, and trust all their estate in a man's hands whom they have never seen; and yet the Word of the infallible God is of little regard and respect with them, even then when He is willing to give an earnest of the promised good." It is noteworthy that in ordinary life small matters of business are transacted by sight, and articles valued by pence are paid for over the counter: for larger things we give cheques which are really nothing but pieces of paper made valuable by a man's name; and in the heaviest transactions of all, millions change from hand to hand without a coin being seen, the whole depending upon the honour and worth of those who sign their hands. What then? shall not the Lord be trusted? Ay, with our whole being and destiny. It ought to be the most natural thing in all the world to trust God; and to those who dwell near Him it is so. Where should we trust but in Him who has all power and truth and love within Himself? We commit ourselves into the hands of our faithful Creator and feel ourselves secure. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 8. *Shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green.—Verdure in the midst of desolation:—*I. THE FACT ITSELF. Meets us everywhere in the natural world. So also in the kingdom of grace. Spiritual health depends not only or mainly on our circumstances, but on the temper and state of our souls. In cottage, in palace; in want, in affluence; in retirement, on busy Exchange; in youth, in age; in health, in disease and sickness, God's Enochs have "walked with God." Look, then, within for source of weakness, decay, low spiritual state. II. THE EXPLANATION. 1. He lives in constant believing communion with God. 2. He improves what advantages he possesses. 3. He retains the good he receives. 4. He sedulously improves and turns to account the grace he has. (*Islay Burns.*) *The continuousness of true progress:—*True religion takes such a thorough hold upon all the deeply seated principles of our nature—so fastens itself upon the entire soul, that the high probability is, that where it has once commenced it will continue. I. THE PRINCIPLE OF INQUIRY IS AN INFLUENTIAL FORCE IN HUMAN NATURE, AND TRUE RELIGION IS SUITED TO MAINTAIN A MASTER HOLD UPON THAT. Does religion proscribe any field of thought? Does it bolt any of the golden gates of science? No; it throws open the whole domain of truth, and spreads it forth, not only in all its amplitude to the mind, but in lights and colours of special fascination and charm. The mere speculative theist "looks through nature up to nature's God"; but the truly religious thinker feels that God is both philosophically and emotionally nearer to him than nature, and he looks through God down upon nature's mighty realms, and thus increases the charms of nature a thousandfold. Does not the picture appear in new beauties, after love for the artist has risen in the heart of the spectator? And does not the universe burst into new glories upon the vision of that man in whose heart supreme love for the Creator has been produced? But it may be said, granting that religion lays open all the realms of science, and heights, incomparably, its charms; may it not be, that in the course of time the intellect may become so conversant with all truth, as to have neither need nor motive for future inquiry, and thereby religion would lose this master hold upon man? We think not. Who shall count the number of God's works, or describe the vastness of His universe? II. THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE IS A MIGHTY POWER IN HUMAN NATURE, AND TRUE RELIGION IS SUITED TO MAINTAIN A MASTER HOLD UPON THAT. Love is the spring and spirit of the universe. And, thank God, it is, notwithstanding our depravity, the strongest force in our nature still. Now, religion calls out this powerful element in our nature in its two most powerful forms, namely, gratitude and admiration. How powerfully does gratitude bind us to our benefactors. The language of the heart to such is, "entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee." Kindness is might of the highest order; by it we can take hold of men's strength, grasp their very souls, and bind them to us by indissoluble bonds. Nor is love, in the form of admiration,

a weaker force. When it is directed to artistic beauty, it is powerful; when it is directed to natural beauty, it is more powerful still; but when it is directed to moral beauty, it is most powerful of all. Beauty carries captive the soul. The fine painting is attractive; the magnificent landscape more attractive still; the true hero, the embodiment of the highest moral qualities, is most attractive of all. So long, therefore, as the supreme love of gratitude and admiration are directed to God, the soul must, from its very nature, be vitally allied to Him. And is not this love, where it has once been awakened, likely to continue? III. THE PRINCIPLE OF RIGHTNESS IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN HUMAN NATURE, AND TRUE RELIGION IS SUITED TO MAINTAIN A MASTER HOLD UPON THAT. Men under the influence of conscience have voluntarily braved the greatest perils, endured the greatest sufferings, and made the greatest sacrifices. Looking at the power and history of this element of our nature, there is a high probability that those attachments and enterprises will be lasting which secure its entire sympathy and sanction. And are not such pre-eminently the attachments and enterprises of a truly religious life? Does not conscience, this monarch energy of the soul, not only sanction supreme love to God, and entire consecration to His service, but imperiously demand it? IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF HOPE IS A STRONG FORCE IN HUMAN NATURE, AND TRUE RELIGION IS SUITED TO MAINTAIN A MASTER HOLD UPON THAT. The best and choicest blessings are ever in the region of hope—a region all flowers and fruit, and sunshine; across whose beautiful landscapes there never sweeps the withering blight or the furious storm, and whose suns and stars are never dimmed by cloud nor mist. Now, the probability of a man's continuance in any enterprise, depends greatly upon its connection with hope. Half the working world toil on in their respective lines of action, not for the sake of present results, but for the sake of what hope has promised them in the future. What connection has the religious life with this hope? Does the religious enterprise hold out any bright prospect? If in connection with religion there should ever come a time when there was nothing more to expect, religion would lose much of its power over man, and there would be a strong probability of a relapse. But if the prospect widened and brightened as the man advanced, would not the chances of a retrogression decrease with every successive step? This is just the fact in a religious life; the more actually attained, the more prospectively appears. V. THE PRINCIPLE OF HABIT IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN HUMAN NATURE, AND TRUE RELIGION IS SUITED TO MAINTAIN A MASTER HOLD UPON THAT. The power of this principle is universally acknowledged, and in some cases is felt invincible. In the history of sin its force is the most striking. All the crimes in the long black narrative of human guilt you may trace, in a great measure, to habit. Every sinful act is another cord woven into that mighty cable of habit, which binds the spirit to the throne of darkness—a fresh momentum added to the falling soul. Now, if habit is so powerful in binding to sin, our position is, that it becomes more powerful in binding to holiness. 1. Because, in the one case, the man's conscience—the very root of his spiritual nature—is in favour of his present course, and against change; in the other case, the whole force of his conscience is against the present mode of life, and is perpetually demanding reformation. 2. Because, in the one case, Divine influence is ever present to stimulate and to cheer the spirit on; but in the other, the whole tide of this influence rolls in powerful opposition. 3. Because, in the one case, there are no unquestionable instances of change; in the other, instances abound on every hand; every conversion to God is an example. (*Homilist.*) *The triumph of trust*.—The laurel, saith King, is never thunderstruck. Sure it is that he who trusteth in God taketh no hurt; his heart is fixed and immovable to endure things almost incredible. True trust will certainly triumph at length. (*John Trapp.*) *Fruit expected from the Church*.—A church is like a great tree in the desert which holds out the promise of fruit, and towards which all the spiritually hungry turn. There can be few sadder things in this world than a church, promising by its very name, by its spire pointing to heaven, by its open doors, by its songs and services, by its bells of invitation, to give food to the hungry, refreshment to the weary, comfort to the sorrowing, and then failing to keep its promises to the souls that come expecting. (*J. H. Miller.*)

Ver. 9. *The heart is deceitful above all things.*—*The deceitfulness of the human heart*.—I. WE ARE TO CONSIDER WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SINNERS KNOWING THEIR OWN HEARTS. They know that they have hearts, which are distinct from perception, reason, conscience, and all their intellectual powers and faculties. But this knowledge of their hearts is not that which is intended

in the text. For in this sense they may perfectly know their own hearts, while they remain entirely ignorant of them in other important respects. 1. Their knowing their hearts in the sense of the text, implies the knowledge of their selfishness. Saints love those who do not love them; but sinners love those only who do love them; and all the criminality of their hearts consists in their partial, interested affections. They may love all the objects that saints love, and hate all the objects that saints hate; and yet all their affections be different, in their nature, from the affections of saints. Whether they love or hate good or bad objects, still their love and hatred are entirely sinful, because they are altogether selfish. This they are not apt to know, nor believe. 2. The knowledge of their hearts implies the knowledge of their desperate, incurable wickedness. There is no hope of their ever becoming better from any motives that can be set before them, or from any means which can be used with them. And until sinners see their hearts in this light, they are unacquainted with them, and know not the nature and depth of their own depravity. 3. Their knowing their own hearts implies their knowing their extreme deceitfulness. II. WHY IT IS SO EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO GAIN THIS KNOWLEDGE. 1. They are unwilling to know their own hearts. This is true of all sinners. "He that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." 2. Another thing which renders it still more difficult for them to know their own hearts, is what the Scripture calls the deceitfulness of sin. All sin is selfishness, and all selfishness is deceitful. They love or hate all objects, just as they view them as having a favourable or unfavourable aspect, in respect to themselves. In particular—(1) They love or hate God, just as He appears friendly or unfriendly to them. (2) They love or hate Christ, accordingly as He appears to be their friend or their enemy. (3) They love or hate good men, just as they appear for them or against them. (4) They love and hate one another, just as they appear to promote or obstruct their interest. Herod and Pontius Pilate. (5) They love or hate the world in which they live, accordingly as it smiles or frowns upon them. (6) They love and hate their own hearts, as they appear to promise good or threaten evil to them. (7) Their hearts lead them to love or hate the means of grace, accordingly as they appear to do them good or hurt. (8) They love or hate convictions, accordingly as they appear to have a favourable or unfavourable aspect upon their future happiness. (9) They love or hate heaven according to the views they have of it. When they view it as a place of perfect and perpetual happiness, they love it, and desire to take up their everlasting residence in it. But when they view it as a place of pure and perfect holiness, they hate it, and prefer to run the risk of everlasting separation from it, rather than to enter into the presence of a holy God, and into the society of perfectly holy beings. Improvement—1. We learn that there is but one way for men to know their own hearts; and that is, to inquire why they love or hate, rejoice or mourn, hope or fear, or why they exercise submission, patience and confidence. 2. We learn that saints may more easily ascertain their true character, than sinners can theirs. They sincerely desire to know their own hearts; and they are willing to take the only proper way to discover their true character. 3. It appears that all the changes that mankind meet with in the course of life, are trials of the heart. All changes in men's circumstances, whether great or small, whether from prosperity to adversity, or from adversity to prosperity, try their hearts, and give them opportunity every day to know whether they are in a state of nature, or in a state of grace. 4. It appears from the wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart, that it is not strange that religious apostasy has prevailed so much in the world. 5. It appears that those are unwise who trust in their own hearts. 6. We learn that sinners are never under genuine convictions until they see the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of their hearts. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The deceitfulness of the heart*:—The ancients supposed the soul to reside in the heart; and when they spake of the heart, they meant the soul which resided there. In the passage before us the prophet means the thoughts, the will, the desires, the affections of the soul of man. I. THE INCONSTANCY OF THE HEART. To a certain extent, the inconstancy of the heart is perhaps natural and unavoidable. Everything around us is shifting, changing. Our judgment, our views, our feelings, our passions seem subject to perpetual vicissitude. A good resolution has been formed; but the fervour has soon abated; and the poor heart, which loves to change, has but too quickly followed its natural inclination. This propensity may be referred, in a measure, to the union of the soul with the body. But the

chief reason is to be found in the darkness and uncertainty of the mind as to its real good. II. THE UNFAITHFULNESS OF THE HEART. Eagerly do we make promises in the hour of affliction—but we forget them in prosperity! In sickness, we have made a thousand resolutions—in health, we have forgotten them all! III. THE SELF-LOVE WHICH OUR HEARTS EXHIBIT. Here a man is full of what he calls zeal for religion, and sees not that his supposed zeal for religion is only zeal for his own party, and that it is only exercised from a wish to gain attention and respect from men. Another is full of zeal for correctness of opinion; and sees not that it is the manifestation of unholy passions. But oh, who can say by how many various methods men cover themselves from themselves! IV. THE ILLUSIONS THE HEART IS CAPABLE OF PRACTISING ON ITSELF. It imposes on the understanding: it embellishes the scene around: it arrays every object in deceptive charms. The interest of man sways his understanding, and every object assumes a different shape and colour. And is it not so in religion? (T. F. Denham.) *Deceitfulness of the human heart*:—I. THE EXTREME DECEITFULNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART.

1. Its misrepresentation to us of outward objects. The seductive influence of the world around us is felt by all, and complained of by many; but yet it is to be remembered that this influence is nothing more than the feeling which we entertain in regard to it; it is nothing less, nor more, than our loving these outward things, our delighting in them, as though they were a real good. Now, is such a view just and right? The influence that is grafted so deep upon us is after all nothing more than a delusion as to the sentiments which we hold in reference to the whole world, its fashions, its pleasures, its joys, and its gains. 2. Its perversion of the truth. How is it that there can be such different sentiments in respect to the Deity of the Messiah; in respect to the reality of free and sovereign grace as the only source and means of salvation; in regard to the truth and reality and necessity of the atonement; of our acceptance before God—the Holy and the Just? Who does not see that there must somewhere lurk some secret wish that the truth should be either as the mind imagines it, or perceives it to be? Who is not aware that there is deception at the bottom? 3. The false estimate which it teaches us to form of ourselves. You need not to be informed how it will magnify our excellences to our own view, and how it will diminish our defects. 4. Its repeatedly enticing us to that which we have so many times condemned and seemed to abhor. The heart may still be in love with that sin from which the conscience recoils. Oh, how sin will undermine the conscience; how sin will dissipate all our holy resolutions and desires! II. THE WICKEDNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART. Let it be remembered that the deceitfulness of the heart, of which we have before been speaking, is a part of its wickedness. The wickedness of the human heart is here spoken of as being desperate. It is a disease which has gone to the last degree, which has spread itself through all the powers of the mind, through all the vitals of the soul. Its desperateness, then, is extreme, and its hopes of improvement from any human remedy, desperate also. As it grows older it will not necessarily grow better; but, if left to itself, it will rather become worse. Nature seems to have some self-rectifying provision within her, so as to subdue some partial disorders of our constitution; but this is not the case in radical defects and fatal diseases. So it is here. There may be some propensities even in human character which may go to counteract the operation of certain others, yet these do not reach the innate character of the heart, and never will they tend to purify it. We shall not, therefore, be improved merely as we advance in knowledge—as we receive merely the chastisements of Divine providence—as we merely come under the instruction of the Word of God. No affliction would sanctify, no outward means would purify—the grace of God alone is adequate to the work. III. LET US ENDEAVOUR TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, “WHO CAN KNOW IT?” This is merely a strong negative in regard to human knowledge. No human being knows the heart of his fellow-man, nor his own heart. He knows not the deep recesses of iniquity which are there. Much has been developed through the history of life, but there remains much more. “None can know it.” We dwell not on this, but we answer according to the intimation of the next verse, God only knows it. God knows it, and He has His eye upon it. All your thoughts have been known to Him, and the effect of all your wilful perversions of the truth, all your attempts to put away from you the power and the effect of the impressions of His Holy Word, all your trifling with the obligations under which you have been laid, the feelings with which you have come to His house, and been listening to His Word; whether there has been a resolution to turn to God, or whether there has still been a wilful

continuance in estrangement from Him. He has seen it all ; and if He has seen it all, He knows it, and He will deal with it as it deserves. Oh, what an awful consideration, that sinners are in the hands of an Omnipotent Being, who will give to every man according as his work has been ! But there is another thought—that is, He can deal with us according to the necessity of the case. He has grace in abundance, and He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. (*J. Griffin.*) *Deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart*.—I. THE HEART IS DECEITFUL. 1. The heart denotes the inner man, his thoughts, his will, his inclinations, and his affections ; or the human soul with its faculties and operations. (1) It is deceitful with relation to God ; for we often promise Him what we do not perform, and endeavour to put Him off with external homage, and with a partial obedience. (2) It is deceitful with respect to other men ; we industriously conceal from them what passeth within us, and is not fit to show itself openly, and we study to cheat them with false appearances. (3) It is deceitful with regard to ourselves ; and our passions often delude us, pervert our judgment, and impose upon our reason. 2. Many causes may be assigned for it. (1) We are changeable by that connection which the soul hath with the body, and with the state of the body which is subject to perpetual alterations. (2) We are inconstant on account of the connection that we have with external objects by our senses. Everything that presents itself before us makes an impression upon the mind. The manners, the opinions, and the passions of those with whom we often converse have no small influence upon us. They work upon our imagination, and produce the like dispositions in us which we behold in them. (3) Another cause of inconstancy is from the soul itself in its present situation ; it loves novelty and variety. II. THE HEART OF MAN IS DESPERATELY WICKED. To be sensible how men in general are depraved ; we need only consult history, and consider the common state of the world. These will give us a hideous representation of human disorders and iniquities, both public and private, national and personal. The desperate wickedness of many is such, that nothing but rigour, nothing but jails and gibbets can keep civil society in tolerable order. Who can number up the sins which men are perpetually committing ? and all these proceed from an evil heart, as our Saviour says. To give some check to this inundation of evil, the providence of God hath provided various remedies ; as the voice of conscience, the advantages of education, the instructions of the wise, the assistance of human laws, the example of the good, the desire of reputation, the fear of infamy, the light of reason, the profitability of virtue, the pernicious nature of vice, and, lastly, the revealed Word of God. Yet, notwithstanding these correctives, we see and feel how moral evil abounds, even where the Gospel is professed. III. THE HEART OF MAN IS INSCRUTABLE. Who can know it ? says the prophet. That is ; No man can know it ; or rather, It is no easy matter to know it. There is a general knowledge which we have of the human heart, and a way of judging concerning it, which in the main is tolerably sure. The tree, says our Lord, is known by the fruits ; and, in like manner, the heart is known by the actions. When a man's behaviour is vile, and his conversation profane, we may pronounce his heart to be bad ; and we are not obliged to put out our own eyes, and renounce our own senses, and to call evil good, and good evil, rather than to censure such a person, or entertain a bad opinion of him. Yet in judging of others much caution and candour are requisite. But the discernment which each person should have of his own heart is the most important. And here one would think that such skill is easily acquired, and doth in a manner obtrude itself upon us. And yet it is certain that in a religious sense it is often hard to know one's self. There are two sorts of self-knowledge, the one a knowledge of feeling and perceiving, the other a knowledge of reflection and discernment. As to the first, we all of us have it without question. It informs us only of what we are thinking or doing, but not of the nature, causes, and effects of our thoughts and deeds. As to the second and true kind of self-knowledge, which is the result of consideration and examination, we have it seldom, and we cannot acquire it without attention and care. It is strange how little we know practically either of our body, or of our understanding, or our heart. As to the body, its defects are usually overlooked by us, unless they be very remarkable, or painful. As to our understanding, we flatter ourselves that we have a due share of it, and observe how deficient our neighbours are in that respect ; how one is stupid and silly, another ignorant, a third prejudiced, injudicious, and conceited. Thus he who hath a wrong judgment and a heated imagination decides upon every point with more confidence than persons

of a far greater capacity. He who is rough, peevish, and intractable, knows nothing of it, whilst others can hardly tell how to bear with him. So true it is that we know not ourselves. A man owns himself guilty of this or that fault, but, however, he says that his heart is good and honest at the bottom. Weak illusion! since it is from the evil which lurks in the heart that these irregular actions proceed. The difficulty of knowing our hearts appears from those repeated commands in Scripture to consider and search our ways. And, indeed, it is no small task to review our knowledge, our opinions, our judgments, and our beliefs; to recollect our past actions, and the use which we have made of God's blessings, and to compare our practice with our duty. This difficulty also appears from the character which God gives to Himself, that He alone is the searcher of hearts. But observe that God, when He calls Himself the searcher of hearts, means two things; that He alone knows the hearts of all creatures, and that He alone knows them without any mixture of error. We know but little of the heart of other men, and, therefore, should be cautious in judging of them; and as to our own, though we shall never know it exactly, with all our endeavours, yet as far as we can, we are obliged to acquaint ourselves with it. Inferences—1. We should entertain a sober diffidence of ourselves. 2. We should not be much surprised or concerned when men use us ill, or disappoint us. We cannot rely upon ourselves, much less upon others. 3. We should take care to give good principles and a good example to those young persons whom Divine or human laws have placed under our guidance and protection. 4. We should be ready to confess our offences to God, and be as strict in censuring our own defects as we often are in condemning those of others. 5. Since the heart of man is deep and close, we should betimes endeavour to get acquainted with our own. But if it be hard to know ourselves, how can we acquire such skill in a tolerable degree? By humility and consideration, by consulting the Holy Scripture, that lamp of God which will give us light in searching into the recesses of the heart; and by imploring the Divine assistance. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *Deceitfulness of the heart*:—That is properly called deceitful which presents objects in a false light, or leads to a misconception of the nature of things within us and around us. And that is properly called deceitful which conceals its own true character, and assumes the appearance of what it is not. 1. One of the ways in which the deceitfulness of the heart manifests itself is in its tendency to blind the understanding in regard to religious truth. To have the mind darkened with ignorance, or perverted by error, is inconsistent with the exercise of holiness, or the practice of true virtue. Evidence is always on the side of truth; but that evidence may be overlooked, or so distorted, that the truth may not be perceived, and instead of it error may be embraced and defended as truth. The reason why the minds of men reject the truth is, the depravity of the heart. Infidelity, and every species of dangerous error, may be traced to the deceitfulness of the heart. If men possessed good and honest hearts, they would search diligently for the truth, and would be disposed to judge impartially of its evidence; and, as was said, evidence being on the side of truth, and the truth congenial with the moral feelings of the upright mind, it would always be embraced. Atheism itself is a disease rather of the heart than of the head. And idolatry, which darkens with its portentous shadows a large portion of our globe, owes its origin to the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart. 2. The exceeding deceitfulness of the heart appears in the delusive promises of pleasure, which it makes, in the indulgence of sinful desires. This is so uniformly the fact, that it is a common remark that men enjoy more pleasure in the pursuit of the objects of the world, than in their possession. This delusion of pleasure in prospect, particularly affects the young. With them experience is wanting, which serves to correct this error of the imagination; but even experience is insufficient to cure the disease. In this matter, the world does not become wiser by growing older. There is another deception of the heart which has relation to the indulgence of natural desires. The person may be apprehensive at first, from former experience, that some evil to soul or body may arise from unlawful indulgence. A pause is produced, and hesitation is felt; but appetite, when strong, pleads for indulgence, and is fruitful in pleas; among which none is more false and deceitful, than that if gratified in this instance, it will never crave indulgence any more. And this false promise often prevails with the vacillating sinner; and he plunges into the gulf, which is open to receive him. 3. Under the influence of an evil heart, everything appears in false colours. Not only does error assume the garb of truth, but piety itself is made to appear odious. Indeed, there is

nothing upon earth which the carnal mind hates so truly as holiness. But as that which appears good cannot be hated, one art of the deceitful heart is, to misrepresent the true nature of piety and devotion. The fairest face when caricatured, becomes deformed, and appears ludicrous. 4. The deceitfulness of the heart is also exceedingly manifest in the false pretensions which it makes, and the delusive appearances which it assumes. And this deceitfulness not only imposes upon others, but upon the person himself. Under this delusion, men persuade themselves that they are not wicked, but that their hearts are good. Their virtues, or semblance of virtues, are magnified, when seen through the false medium of self-love; and their vices are so diminished, that they are either not seen, or appear as mere peccadilloes, scarcely deserving notice. Such persons are also deceived as to their own wisdom. But the most dangerous form of this deceit is, when persons, never converted or renewed, are induced to believe that they are saints. 5. The deceitfulness of the heart is manifest in the good which we promise ourselves that we will do in future. But the true test of character is, what we are actually doing at the present time. Do we now, from day to day, do all the good which is in our power? Do we now improve our time and talents to the utmost? If we do not, then does our heart deceive us, as to its own real disposition? 6. Another way in which our hearts deceive us is, by leading us to judge of ourselves, not by a strict scrutiny into our real motives, but by viewing our character through the medium of public opinion, or through the favourable sentiments of our partial friends. Reflections—1. If the heart be so exceedingly deceitful and wicked, we should be deeply humbled before God that we have hearts so evil. 2. If the heart be so deceitful, we should place no confidence in it. 3. If the heart be so deceitful, it should be watched with care. 4. From the state and character of the heart here given, we may infer the necessity of a change of heart; and everyone should be led to cry to God for renewing grace. 5. We should come often to the fountain which is opened for sin and uncleanness. 6. If any of us have been made sensible of the deceitfulness and wickedness of our hearts, and have, in some degree, been delivered from this great evil of our nature, this change, we are sure, has not proceeded from ourselves. (*A. Alexander, D.D.*)

The deceitfulness of the heart:—Unless we are affected, permanently and practically, with the corruption of our nature, all other points of Christian doctrine connected with it, supposing we even admit their truth, must be mere speculation, un-affecting in their influence, unprofitable in their results. I. THE UNPARALLELED DECEITFULNESS, AND DESPERATE WICKEDNESS OF THE HEART. This appears from the following considerations: That it is able to evade the most pointed applications of Divine truth, to resist the most powerful convictions of the Divine Spirit, and to violate the most serious resolutions of the awakened conscience. 1. One might imagine that the unprofitableness and danger of living in a spirit and temper so much below the spirit and temper of real Christians would, when faithfully disclosed, have the effect of awakening solicitude in the minds of those persons whose everlasting condition is so deeply involved. But how often would these expectations be disappointed! Every person makes the application for his neighbour, saying, "Thou art the man"; and with great dexterity evades it himself. 2. When the devotional spirit, the heavenly temper, the holy conduct of the Christian are faithfully described; when his motives and principle, his affections, his objects, and his aims, are disclosed, it is natural to suppose that worldly men, by contrasting all this with their own spirit and temper and conduct, with their own motives and principles and affections, with their own objects and aims so directly the reverse, would be humbled and confounded. But how often are men satisfied with admiring the beauty of holiness, without imitating it; or with pronouncing holiness impracticable, without endeavouring to practise it! 3. In order to give power and efficacy to the Gospel, the Holy Spirit accompanies it to the heart and conscience, and causes men to see its vast importance, and to feel its mighty influence on the soul. Who can think of death, judgment, and eternity; of heaven and hell; of glory, honour, and immortality; and of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched; in connection with his own sins; with redemption; with that newness of heart and newness of life which are taught as necessary to prepare him for the inheritance of the saints in light, without either believing that all these are idle speculations, or concluding that religion is no vain thing? Who has not had the conviction so natural, so true, and so awful, that if he is not prepared to come to the table of the Lord, he is not prepared to meet his God? Have you not the conviction that your life is

inconsistent with the piety required of communicants? But how deceitful is the heart which is able to resist these convictions, and to allow you from time to time to go on in the same course of negligence, disobedience, and ingratitude! 4. How little the heart is to be trusted in the things that belong to our peace, is evident from the many resolutions to serve God, which almost every heart has violated, that has been influenced by the truth as it is in Jesus. When we are most determined against iniquity, most shocked with the idea of committing it, and most persuaded that we are steadfast, then we are most in danger. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" is language which is seldom used without being followed by the commission of the very sin of which we thought ourselves utterly incapable. II. THE NECESSITY OF BEING AWARE OF ITS DECEITFULNESS AND WICKEDNESS. 1. It is the most difficult knowledge. There are so many mixtures in the motives of the heart, so many windings, so much duplicity and insincerity, so much false profession and false appearance, that it is impossible thoroughly to comprehend it. Not only can no man trust the heart of another, but no man can trust his own. 2. It is the most disagreeable knowledge. Nothing is so mortifying to our pride. Hence, instead of searching for the deceitfulness and wickedness of our hearts, we feel a strong temptation to let it lie concealed, to shut our eyes against the light, and to avoid the disquietude arising from the discovery of what is so humbling. 3. It is the most desirable knowledge which we can obtain. It is the knowledge of our own deceitful and desperately wicked hearts that renders us careful of our own souls; that humbles us; that leads us to the Saviour; that makes Jesus Christ precious to us; that constrains us to seek the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; that sends us to our Bible, to the throne of grace, and to the table of the Lord. (*M. Jackson.*) *The central principle in man*:—Few men are acquainted with themselves. With the principles of commerce, political economy, scientific investigation, classical criticism, theologic research, ecclesiastical history, they are more familiar than with the secrets of their own nature, and features and motives of their own character. The source of every evil, the secret of all felicity, is not touched until the heart is reached and scrutinised. I. UNREGENERATE HUMAN NATURE IS ENTIRELY UNTRUSTWORTHY. "Deceitful above all things." 1. It distorts the character of God. "God is merciful"—often a plea for continuance in sin. 2. It misrepresents the means of human felicity. Young persons flatter themselves that they have but to drink fully of the cup of earthly pleasure to be really happy. No greater mistake. Others seek it in the acquisition of wealth, settling it in their mind that he who has most gold has most happiness. 3. It perverts the way of salvation. Rites, penances, frames, and conditions are piled up until the Saviour is either hid or barely seen. 4. It misrepresents the nature and excellence of true religion. Does religion include humbleness of mind? The deceitful heart declares that it is "a silly weakness." Does religion include meekness of disposition? The deceitful heart stigmatises it as foolish fastidiousness. A spirit of forgiveness is despised as unmanly. Tenderness of conscience is condemned as ridiculous precision. Spirituality of mind is designated canting hypocrisy, and purity of heart and life a thing impossible. 5. It disguises the true character of sin. "Vice is first pleasing, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed; then the sinner is independent, then obstinate, then he resolves never to repent; then he dies, then he is damned." 6. It deceives itself and endeavours to deceive God (*Mal. i. 14*). 7. It surpasses in treachery everything else. The mossy swards, the ocean, the desert mirage, the morning bright with sunshine, are all deceitful; but not more so than the human heart. Inconstant as the wind, uncertain as riches, ever betraying and betrayed, who would trust it? II. UNRENEWED HUMAN NATURE IS FEARFULLY DEPRAVED—"desperately wicked." 1. Its corruption is desperate. "Wicked to desperation." Hence the deeds of violence and despair which prevail. 2. Its corruption is unsearchable. "Who can know it?" Think of Pharaoh insolently rejecting the commands of Jehovah, in spite of plagues and pestilence. Think of Manasseh, Saul, and Peter boasting, then denying his Saviour with oaths and curses. Learn—1. The necessity of regeneration. Nothing but "a new heart" will meet the requirements of the case. Hence David: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Hence the promise in Ezekiel: "A new heart will I give unto you." 2. The necessity for self-distrust. "He that trusteth his own heart is a fool." Treat it as you would a man who had deceived you in every possible way. Always act upon the supposition that it is concealing something wrong. "Keep thy heart with all

diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." (*W. H. Booth.*) *The deceitfulness of the heart*.—I. MEN IMPOSE ON THEMSELVES RESPECTING THEIR OWN CHARACTER. The human heart is a great deep: a deep so turbid by sin and agitated by passion that we cannot look into it far; a deep which no line yet has been long enough to fathom. The account in the history of the Bible of the depravity of man is not more humiliating than is the account in Tacitus and Sallust, in Hume and in Gibbon; the account in the Sacred Poets is substantially the same as in Shakespeare and Byron; the account given by Paul is the same that you will find in the books of every traveller who has penetrated the dark regions of the heathen world. You admit the account to be true of the world at large, of other men; you take securities of others; you put padlocks and bolts on your stores; you guard your houses, as if you believed it were true. Others believe the same of you; and the Bible holds all to be substantially alike—all fallen and ruined. And yet it is evident that men do not by nature attribute to themselves the character which is given of the human heart in the Bible. Who will bear to be told, though you may go with all the influence of the tender relations of friendship, and all the influence that you can take with you from any official relation, that his mind is "enmity against God"; that "in his flesh there dwelleth no good thing"; that he "is a hater of God"; that he is a "lover of pleasure, more than a lover of God"; that he is "living without God and without hope"; that his "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"? You will hear it from the desk—for you believe that it is our official duty to make the statement; and the statement is of necessity so general that no one feels himself particularly intended. But would you hear it from me, if I should come to you alone, and if I should make the statement with all the tenderness that I could assume? Is it not possible that your heart has deceived you on this point? Let me suggest a few things for your consideration. One is, that if the Bible be true, there is no such native excellence of character as you suppose you possess; for in the most solemn manner the Bible declares the whole race to be guilty, and ruined, and lost; and the Bible has such evidences of its truth and its Divine origin as should lead you to suppose it possible that its account of the human character is correct. Another consideration is, that multitudes of men who once had the same view of themselves which you have, have been convinced of their error, and have been led to accord with the account in the Bible. I allude to those who are now Christians. Another consideration is, that there is nothing easier than to deceive ourselves in this matter. You have certain traits of character which are in themselves well enough, and which may be commendable, and you exalt them in the place of others which God requires. You have a disposition that is naturally amiable and inoffensive. So has a lamb, and a dove. Is this the love of God? Is that what the law requires? You are honest and upright towards men. Is this the love of the Creator, and is this to be a substitute for repentance and faith? Are you not deceived in your estimate of your own character in regard to the love of virtue? Let me ask a few plain questions. You say you love truth. Why then resist the truth as designed to bear on your own heart and to show you what you are? You are amiable. Why not then love the Lord Jesus Christ? Has there been any one among men more amiable or lovelier than He? You love purity. Why not then love God? Is there any one more pure than He? You are aiming to do right. Why then do you not pray in the closet, and in the family, as you know you ought to do? II. MEN DECEIVE THEMSELVES IN REGARD TO THEIR REAL ATTACHMENTS. You think you have no undue attachment to a child. When the great Giver of life takes this child back to Himself, are you willing to part with it? You think you have no undue attachment to wealth. How do you feel when you are embarrassed and when others are prospered? When wind, and tide, and fire, and tempest are against you, and when others grow rich? When your property takes to itself wings and flees away, while others are enjoying the smiles of Heaven? You think you have no undue attachment to the world, and that in the influence which that world has over you, you are showing no disrespect to the commands of God. Let me ask you, is any pleasure abandoned because He commands it? Is any place of amusement forsaken because He wills it? You suppose you have some attachment to Christians, and to the Christian religion. You admit the Bible to be true, and mean to be found among the number of those who hold that its doctrines are from Heaven. Yet does the heart never deceive you in this? Is not this the truth—for I make my appeal to your own consciousness? You admit the doctrines of the Bible to be true in general;

you deny them in detail. You think you have no particular opposition to the duties of religion. But is not this the truth? You admit the obligation in general; you deny it in detail. III. **THE HEART IS DECEITFUL, IN REGARD TO ITS POWER OF RESISTING TEMPTATION.** In the halcyon days of youth and inexperience, we think that we are proof against all the forms of allurement, and we listen with no pleasurable emotions to those who would warn us of danger. We flatter ourselves that we are able to meet temptation. We confide in the strength of our principles. We trust to the sincerity of our own hearts. Professed friends meet us on the way and assure us that there is no danger. The gay, the fashionable, the rich, the beautiful, the accomplished, invite us to tread with them the path of pleasure, and to doubt the suggestions of experience and of age. We feel confident of our own safety. We suppose we may tread securely a little farther. We see no danger near. We take another step still, and yet another, thinking that we are safe yet. We have tried our virtuous principles, and thus far they bear the trial. We could retreat if we would; we mean to retreat the moment that danger comes near. But who knows the power of temptation? Who knows when dangers shall rush upon us so that we cannot escape? There is a dividing line between safety and danger. Above thundering Niagara the river spreads out into a broad and tranquil basin. All is calm, and the current flows gently on, and there even a light skiff may be guided in safety. You may glide nearer and nearer to the rapids, admiring the beauty of the shore, and looking on the ascending spray of the cataract, and listening to the roar of the distant waters, and be happy in the consciousness that you are safe. You may go a little farther, and may have power still to ply the oar to reach the bank. But there is a point beyond which human power is vain, and where the mighty waters shall seize the quivering bark and bear it on to swift destruction. So perishes many a young man by the power of temptation. IV. **THE HEART DECEIVES ITSELF IN ITS PROMISES OF REFORMATION AND AMENDMENT.** Permit me to ask of you, how many resolutions you have formed to repent and be a Christian—all of which have failed! How many times have you promised yourself, your friends, and God, that you would forsake the ways of sin and live for heaven—all of which have failed? How often have you fixed the time when you would do this? And yet that time has come and gone unimproved. At twenty, at thirty, at forty, at fifty years of age you may have resolved to turn to your Maker should you reach those periods—but on some of you the snows of winter have fallen, and yet a deceitful and a deceived heart is pointing you to some future period still. It deceived you in childhood; it deceived you in youth; it deceived you in manhood; it deceives you in old age. It has always deceived you as often as you have trusted it, in all circumstances of life—and yet you trust it still. It has deceived you oftener than you have been deceived by any and all other things—oftener than we are deceived by the false friend; oftener than the traveller is deceived by his faithless guide; oftener than the caravan is deceived by the vanished brook; oftener than the bow deceives the hunter; oftener than you have been deceived by any and all other men. There is no man whom you have not trusted more safely than your own heart; no object in nature that has been as faithless as that:—and I appeal to you if it is not deceitful above all things. Conclusion: 1. There is danger of losing the soul. 2. The heart of man is wicked. You have a heart which you yourself cannot trust. It has always deceived you. You have a heart which your fellow-men will not trust. They secure themselves by notes, and bonds, and mortgages, and oaths, and locks, and bolts;—and they will not trust you without them. You have a heart which God regards as deceitful and depraved, and in which He puts no confidence, and which He has declared to be “desperately wicked.” I ask whether that heart in which neither God nor man, in which neither we nor our friends can put confidence, is a heart that is good and pure? Is it such a heart as is fitted for heaven? I answer no—and you respond to my own deep conviction when I say it must be renewed. 3. I would conjure you to wake from these delusions to the reality of your condition. I would beseech you to look at truth, and be no longer under the control of a deceived and a deceitful heart. (*A. Barnes, D.D.*) *The deceitfulness of the heart:*—It appears—I. FROM MEN’S GENERAL IGNORANCE OF THEIR OWN CHARACTER. They think, and reason, and judge quite differently in anything relating to themselves, from what they do in those cases in which they have no personal interest. Accordingly, we often hear people exposing follies for which they themselves are remarkable, and talking with great severity against particular vices, of which, if all the world

be not mistaken, they themselves are notoriously guilty. In vain do you tender to them instruction or reproof, for they turn away everything from themselves, and never once imagine that they are the persons for whose benefit these counsels and admonitions are chiefly intended. If we trace this self-ignorance to its source, we shall find that it is in general owing, not only to that partiality and fondness which we all have for ourselves, but to the prevalence of some particular passion or interest, which prevents the judgment in every case where that particular passion or interest is concerned. And hence it happens that some men can reason and judge fairly enough, even in cases in which they themselves are interested, provided it does not strike against their favourite passion or pursuit. Thus the covetous man will easily enough perceive the evil of intemperance, and perhaps condemn himself if he has been guilty of this sin in a particular instance. But he is altogether insensible to the dominion of his predominant passion, the love of money. It has become habitual to him. His mind is accustomed to it, so that in every case, where his interest is concerned, his judgment is warped, and in these instances he plainly discovers that he is totally unacquainted with his own character. The same observation applies to other particular vices.

II. FROM MEN'S GENERAL DISPOSITION ON ALL OCCASIONS TO JUSTIFY THEIR OWN CONDUCT. If we cannot justify the action itself, we attempt to extenuate its guilt from the peculiar circumstances of the case. We were placed in such and such a particular situation, which we could not avoid; our temptations were strong: we did not go the lengths that many others would have gone in similar circumstances; and the general propriety of our conduct is more than sufficient to overbalance any little irregularities with which we may sometimes be chargeable. Men even learn to call their favourite vices by softer names. Intemperance is only the desire of good fellowship; lewdness is gallantry, or the love of pleasure; pride, a just sense of our own dignity; and covetousness, or the love of money, a prudent regard to our worldly interest. Besides these single determinate acts of wickedness, of which we have now been speaking, there are numberless cases in which the wickedness cannot be exactly defined, but consists in a certain general temper and course of action, or in the habitual neglect of some duty, whose bounds are not precisely fixed. This is the peculiar province of self-deceit, and here, most of all, men are apt to justify their conduct, however plainly and palpably wrong. To give an example: There is not a word in our language that expresses more detestable wickedness than oppression. Yet the nature of this vice cannot be so exactly stated, nor the bounds of it so determinately marked, as that we shall be able to say, in all instances, where rigid right and justice end, and oppression begins. In like manner, it is impossible to determine how much of every man's income ought to be devoted to pious and charitable purposes: the boundaries cannot be exactly marked; yet we are at no loss in the case of others to perceive the difference betwixt a liberal and generous man, and one of a hard-hearted and penurious disposition.

III. FROM THE DIFFICULTY WITH WHICH MEN ARE BROUGHT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR FAULTS, EVEN WHEN CONSCIOUS THAT THEY HAVE DONE WRONG. We wish always to entertain a favourable opinion of ourselves and of our own conduct, and are displeased with those who endeavour in any instance to change this opinion, though it be done with the best, and most friendly intention. But how unreasonable is this degree of self-love! Were we alive to our true interests, we would wish to become better acquainted with our follies and our faults, and would esteem our faithful reprovers our best friends.

IV. FROM THE DISPOSITION WHICH MEN DISCOVER TO REST IN NOTIONS AND FORMS OF RELIGION, WHILE THEY ARE DESTITUTE OF ITS POWER. Hence it is that so many are hearers of the Word only, and not doers also, deceiving their own selves. Hence it is that so many shew great zeal about small and unimportant matters in religion, who are shamefully deficient in some of its plainest and most essential duties; that so many are punctual in their observance of religious institutions, who are unjust and uncharitable in their conduct towards their fellow-creatures. Hypocrisy in all its forms and appearances flows from the deceitfulness of the heart; for in general men deceive themselves before they attempt to deceive others.

V. WHEN MEN OVERLOOK THE REAL MOTIVES OF THEIR CONDUCT, AND MISTAKE THE WORKINGS OF THEIR OWN CORRUPTIONS FOR THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD. We are greatly shocked when we read of the dreadful persecutions which in different ages have been carried on against the faithful servants of Christ; yet these men pretended zeal for the glory of God: nor is it improbable, but that many of them might so far deceive themselves as to imagine that they were

doing God service, while shedding the blood of His saints. This is indeed the highest instance of the extreme deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart, and the most awful proof of being given up of God to a reprobate mind. But, in a lesser degree, men frequently practise this kind of deceit upon themselves, ascribing to the Word and to the Spirit of God what is evidently the effect of their own ignorance, wickedness, and depravity. (*D. Black.*) *The natural characteristics of the heart*:—I. THE UNPARALLELED DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART. 1. The false views which it leads men very generally to adopt respecting the safety of their state. (1) It leads some to conclude that they are in a safe state, merely because they are free from the commission of gross sins, and not inattentive to the performance of many moral and social duties. (2) If, in addition to the external decorum just mentioned, and which, as far as it goes, is certainly commendable, there be found also a merely formal attention to some religious duties: then, in too many cases, the deceitful heart prompts the idea that there can be no doubt of the safety of the person in question; nay, that assurance is thus rendered doubly sure. (3) The deceitful heart of others will lead them to rest satisfied with a general reliance on the mercy of God; a reliance this, which may be found even in those whose lives are stained with the grossest immoralities. (4) A fourth class is led by the deceitfulness of the heart to rely for safety on the adoption of a new set of religious opinions, and on a bare and empty profession of the real truths of the Gospel. 2. The delusions which it practises upon us in reference to those sins to which we are most prone. (1) If it fail to persuade us that they are no sins at all, though this is an energy of delusion which it is mighty to practise, it will at least represent them to us as sins of a very venial nature. (2) It would represent to us that one single repetition of the indulgence may not be attended with any such dreadful consequences. (3) Notwithstanding the promise of effectual aid to all who sincerely ask for it, and the assurance that the Christian shall be enabled to do all things connected with his duty through Christ strengthening him, it would suggest the idea that resistance to the commission of the beloved sin is utterly vain (*Jer. xviii. 12*). (4) Before the commission of our favourite sin, it would dreadfully abuse the mercy of God, and lead us to expect that He will never condemn us to all eternity for a little irregular pleasure or gain; but, on the contrary, be ever ready to pardon us: while, after the commission of the sin in question, it would endeavour to secure our destruction by driving us to despair; and by representing to us that our opportunity is gone for ever, and our day of grace closed. II. ITS DESPERATE WICKEDNESS. 1. Every part of it, every one of its faculties, partakes of this depravity. (1) Even the understanding itself, however equal its powers may be to make progress in every department of literature and science, is yet on the most important of all subjects utterly blinded (*Eph. iv. 18*). (2) The judgment, however accurate in forming its estimate of matters relating to the present life, is yet so completely perverted in reference to the grand concerns of religion, that even the wisdom of God is unhesitatingly deemed by it to be nothing better than absolute foolishness (*1 Cor. i. 18, 21, 23*; *ii. 14*). (3) The will, the faculty by which we make our selection out of the various objects presented to our choice, is altogether averse to what is really good; holiness being the object of its unmitigated aversion: while there is in it a perpetual and violent inclination to what is evil. (4) The affections are set either on unlawful objects; or, if on lawful ones, yet in an unlawful and sinful degree. (5) The conscience is either mistaken in its decisions, or weak in its influence. 2. The seeds at least of every evil are invariably found there. (1) There dwells pride, swelling at the thought of every circumstance which serves in any way to elevate man above his fellow. (2) There is found that impatience which rises against God and man, when our will is crossed by them, or our expectations disappointed; that anger, which is ready to break out on the slightest provocation, or even on no provocation at all; that envy, which is ever ready to repine at the superior prosperity or excellence of another; and that hatred, which often conceals its hostile projects under the mask of apparent reconciliation. There are the seeds of that malice which delights in the misfortunes of the objects of its dislike; and of that revenge which, arrogantly assuming the prerogative of God (*Rom. xii. 19*), takes the work into its own hands. (3) It is the heart, too, in which among a host of other evils every sin of impurity is conceived and cherished (*Mark vii. 21, 22*); and which is the seat also of that unbelief which, disregarding alike the Divine promises and threatenings, is the root of every sin, of every imaginable departure from the living God (*Heb. iii. 12*). 3. Its wickedness will further appear, if we

reflect on the aggravating circumstances under which it will prompt to the commission of our darling sin. (1) A man shall be thoroughly convinced of the sinfulness of the action on the commission of which he is bent; shall be thoroughly convinced that those who do such things are worthy of the Divine condemnation; and yet his heart shall urge him to commit it in defiance of such conviction. (2) It would urge a man to sin, notwithstanding the most solemn vows and resolutions: notwithstanding, as in the case of the profane swearer, his sin be attended with neither profit nor pleasure: in defiance, too, of every means which God in mercy makes use of to restrain him from the commission of it. III. INSCRUTABLE. "Who can know it?" 1. But when we speak of the impossibility of thoroughly penetrating the inmost recesses of the heart, we speak in reference to created beings only. With regard to the omniscient God, He is one who "searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts" (Chron. xxviii. 9): nay, He understandeth our thoughts "afar off" (Psa. cxxxix. 2), knows them before they are conceived. 2. Neither, when we say that the heart is inscrutable, do we mean to deny that a very considerable knowledge of it, a knowledge which is sufficient for all practical purposes, is attainable by man. With regard to merely worldly characters, indeed, however they may boast of their penetration into the schemes and designs of others, they commonly have scarcely taken the first step in the knowledge of the unparalleled deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of their own hearts: on this subject they know next to nothing. 3. It is the real Christian alone who attains any adequate and useful knowledge of this kind: and who makes this attainment by means of the influences of that Spirit, who was promised by our Lord for the purpose of convincing the world of sin; by means too of the diligent and humble study of that Word of God which, when accompanied by that Spirit, proves itself to be "quick and powerful," &c. 4. Yet even the measure of knowledge which he is thus enabled to attain, is not acquired without the greatest difficulty: a difficulty which arises from the nature of that deceitfulness which he is endeavouring to detect; and from the power of that self-love which would still lead him to view his own heart with a partial eye. IV. INFERENCES. 1. How great the folly of trusting to our own hearts! 2. How important the duty of watchfulness! 3. The necessity of earnest prayer. 4. In what urgent need we stand of God's mercy in Christ. 5. The indispensable necessity of that great change of heart, which, under a variety of appropriate images, is so repeatedly insisted on in the Bible: which is represented at one time as a being born again; at another as a new creation; at a third, as a spiritual resurrection to a life of holiness. (*John Natt, B.D.*) *The deceitfulness of the heart*:—1. Man discovers this corrupt principle by adopting or maintaining a profession of religion hypocritically. Those who are conscious of hypocrisy may adopt and maintain a religious profession merely in some degree to pacify conscience. When this is alarmed by a sense of sin, they are fain to lull it, if possible, by the semblance of holiness. Others may assume a cloak of religion, that in this way they may display their natural abilities, and gain the affection or admiration of the religious; or they may design the advancement of their temporal interests. They use religion just as it serves their own purposes. Some throw aside the cloak of a profession as being too cumbersome, as soon as their purposes are served by it; or perhaps when they find themselves disappointed in their expectations. Others continue to wear it to the end, and will never be discovered, till the Son of Man shall send His angels to separate the precious from the vile. 2. The deceitfulness of the heart appears when men discover greater zeal about matters of indifference, or, at least, of comparatively less importance than about those of the greatest moment. They are perhaps regular in the observation of secret, private, and public ordinances, but in a great measure negligent of relative duties. They are undutiful husbands or wives, parents or children, masters or servants. You can have little dependence on their word, or confidence in their uprightness in civil dealings. Perhaps they carry on a practice of deceit, extortion, and oppression in so secret a manner, that although suspected by all around, no one can prove it. There are others who go still farther. They place the greatest part of their religion in scrupulosity about matters of mere indifference. The smallest deviation from a common form, which has no other sanction than that of custom, and it may be, not even that of common sense, will be esteemed a grievous defection. The most innocent and necessary recreations will be reckoned unlawful freedoms. Notwithstanding all this warmth of zeal, you may perhaps find some of this character, if carefully

watched, almost strangers to a principle of common integrity. They will make conscience a plea for all their impositions on others. But they more generally arise from the deceitfulness of the heart than from any tenderness of conscience.

3. The short continuance of religious impressions, whether on saints or sinners, is another evidence of this deceitfulness. (1) Unrenewed men, when they have heard an awakening sermon, or been visited with some severe affliction, set about external reformation, and, it may be, endeavour to cleanse their hearts and mortify their lusts by prayer and fasting; but the first temptation that assails them effaces all these serious impressions, and plunges them into those sins that they pretended to forsake. Now, as the leading reason of this is that they have not undergone a saving change in regeneration, it argues the great deceitfulness of their hearts, that all their zeal for God and religion, for the purification of their hearts and reformation of their lives, is dissipated by the first blast of temptation.

(2) The deceitfulness that also prevails in the hearts of the Lord's people, appears by the short duration of their religious impressions. Often, after enjoying the most comfortable communion with God, and resolving to walk always with Him, they find that the duty in which they have been engaged is scarcely ended ere their warmth of affections and holy resolutions are vanished.

4. This deceitfulness appears by the many delusions of the imagination, in forming great hopes of earthly riches, honour, or pleasure. How often does the poor man build himself up, and regale his fancy with the empty prospect of great riches. How often does the mean man amuse his imagination with the delusive hope—we can scarcely call it hope, for it hath not probability sufficient to constitute hope—with the idea, with the supposition of honour and dignity, to which it is possible he may yet be advanced. If one of his acquaintance has been unexpectedly exalted in his situation in life, he will consider this as a strong argument for the probability of his own advancement. And is not this vanity of imagination, which all must feel in some degree, because of the natural folly of all, a decisive proof of the deceitfulness of the heart?

5. The extreme reluctance of the heart to believe its own deceitfulness, is a great evidence of its power. So great is this reluctance, that sinners, instead of crediting what they hear from the law and testimony, are apt to take offence at the servants of Christ, when they insist on the evils of the heart; as if they had a pleasure in magnifying the wickedness of man, and in representing human nature as vastly worse than it really is. At any rate, they deny the applicableness of the doctrine to themselves, and proudly say, with the vain-glorious Pharisees, Are we blind also? Learn: 1. The origin of hypocrisy in a religious profession. Of this the natural deceitfulness of the heart is the parent. 2. The only cure of hypocrisy. This is the destruction of the principle of deceit. 3. The danger of this course. (*J. Jamieson, M.A.*)

Self-cheating:—The greatest cheat a man has is his own heart. I. HIS HEART CHEATS HIM OF A TRUE ESTIMATE OF HIMSELF. It tells him that he is morally what he is not, that he is rich, "increased in goods," and needeth nothing; whereas he is "poor, blind, and naked." II. HIS HEART CHEATS HIM BY FALSE PROMISES OF THE FUTURE. 1. It promises him a longer life than he will have. 2. It promises him greater enjoyments than he will ever have. To all it paints a Canaan; but most find it, not a Canaan but a painful pilgrimage in the wilderness. 3. It promises him greater opportunities of improvement than he will ever have. It always holds out to him a "more convenient season"; but the "convenient season" seldom comes. (*Homilist.*)

The heart's deceitfulness towards itself:—I. IT ABOUNDS IN CONTRADICTIONS, so that it is not to be dealt with on any constant rule. 1. The frame of the heart is ready to contradict itself every moment. Facile now, then obstinate; open, then reserved; gentle, then revengeful. 2. This ensues from the disorder wrought upon our faculties by sin. II. ITS DECEIT LIES IN ITS FULL PROMISINGS UPON THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THINGS. 1. Never let us think our work in contending against indwelling sin is ended. The place of its habitation is unsearchable. There are still new stratagems and wiles to be dealt with. Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory. 2. The fact that the heart is inconstant calls for perpetual watchfulness. An open enemy, that deals by violence only, always gives some respite; but against adversaries that deal by treachery nothing but perpetual watchfulness will give security. 3. Commit the whole matter, therefore, to Him who searcheth the heart. Here lies our safety. There is no deceit in our hearts but He can disappoint it. (*John Owen, D.D.*)

The deceitfulness of man's heart:—I. A DIFFICULT SUBJECT TO DEAL WITH. 1. The examination

is made by the guilty party into his own character. 2. Nothing more humiliating and painful to man's pride. II. NO DECEPTION LIKE THAT OF THE HEART. 1. It is the fountain of deceit. 2. It deceives its owner and best friends often. 3. Its deceit is in a large measure voluntary. 4. Its deceitfulness is insidious in its growth. 5. Will be terrible in its consequences. III. THE EXAMPLES OF SCRIPTURE BEAR THIS OUT (1 Kings xiii. 11-18; 2 Kings v. 22-27, viii. 7-15; Acts v. 5-10). IV. THE HEART DECEIVES ITS POSSESSOR CONTINUALLY. With regard to—1. Its motives. 2. Its inclinations. 3. Its safety amidst temptations. 4. Its power of reformation. Learn: 1. To distrust and watch it. 2. To trust in Christ and His Word. (*E. Jerman.*) **And desperately wicked.**—*Wickedness of the heart:*—1. The universal prevalence of wickedness in the world, in all countries, and in all ages. A great part of the business of the world has relation to the existence and prevalence of crimes; either to prevent, to guard against, or to punish them. Our laws, our courts, our prisons and penitentiaries, our locks and bars, our munitions of war on sea and land, are all evidences of the wickedness of man. No nation legislates on the principle, or with the expectation, that men will not be found wicked. Indeed, civil government itself owes its origin to the necessity which exists of guarding against and coercing the wickedness of the people. Heathen writers, as well as Christian, give testimony to the fact that men are desperately wicked. What is history, but a record of the crimes of men? And not only historians, but poets and satirists among the heathen, paint the depravity of man in the most frightful colours. And all modern travellers of veracity, and especially missionaries, unite in testifying that the picture of human nature, drawn by Paul in his epistles, is an accurate delineation of the present condition of the whole pagan world. And alas! nominal Christians are but little better. Indeed, considering their light and privileges, their guilt is much greater. 2. The desperate wickedness of the heart will appear also, if we consider its aversion to God and holiness. Do men, generally, who have the opportunity of knowing the true character of God, love it as the angels do in heaven? Do they love it at all? If they do, would they not all be found zealously engaged in glorifying God by worshipping Him in His earthly temples? Would they not be found in constant and cheerful obedience to His will? 3. Another evidence of the desperate wickedness of the human heart is, that it never grows better, or makes any true reformation of itself; but, on the contrary, grows worse and worse, as long as it is left to the influence of its own corrupt principles. 4. The heart of man, left to itself, not only never grows better, but this disease may well be called "desperate," because it yields not to the most powerful remedies which human wisdom has ever invented; but increases in virulence under them all. (1) Early discipline and careful education have been considered by some sufficient to reach the seat of the disease, and to bring about a radical cure; but the result of impartial examination is, that all the discipline and careful training which have ever been used, can do no more than skin over the foul ulcer of human depravity. (2) Philosophy also tried her power, and has boasted of great achievements; but, while the streams from the fountain of human depravity may have been diverted into a more refined and secret channel, so as to conceal the turpitude of its character, yet its poisonous nature has not been changed. (3) The desperate wickedness of the heart, not only manifests itself by resisting the influence of all human remedies; but that which exhibits its inveterate malignity in the strongest light is, that it does not even yield to the means of reformation which God has appointed. 5. When the heart appears to be converted, and a visible reformation takes place in the life, after a while these promising appearances, which, like blossoms in the spring, gave ground to hope for abundant fruit, are nipped by the severe frost, or blasted by the chilling wind, and all our hopes are disappointed. The soul was impressed by Divine truth, and the affections for a season warmly excited, but the bitter root of iniquity was not eradicated. 6. No severity nor continuance of pain will ever conquer or remove the depravity of the heart. Many have resorted to self-inflicted tortures, as great as human nature can endure, and have spent their lives in crucifying the desires of the flesh; and they may have, to a certain degree, succeeded in diminishing the ardour of those passions which are connected with the animal frame, by emaciating the body; but this did not reach the real seat of the malady. It lies far deeper than the flesh. 7. Another argument of the desperate wickedness of the human heart is the power of indwelling sin in the regenerate. (*A. Alexander, D.D.*) *Sin.*—To know our sin is the first lesson that a child of God must learn. Salvation is sweet, because of the danger in which sin puts us. The

Saviour lived, and bled, and died, to atone for it. I. The NATURE of sin is twofold—as it exists in the heart, and as it is seen in the act. II. The EFFECTS of sin are twofold, as the nature of sin was; there is the guilt of sin, and there is its power. III. The CURE of sin is twofold likewise; its guilt is washed away in the blood of Christ, and its power is broken down by the Holy Ghost. Why, then, should we be afraid to look at our sin, when we have a perfect cure for it? Have you learned to hate sin? It is not enough to hate the sins of others; but you must learn to hate your own, however pleasant they may be to you, and however long you may have practised them. Nor is it enough to fear the punishment of sin, unless you mourn under its guilt, and seek to be freed from its power. (*E. Garbett, M.A.*) *The heart is a grand impostor*:—It is like a cheating tradesman who will put you off with bad wares; the heart will put a man off with seeming grace, instead of saving. A tear or two shed in repentance, a few lazy desires is faith; blue and red flowers that grow among the corn look like good flowers, but they are beautiful weeds. The foolish virgins' lamps looked as if they had had oil in them, but they had none. Therefore to prevent a cheat, that we may not take false grace instead of true, we had need make a thorough disquisition and search of our hearts. (*T. Watson.*) *The heart deceitful*:—The dank, mossy sward is deceitful; its fresh and glossy carpet invites the traveller to leave the rough moorland tract, and at the first step horse and rider are buried in the morass. The sea is deceitful; what rage, what stormy passions, sleep in that placid bosom! and how often, as vice serves her used-up victims, does she cast the bark that she received into her arms with sunny smiles a wreck upon the shore. The morning is oft deceitful; with bright promise of a brilliant day it lures us from home; the sky ere noon begins to thicken; the sun looks sickly; the heavily laden clouds gather upon the hill tops; the lark drops songless into her nest; the wind rises moaning and chill; and at last tempest storm and rain thicken on the dying day. The desert is deceitful; it mocks the traveller with its mirage. Deceitful above sward, or sea, or sky, or enchanting desert, is the heart of man; nor do I know a more marked or melancholy proof of this than that afforded by our light treatment of such weighty matters as sin and judgment. (*T. Guthrie.*) *The impurity of the heart*:—In a vessel filled with muddy water the thickness visibly subsided to the bottom, and left the water purer and purer until it became perfectly limpid. The slightest motion, however, brought the sediment again to the top; and the water became thick and turbid as before. "Here," said Gotthold, when he saw it, "we have an emblem of the human heart. The heart is full of the mud of sinful lusts and carnal desires; and the consequence is, that no pure water—good holy thoughts—can flow from it. Many a one, however, is deceived by it, and never imagines his heart half so wicked as it really is, because sometimes its lusts are at rest, and sink to the bottom. But this lasts only so long as he is without opportunity or incitement to sin. Let that occur, and worldly lusts rise so thick that his whole thoughts, words, and works show no trace of anything but impurity." *The difficulty of knowing the heart of man*:—"Who can know it?" The heart is deep, and, like Ezekiel's vision, presents so many chambers of imagery, one within another, that it requires time to get a considerable acquaintance with it, and we shall never know it thoroughly. It is now more than twenty-eight years since the Lord began to open mine to my own view; and from that time to this almost every day has discovered to me something which, till then, was unobserved; and the farther I go the more I seem convinced that I have entered but a little way. A person that travels in some parts of Derbyshire may easily be satisfied that the country is cavernous; but how long, how deep, how numerous, the caverns may be, which are hidden from us by the surface of the ground, and what is contained in them, are questions which cannot be fully answered. Thus I judge of my heart, that it is very deep and dark and full of envy; but as to particulars, I know not one of a thousand. (*John Newton.*)

Ver. 10. **I the Lord search the heart.**—*God, the inspector of the heart*:—I. THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OF THE HUMAN HEART. 1. "The heart is deceitful above all things." There is scarcely a truth, for instance, revealed in the Bible, which it has not, at one time or other, led some men to call in question. But the deceitfulness of the heart appears nowhere, perhaps, so striking as in the case of many who sit under the faithful ministry of the Gospel, or are visited with some severe attack of sickness. How many are there who, in these circumstances, form the most serious resolutions of repentance and reformation!

Their goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away. 2. The heart is desperately wicked. We must take the heart as it is to the Physician of souls, or remain for ever without a cure. 3. "Who can know it?" Its deceitfulness is an ocean which we cannot fathom, its wickedness a world which we cannot explore. II. THE DIVINE CONDUCT IN REFERENCE TO THE HEART.

1. He "searches the heart, and tries the reins." He is acquainted with our principles and motives, our dispositions and affections. However small the measure of good, or the measure of evil, which may be lurking within, He must instantly see it. Though it should be only as a grain of mustard seed sown in a garden, or as a grain of wheat sown in a field, His piercing eye cannot fail to discover it. 2. The object which He has in view in doing this, or the important reason which He assigns for thus searching the heart and trying the reins;—"even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." (1) The ways of men, in some respects, are various as the leaves of the forest; but in the sight of God they are all either good or bad, righteous or wicked, godly or ungodly: and according as their ways answer to this character will men be rewarded or punished by the Judge of quick and dead. (2) There is scarcely anything we do or say but is attended with either a beneficial or an injurious effect upon others as well as ourselves; and in settling our everlasting destiny, God will not fail to take into account the good or the evil which may thus have resulted from our actions: for He will give every man, not only according to his ways, but also according to the fruit of his doings. Conclusion—1. If the heart is deceitful above all things, let us learn to distrust it for evermore. 2. If the heart is desperately wicked, let us see the necessity of having a new heart created within us. 3. Though we cannot fathom all the depths of deceit and wickedness contained in the human heart, we may yet obtain a much more extensive knowledge of these things than we generally possess. 4. Since God searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men, let us know the utter impossibility of imposing upon Him. 5. Since God will give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness! (*D. Rees.*)

God searching the human heart:—Taken by the gardener into a gentleman's garden, I saw long rows of beautiful chrysanthemums, preparing for a flower show. "Each one of those has to be examined every day," said he, "lest earwigs get into the tender tops and eat out the young buds." And while I watched I saw the under-gardener going from one to another, gently opening the top shoots, and seeing that no hidden evil lurked within. "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (Psa. li. 6). What earwigs of thought, desire, imagination get into the heads of the Lord's plants, their best parts! How jealous Paul was of young converts, lest earwigs of false doctrine, or evil practice, should destroy his labour. The head Gardener sees to this. "I the Lord search the heart" (Jer. xvii. 10). (*Footsteps of Truth.*) To give every man according to his ways.—*God's rule of judgment*:—I. THE PREPARATION GOD IS MAKING FOR THE FUTURE JUDGMENT. 1. He continually marks the ways of men. (1) Actions. (2) Words. (3) Thoughts. 2. He records everything in the book of His remembrance. II. THE RULE BY WHICH THE JUDGMENT SHALL BE DETERMINED. 1. The sentence will be according to every man's works (Gal. vi. 7, 8; 2 Cor. ix. 6). 2. Rightly understood, this strongly declares the equity of God's future judgments. Everything that can affect the quality of an action will be taken into account. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*)

Ver. 11. As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days.—*Riches gotten not by right*:—The illustration is taken from natural history. Some think it refers to an ancient practice still maintained amongst the Arabs, of driving the mother birds from place to place till they become exhausted, and are easily captured: in which case, of course, the poor partridge never has the joy of seeing her own progeny. Patiently has she sat for weeks in her nest, over eggs which another than herself is to hatch. I do not think this is the intended idea at all. On looking into the Septuagint, I find the rendering of the verse somewhat different, but practically the same as many of you will find in the margin of your Bibles. "As the partridge gathereth young which she has not herself brought forth." That is more plain and natural. The partridge is in the habit of stealing eggs

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from the nests of other birds of a different species, and of sitting upon them; and then, shortly after these eggs are hatched, the young, forsaking their false parent, and associating with birds of their own order, make the old partridge look very foolish, as all her promising brood desert her. **I. THE BIBLE HAS NOTHING TO SAY AGAINST A MAN'S GETTING RICH BY JUST AND HONOURABLE MEANS.** A fine healthy sight it is we may see every morning in London, the thousands of young men pressing in to the city on 'bus or car, or better still, on their own two feet, eager for business, and determined to get on. Diligence in business is one of the prime virtues of human life upon the earth, but the motive power which impels it is the expectation of gain. To be altogether indifferent to material profit, so far from being a recommendation, betokens an unmanly and defective character. It is all very well to moralise on the duty of being contented with our lot, but there is a certain "contentment with our lot" that simply means indolence, and stupidity, and the lack of enterprise. The wish to get riches is not a sinful wish; nay, it may be a most laudable one, and, as I have said, a useful stimulus to industry. Hence, it is by no means a good thing for a man to have been "born with a silver spoon in his mouth"; it may, indeed, make him the envy of others, but his moral dangers are enormously increased thereby. I don't pity you in the least, my young brothers, if you have had to begin life without a halfpenny; so long as you have good brains, sound health, high principle, and a fair opening, I have no fear of you; stick to your work; push on; go ahead; and may God prosper you! **II. RICHES UNRIGHTEOUSLY GOTTEN ARE NO BLESSING.** There are many ways in which you may violate the spirit of the eighth commandment, without robbing the till, or forging a cheque, or making a false entry in the cash-book. Do let me entreat you to be straightforward and open in everything; let your conduct and character be above the shadow of suspicion; let truthfulness and honesty be a very law of your being; condescend to nothing which conscience does not thoroughly approve; have an instinctive horror of everything approaching duplicity or equivocation; hate a lie as you hate death; and let your whole action in business be such that you can invite the eye of God to search you through, confident that all is straight and right. Ah! believe me, such a character is the grandest capital in the long run: as John Bright wrote to a young man who applied to him for advice:—"In my judgment the value of a high character for strict honour and honesty in business can hardly be estimated too highly; and it will often stand for more in the conscience, and even in the ledger, than all that can be gained by shabby and dishonest transactions." It seems to the rogue, wrote Thomas Carlyle, that he has found out a short north-west passage to wealth, but he soon discovers that fraudulence is not only a crime but a blunder. Sin never pays. Said a pawky Scotch farmer to his son, "John, honesty's the best policy; I've tried both ways myself." There is a great deal of money made in trade, which, it must be confessed, is gotten not by right. Too often there is one code of virtue for the home circle, and another code for the factory or shop. One system of morals for the Sunday, another for the weekday. Violations of rectitude, which would be severely condemned in the family, are winked at in business. When we come to the strict standard of God's law, we shall find a vast deal more unrighteousness in the mercantile world than most of us are willing to allow. Strange as it may seem, thousands of men are far more ready to be benevolent than just. Mr. Gladstone, in one of his speeches, sagaciously observed, "I would almost dare to say there are five generous men for one just man. The passions will often ally themselves with generosity, but they always tend to divert from justice." I am quite in a line with the text when I advise you to practise frugality. Don't spend all your earnings; cultivate thrift. However small the sum, it will grow; and the tendency will be to develop in you self-denial, economy, and forethought. Then I would also suggest to you the wisdom, nay, the duty, of effecting, at as early a date as possible, an insurance on your life. When Jacob was bargaining with Laban about terms, he showed the sagacity that has ever been characteristic of his posterity; he was not going to remain in Laban's service without fair wages; "and now," he added, "when shall I provide for mine own house also?" I would almost go so far as to say that the small yearly sum it will now involve is not your own; if you spend it on unnecessary comforts, you may "leave them in the midst of your days, and at your end may be a fool." **III. THE PENALTY ON THE ACQUISITION OF UNRIGHTEOUS GAIN GENERALLY FOLLOWS EVEN IN THIS LIFE.** Perhaps this does not hold so markedly in our times as under the old dispensation, because immortality,

with its just retribution, is now more clearly revealed. Still, no thoughtful person can fail to see how often a terrible Nemesis pursues the fraudulent man, even "in the midst of his days," and how, "at his end," even the world styles him "a fool." Some unexpected turn comes, some monetary crisis, some commercial disaster, and lo! all his hoarded gains take wing and fly away, and the unprincipled man is left like the silly partridge, to sit disconsolate in an empty nest! But though the money abide with him, there may be wretchedness untold, and he is ready to curse the gold that promised so much happiness, and now yields so little. Ill-gotten wealth will never make its owner really happy. There are plutocrats in this city whose tables are covered with silver plate, who drink their sparkling champagne, and roll along the streets in their sumptuous carriages, whose lives are unutterably miserable. A worm is gnawing at the root. Their fortune has been built upon a basis of deception, bringing with it deep, unutterable remorse; and though friends may flatter, an upbraiding voice from the unseen is ever whispering in their ear one little word of four letters—and two of them the same—"Fool!" Do not forget that your best possessions, even now, are things which cannot be weighed in a scale, nor measured by a rule; they are treasures which rust cannot tarnish, nor thieves carry away. It was a noble declaration of Marcus Aurelius, "My dominions are greater within than without"; and if this was the utterance of a heathen monarch, what ought a Christian to feel? Only let a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ put you into connection with the riches of His grace, and let there burn within you the hope of a glorious immortality; then, I hesitate not to say, your fortune is made; you have the guarantee of peace and plenty here, and the promise of a blessed inheritance hereafter! (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) *Riches that escape from a man*:—Allusion is here made to a well-known fact in natural history. If a partridge or a quail or a robin brood the eggs of another species, the young will not stay with the one that happened to brood them, but at the first opportunity will assort with their own species. Those who have been brought up in the country have seen the dismay of the farmyard hen, having brooded aquatic fowls, when after a while they tumble into their natural element—the water. So the text suggests that a man may gather under his wings the property of others, but it will after a while escape; it will leave the man in a sorry predicament. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Commercial morality*:—I. THERE ARE MANY WRONG WAYS OF GETTING RICHES, or seeking, at least, to get them, even where there is no violation of right or equity in a man's transactions with his fellow-men. 1. What right-minded man would rush into the strife and scramble for them in the headlong way that many do? 2. Can that man be said to be getting riches rightly who is scraping them together, and hoarding them up, without regarding the urgent necessities, not to say anything of the desirable comforts, of others? 3. Is it right to get riches in an irreligious way, by habitually neglecting God and putting our duty to Him out of the account altogether? 4. It is one thing to get riches in a way that is not right—that is, unworthily, hard-heartedly, and irreligiously—and another thing to get them "and not by right,"—that is, unrighteously, by downright dishonesty, by the violation of the law of equity, by the rupture of the bond of uprightness in the conduct of man to man. It is this latter way of getting riches which is expressly mentioned here, emphatically condemned, and threatened with an inevitable and appropriate punishment. II. THERE IS A REMARKABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN WHAT IS SAID ABOUT THE HUMAN HEART in verse 9, and what immediately follows. "The heart is deceitful," &c. Here is a challenge. Fathom the depth of depravity, obscured and complicated by the deceitfulness, who can. There is only one who can accept the challenge; and He does. "I the Lord search," &c. His judgment is ever according to truth. He stamps all human character with its proper die; calls all human conduct by its proper name; and will infallibly lead all human conduct, be it good or bad, to its appropriate issue. Not by right are riches gotten—1. If by the deceptions of merchandise. 2. By the unfair remuneration of labour. 3. By the artifices of commerce. Conclusion—Be industrious; seeking, by the hand of diligence, if it be God's will, even to be rich. But beware of being carried away from moral principle, from a religious life, by the prevailing furor of business, the almost terrific money-rage. "One thing is needful." All things are ours, if we are Christ's, for Christ is God's. (*H. Angus, D.D.*)

Vers. 12-14. A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.—*Our sanctuary*:—This book of Jeremiah is a very thorny one: it might

be called, like his smaller work, "The Book of Lamentations." Our text is as a lily among thorns, as a rose in the wilderness; the solitary place shall be glad for it, and the desert shall rejoice. The words sound like sweet music amid the crash of tempest. The bitter tree yields us sweet fruit. The weeping prophet wipes away our tears. I. THE TRUE PLACE OF OUR SANCTUARY. It is not at Jerusalem, nor yet at Samaria; it is not at Rome, nor yet at Canterbury. The place of our sanctuary is our God Himself. "God is our refuge and strength." "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." 1. He is viewed under the aspect of a sovereign reigning in majesty—"A glorious high throne is the place of our sanctuary." Many refuse to worship God as reigning; they have not yet grasped the idea that the Lord is King, so that they cannot understand the song, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice." For that includes, first, Divine sovereignty, and some men grow black in the face with rage against that truth; they cannot endure it. He will make His own election, and He will distribute His mercy as seemeth good in His sight. Now this God whose sovereignty is so much disputed is our God; a glorious high throne for absolute dominion and sovereignty is the place of our sanctuary. To Him whose sovereign grace is the hope of the undeserving we fly for succour. Besides sovereignty, of course, His glorious high throne includes power. A throne without power would be but the pageantry of vanity. There should be power in the King who ruleth over all: and is there not? Who shall stay His hand, or say unto Him, "What doest Thou?" 2. Forget not that the Lord reigns in exceeding glory. The excellence of His dominion surpasses all other, for He is the blessed and only Potentate. Every act of His empire exhibits His glorious character, His justice, His goodness, His faithfulness, His holiness. 3. It says, "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary." It is a very blessed thing to come back to the fact that the Lord has not newly assumed a throne, from which He has newly cast out some former king. As His is the most potent of empires, so is it the most ancient. God is never taken by surprise; He has foreseen all things, and worked them into His grand plan. God is working evermore for a glorious purpose, which shall one day make the universe and all eternity to sing with rapturous joy that ever God determined to do what He is now doing. 4. When the prophet alludes to the place of our sanctuary, our mind is naturally led to feel that there must be some kind of place where God especially reveals Himself. The place where He mainly revealed Himself among men was the temple, to which I have said Jeremiah somewhat alludes. Now, where was the temple built? It was built upon that mountain whereon Abraham took his son Isaac to offer him up as a sacrifice. A ram caught in the thicket was the substitute for Isaac; but there was no substitute for Jesus, the Son of God. He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. But there, where the most instructive of all types of the heavenly Father's love was exhibited, there must be the temple wherein God would converse with men and make for men a place of sanctuary. The temple itself was built upon that site, and there it was that God dwelt visibly between the wings of the cherubim, above the ark of the covenant, over that golden lid which was called the mercy-seat. What was that ark of the covenant, but a type of our Lord Jesus Christ in a most instructive way. The sacrifice of Isaac and the ark of the covenant were only types of that greater sacrifice, when He who is the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, went up to the Cross, and on Calvary "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." It is natural that the Lord should meet with us in grace in the place where He put His Son to grief. There, where He made His soul an offering for sin, the Lord becomes well pleased with us. Now, then, the place where we worship is God Himself revealed in the person of His dear Son. I pray you, never try to worship anywhere else. Christ is the one altar, the one temple, the one sanctuary. 5. In addition, the Lord God is our refuge; for a sanctuary was a place to which men fled in the hour of peril. Is not Jesus our refuge from present guilt and from the wrath to come? II. I am to speak concerning THOSE WHO DEPART FROM GOD. Alas, that there should be such!—men who leave the river for the desert, the living for the dead! Who are they? The text says, "All that forsake Thee," and "they that depart from Me." See, then, that this text has a bearing upon us, because these people of whom we are now going to speak were not an ignorant people who did not know God, or how could they be said to forsake Him? At one time, evidently, these people had something to do with the Lord, but after awhile they forsook Him. What did they

do? They no longer sought unto the Lord as once they did, but ceased to be fervent in their service. At first they ceased to worship Him, they took no delight in His ways; they tried to be neutral, they were lukewarm, careless, indifferent, they forgot God. After thus declining in zeal, and refusing outward worship, they went further; for he says they had departed from Him—they could not endure the Lord, and therefore went into the far country. They said unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." They went into open sin; they disowned their God and broke His commands: some of them even dared to blaspheme Him. The course of sin is downhill. The man who once forgets his God soon forgets himself; and then he throws the reins on the neck of his lusts and goes from sin to sin, forgetting his God more and more. The most hardened of sinners will one day be ashamed, saying, "I acted unprofitably to myself." Such shame will come over you forgetful ones one of these days. It may not come upon you till you die, but it is very probable that it will assail you then. When in your dying hours, what a dreadful thing it will be to be filled with shame at the remembrance of the past, so as to be afraid to meet your God, ashamed to think that you have lived a whole life without caring for Him! What will it be to wake up in the next world and to see the glory of God around you—the glory of the God whom you despised! Oh, the shame that will come over the ungodly in judgment! "They shall wake up to shame and everlasting contempt." Great men and proud men will be small enough ere long; and careless and profane persons will be miserable enough when that word shall be fulfilled—"All that forsake Thee shall be ashamed." And then it is added that they "shall be written in the earth"; that is, if they turn away from God they may win a name for a while, but it will be merely from the earth, and of the earth. O worldlings, you have your riches in this poor country which is soon to be burned with fire. Your pleasures and treasures will melt in the fervent heat of the last days. Your life's pursuits are a short business, ending in eternal misery. The text tells us that there shall come something besides this: they that forsake God shall one day be sore athirst even unto death, "because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." There is for the soul but one fountain of water, flowing, cool, clear, ever refreshing. "All my springs are in Thee," said David; and so may we say, for our only source of supply is the Lord our God. If a man turns away from God, then he forsakes the cool fountain, he goes to broken cisterns that hold no water, and he will perish of thirst. III. Let us look at **THE CORNERS** to God. Those who come to God—how do they come? They come away from all the world. O soul, if thou wouldst have peace, come away to your God. Never take your place with those who shall be written in the earth. How did believers come to God of old? Jeremiah came sick and needing to be saved, for he cried, "Heal me, O Jehovah, save me." That is the way to come. But come to God with faith. It was grand faith of Jeremiah which enabled him to say, "Heal me, and I shall be healed." Sick as I am, if Thou wilt act as physician to me I shall be cured: if Thou save me, lost as I am, I shall be saved. Come along, poor sinner. "Where, sir?" say you. To God in Christ Jesus. And come with this acknowledgment on your tongue,—*"For Thou art my praise."* We have a good God, a loving God, a tender God, a gracious God, a God full of long-suffering and mercy and faithfulness to us poor sinners. This is good argument in prayer—"I have made my boast in Thee, O God, I pray Thee let not my glorying be stopped. Be to me as I have declared Thou wilt be." But suppose you cannot say so much as that, then put it this way—"Heal me, O Lord; heal me this morning; save me, O Lord; save me at once, and Thou shalt be my praise. Lord, I promise that I will never rob Thee of the honour of my salvation; if Thou wilt but save me Thou shalt have all the glory of it." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God our sanctuary*.—The godly soul has a sure defence and aid in his living, loving Father and God. In every time of earthly need and trouble this is his chief consolation, and the source of serene and abiding joy. I. **THE NECESSITY OF A DIVINE REFUGE.** Times come when the hardest and most self-reliant is made to feel that he is but feebleness, vanity, and dust. Protection, comfort, and settledness for the soul can alone be found in God. 1. We are victims of moral evil. 2. Of mental and physical sorrows. II. **THE NATURE OF THE REFUGE AFFORDED.** 1. Lofty and glorious in position. There we may obtain—(1) Mercy. (2) Grace. (3) Pardon. (4) Strength. 2. All-sufficient in resources. Help for every circumstance, need, age. 3. Perpetual

and abiding in duration. (*James Foster, B.A.*) *Man's refuge*—*A glorious high throne*.—The word sanctuary at first meant anything separated and set apart for a holy purpose; later it came to designate a place used exclusively for sacred services; and then we find it used to express one chief end of a sacred place—an asylum—a place of refuge to which the guilty may fly and be safe.

I. MAN'S REFUGE. No creature so much needs the shelter and defence of a safe hiding-place as man. His sources of danger are more than can be numbered. Beset with foes, he is in constant need of shelter, and often cries out for deliverance. What so welcome to him as a refuge! Physically regarded, as possessed of a body over which disease and death reign, how often does he sigh for some asylum, which may furnish a defence against these invaders of life! How is he to escape the feeling of terrible desertion and unimaginable dangers, how help crying out for some refuge from "the fightings without, the fears within," and the foes on every side? And, looking still deeper, when we see that he is the subject of a disease deceitful above every other—a disease which pertains to his whole nature—an "incurable wickedness," and when we hear him cry out in anguish of soul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death,"—who does not rejoice at the very idea of a refuge? How hard it is not to complain against God, and to demand "wherefore He has made man in vain!" How still harder to believe that there is a refuge for man which has been set up from the beginning! But in all times of deepest trouble, when human helpers fail and the hour of extremity comes, the strange thing is that the universal instincts of man's nature do lead him to look for help, and though he passes away apparently unhelped, he does so looking for help. You may have stood among a crowd, upon the shore, watching some vessel tossed on the tempestuous billows which threatened to overwhelm her, until at length a mighty wave washed over her and swept her clean of every living soul. And as that sea overwhelmed her there arose from the breast of every one of the gazing crowd, "God help them!" Was that prayer an unconscious self-delusion in that moment of agony, or is there help for man in all times of his need? Or you may have listened to a judge passing the awful sentence which doomed a fellow-creature to death—and whilst telling him there was no longer mercy or hope for him on earth, pointing to heaven and assuring him of hope and help in God. Was that judge dishonouring his judicial robes, and deceiving that poor wretch by this solemn mockery of pretended mercy, or is there an open door of hope in heaven for the poor outcasts from earth? And we have all read of the poor thief upon the Cross, turning, whilst paying the last penalty of the law with his life, in penitence to the Saviour and praying, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom"; and we know the gracious answer he received, "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Was our Lord deceived in this promise, or did He knowingly deceive the miserable victim of crime in the moment of his extremity? Oh no—there is help for the helpless, help for the hell-deserving, shelter for the defenceless, a refuge for the outcasts. "The just God," who is also a "Saviour"—oh, how I love that combination—hath said, "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else." **II. MAN'S REFUGE IS A SANCTUARY.** A place which is only a refuge furnishes but a temporary shelter. To the shipwrecked, a naked rock jutting out of the sea would be a glad refuge from the devouring waves; but it would not be a refuge long. But a refuge, which is also a sanctuary, a Divine house, affords not only shelter, but rest, repose, and satisfaction for all we need or can desire. The house of God may well be a home for man. And he who enters such a refuge soon discovers that it will be to him all his desire.

III. MAN'S REFUGE IS NOT ONLY SACRED, BUT ROYAL. "A glorious high throne is the place of our sanctuary." The house of God, "the dwelling-place of the Most High," is also the seat and source of all rule, authority, and power. "Under the shadow of the Almighty," man finds a sure defence for the whole breadth of his nature, in the midst of every possible circumstance, throughout the whole course of his history. The security and defence vouchsafed to him are of the highest character, and inseparable from the nature of the throne, which has become his refuge. The sanctuary-refuge-throne is holy, and the holiness of the throne is its defence and security. The power of the throne is the defence of man's refuge. But the throne, which has become man's refuge, is not merely a symbol of power, but also of power surrounded with becoming glory. There is "the pomp which surrounds a throne." The throne gathers up and crowns

every excellency. IV. THIS SANCTUARY-REFUGE-THRONE IS SPOKEN OF AS AN EXALTED THRONE. It is high enough to embrace not merely man's individual nature, in all its integrity of "body, soul, and spirit," but the whole race—the earliest sons in all the height and might of their experience, together with the latest born in the feebleness of beginning life. And not merely the race of man, for, under its exalted height is gathered together, in one unity of blessed life, all the elect, from the archangel before the throne to the weakest and meanest of the sons of men. V. THIS EXALTED THRONE IS GLORIOUS IN THE HISTORY OF ITS EXALTATION. Its exaltation has not been by might but by right. Righteousness has been pleased and the law magnified throughout the holy pathway of ascent from a humble refuge to the glorious high throne. In becoming a refuge for the destitute, the abandoned, the lost, the throne has revealed the charms of the holy order and eternal righteousness by which triumphant conquests are made over every form of disorder and wickedness. Fugitives from the consequences of violated law, as they enter the refuge become obedient to law; the wicked become righteous; the sinful are made holy. VI. IT HAS BEEN SET UP FROM THE BEGINNING. The provision for the requirements of man's fallen nature was no afterthought but a forethought. The refuge was ever latent in the unbroken depths of the throne, and, for the revelation of its fundamental glory, needed to be opened up. The history of man unfolds the eternal purpose, and will be no mean history when complete. It was the joy of the Eternal Wisdom, whose "delights were with the sons of men" "ere ever the earth was"; it will be His joy when the earth is no more. The discords of human history lie between two harmonies, the one in which they have no place, the other in which they have been resolved. In man's nature is struck the keynote of those pre-established harmonies, the melody of which is being written out in his history as a fitting song with which to celebrate the close of his earthly career, and the reconciliation of all things. VII. THE PERSONALITY OF THIS REFUGE. An impersonal refuge could never afford shelter and defence for man against his personal foes. Moreover, the impersonal could never afford rest to, nor become a home for man. Man needs man, a human security, a human joy, a human home, a warm maternal bosom on which to rest; not even God as God, but God as man. Is there such a person? One who is a refuge for man and a sanctuary for God? One who is also a throne, a throne exalted by a glorious history, and yet set up from the beginning? Oh joy of all joys, that God has revealed to us One possessed of all these attributes! We make our first acquaintance with Christ as a refuge. We seek in Him deliverance, shelter, and safety. Having made the experience of Him as a refuge, we begin to find He is more than a refuge, that He is a Divine house, a blessed home, a home in the house of God. Then, as we enlarge our acquaintance with our home, we find it a house of many mansions, opening up out of each other height above height, until a very throne is displayed to us—the throne of God, rising out of the refuge for man—and that the refuge is lost in the throne. And then as we gaze upon the throne which has hidden the refuge in its glory, the humanity in the Divinity, we begin to discover the refuge again in its deeper depth, something human in the depths of the Divine, and that it gives its own lustre to the central glory of the throne. And we perceive that this eternal humanity in the depths of Deity which gives a lustre to the eternal glory is the humanity which is the Alpha and Omega of man's earthly history. And seeing this we refuse to it all dates and proclaim it to have been ever from of old, and that it "became" the eternal Son in the bosom of the Father, nay, "behoved Him to be in all things made like unto His brethren that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people"; nay, more, that it "must needs have been" that He might "enter into His glory"! Hallelujah! God has made Himself one with us in our necessities that we may partake of His glory. (*J. Pulsford, D.D.*) Adoring exclamations of a soul gazing on God:—I. A WONDERFUL VISION OF WHAT GOD IS. There are three clauses. They all seem to have reference to the temple in Jerusalem, which is taken by a very natural figure of speech as a kind of suggestive description of Him who is worshipped there. "The Sublime Porte" is properly the name of a lofty gateway which belonged to the palace in Constantinople, and so has come to mean the Turkish Government—if government it can be called. So we talk of "the Papal see." Or, again, the decision of "the Chair" in the House of Commons. So the prophet takes outward facts of the temple building as symbolising great and blessed

spiritual thoughts of the God that filled the temple with His own lustre. 1. "A glorious throne"—that is grand, but that is not what Jeremiah means—"A throne of glory" is the true rendering. In the Old Testament, where "glory" is ascribed to God, the word has a very specific meaning, namely, the light which was afterwards called the "Shekinah," that dwelt between the cherubim, and was the symbol of the Divine presence, and the assurance that that presence would be self-revealing, and would manifest Himself to His people. The throned glory, the glory that reigns and rules as King in Israel, is the idea of the words before us. It is the same throne that a later writer in the New Testament speaks of when he says, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace." We all can draw near, through the rent veil, and walk rejoicingly in the light of the Lord; this glory is grace; this grace is glory. This, then, is the first of Jeremiah's great thoughts of God, and it means—"The Lord God omnipotent reigneth," there is none else but He, and His will runs authoritative and supreme into all corners of the universe. 2. "High from the beginning." It was a piece of the patriotic exaggeration of Israel's prophets and psalmists that they made much of the little hill upon which the temple was set. Jeremiah felt it to be a material type, both of the elevation, and of the stable duration, of the God whom he would commend to Israel's and to all men's trust. "High from the beginning," separated from all creatural limitation and lowness, He whose name is the Most High, and on whose level no other being can stand, towers above the lowness of the loftiest creature, and from that inaccessible height He sends down His voice, like the trumpet from amidst the darkness of Sinai, proclaiming, I am God and there is none besides Me. Yet while thus "holy"—that is, separate from creatures—He makes communion with Himself possible to us, and draws near to us in Christ, that we in Christ may be made nigh to Him. 3. He is "the place of our sanctuary." That is, as though the prophet would point as the wonderful climax of all, to the fact that He of whom the former things were true should yet be accessible to our worship; that, if I might so say, our feet could tread the courts of that great temple; and we draw near to Him who is so far above the loftiest, and separate from all the magnificences which Himself has made, and who yet is "our sanctuary," and accessible to our worship. Ay! and more than that—"Lord! Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." In old days the temple was more than a place of worship. It was a place where a man coming, had, according to ancient custom, guest rights with God. God Himself, like some ancestral dwelling-place in which generation after generation of fathers and children have abode, whence they have been carried, and where their children still live, is to all generations their home and their fortress. II. THE SOUL BAPT IN MEDITATION OF THIS VISION OF GOD. To me, this long-drawn-out series of linked clauses without grammatical connection, this succession of adorning exclamations of rapture, wonder, and praise, is very striking. It suggests the manner in which we should vivify all our thoughts of God, by turning them into material for devout reverence; awe-struck, considering meditation. We should be like ruminant animals who first crop the grass—which being interpreted means, get Scripture truth into our heads—and then chew the cud, which being interpreted is, then put these truths through a second process by meditation on them that may turn into nourishment and make flesh. III. THE MEDITATIVE SOUL GOING OUT TO GRASP GOD THUS REVEALED, AS ITS PORTION AND HOPE. "O Lord! the hope of Israel." I must cast myself upon Him by faith as my only hope; and turn away from all other confidences which are vain and impotent. So we are back upon that familiar Christian ground, that the bond which knits a man to God, and by which all that God is becomes that man's personal property, and available for the security and the shaping of his life, is the simple flinging of himself into God's arms, in sure and certain trust. Then, every one of these characteristics of which I have been speaking will contribute its own special part to the serenity, the security, the Godlikeness, the blessedness, the righteousness, the strength of the man who thus trusts. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) All that forsake Thee shall be ashamed.—*A backslider ashamed of his conduct*:—A London City missionary writes: "One Sunday afternoon, when out visiting, I noticed a soldier. He was in a great hurry, but I soon caught him up, gave him a tract, and, walking with him, spoke to him about his soul. In reply he said, 'I only wish I was the same as I used to be. For four and a half years I was a Christian. I worked for Christ with all my heart, and was never so happy as when so engaged. I

made up my mind to enlist. I thought I should get on all right, but when my companions knew I was a Christian, they made it so hot for me I could not stand it, and gave in.' 'But,' said I, 'what would your country think of you if you were a coward in the face of an enemy? And should you fear to face the foes of Jesus Christ? When the greatest danger surrounds you, then it is your duty to be most faithful, not only to King Edward, but to King Jesus.' The young soldier was deeply moved, and said, 'I do thank God for meeting you. I will give my heart to Jesus again, and by God's help I will be true to Him. I will not be a coward again, but will confess Him to-night in the barrack-room.' **Shall be written in the earth.**—*Where is our name being written?*—Prudentius rightly saith, that their names that are written in red letters of blood in the Church's calendar, are written in golden letters in Christ's register in the book of life; as on the contrary, these idolaters whose sin was with an iron pen engraven on tables of their hearts (ver. 1) are justly written in the earth. (*John Trapp.*)

Ver. 14. **Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.**—*The Lord's healing*.—I. **THE PROPHET'S CRY.** Sin is the sickness of the soul. It has seized upon all its powers. Not one single faculty has escaped; all are polluted, all diseased. Its very vitals are affected by sin. The understanding is darkness (1 Cor. ii. 14). The will is stubborn; the conscience is impure (Tit. i. 15). The very memory is impure. But the chief seat and residence of sin is the heart (Jer. iv. 18). Oh, how little do we know its deep defilement (1 Kings viii. 38). The leprosy of the law was a type of it. It is poison (Psa. cxl. 3). It is the "mire" in which the sow wallows, the "vomit" of a dog (2 Pet. ii. 22). One sin has in it all enmity, rebellion, distance from God, all deceitfulness, hardness; and yet, how slight are our deepest views; how poor and feeble our most heartfelt repentance; how unfeeling our most touching sorrow. Sin is by all human skill and human power incurable (Jer. ii. 22). II. **IS ALL THIS SO? THEN NO ONE BUT JESUS THE LORD CAN HEAL OUR SPIRITUAL DISEASES.** 1. It requires omniscience to know them. There is in all sin, in every one sin, a depth which human wisdom can never fathom—a depth of baseness, ingratitude, contempt (Psa. xix. 12). 2. It requires omnipotence to subdue them. It requires the same putting forth of Divine omnipotence to bring light into the darkened soul as to bring light into this darkened world (2 Cor. iv. 6). 3. It requires infinite patience to bear with these soul-diseases. 4. It requires an infinite sympathy, and a boundless love. III. **HIS HEALING.** 1. The means whereby He heals are various. Indeed, there is not a single circumstance which He does not employ for this very end. By things pleasant, things painful; comforts and crosses; by what He gives, by what He takes away; by friends, by foes; by saints, by sinners; by the Church, by the world; by sickness, by health; by life and by death; He heals the sin-sick soul. 2. The character of His healing. (1) Most wise healing. How infinite that wisdom which suits His skill to every individual case. Some are confident, He checks them; others depressed, He cheers them. Some love nothing but high cordials, He brings them down to that hunger that makes every bitter thing sweet. (2) Most tender healing. His is the tenderness of Him who in all our afflictions is afflicted, a friend, a brother, a nurse. Is the medicine bitter? He administered it with His own hand. (3) Most mysterious healing. He makes us wise by discoveries of our own folly, strong by unfolding our own weakness. (4) Most efficacious healing. He blesses His own remedies. (5) Most holy healing. All this healing is to conform to the Divine image. Conclusion.—1. Our wisdom is to be willing to have our spiritual maladies discovered, yea, thoroughly searched. 2. Our wisdom is to be willing to have them thoroughly cured, honestly to wish this, cost what it may, "Heal me." 3. To expect no cure but what is promised. 4. To put ourselves fairly into His hands. 5. Above all, to trust not only in Him, but in the blessed confidence of a simple faith that He is able to heal, and will heal, to come to Him with the prophet's cry, "Heal Thou me." (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *A cry for healing and saving grace*.—I. **SIN IS THE DISEASE OF THE SOUL, AND IS SO FELT.** 1. Loss of rest. 2. Deprivation of taste. 3. Loss of sight. 4. Loss of hearing. II. **CHRIST IS THE ONLY PHYSICIAN.** 1. The infinite efficacy of Christ's atonement, as showing God's readiness as well as ability to pardon. 2. Since God requires forgiveness without bounds of us, will not He extend the same to sinners? 3. The direct statements of Scripture. 4. Great

instances of mercy. **III. PRAYER IS OUR ONLY REFUGE.** The appointed means. Has never failed. **IV. PRAISE SHOULD BE OUR TRUEST DELIGHT.** (*S. Thodey.*)

A prayer for salvation:—1. These words express a deep concern about salvation, and an earnest desire to obtain it. 2. A firm persuasion that God alone can save. 3. A heartfelt application to God for salvation through the medium of prayer. 4. An unwavering confidence that the salvation which God bestows in answer to prayer will be a salvation suited to the wants of fallen man. (*G. Brooks.*)

The penitent's prayer:—I. AS EXPRESSING A DEEP CONCERN ABOUT SALVATION, AND AN EARNEST DESIRE TO OBTAIN IT. He not only cherishes a lively aversion to all that stings him with remorse, or that fills him with alarm; he mourns also the loss of those positive blessings of which his apostasy has deprived him, and thirsts for their recovery. II. The true penitent being thus awakened to a sense of his need of salvation, and to unfeigned and anxious concern about obtaining it, HE APPLIES FOR IT TO ALMIGHTY GOD. "Save me, O Lord." The nature and exigency of his situation compel him to have recourse to God as alone able to deliver him. The Divine mercy exhibited in the Gospel encourages him to put his confidence in God, as perfectly willing to bestow the deliverance he is so anxious to attain. Every new proof that he discovers of God's kindness gives him a more forcible impression of the heinousness of his guilt and of the folly of his conduct, and shows him still more clearly how much he must lose by remaining in a state of alienation and impenitence, and thus adds a fresh and double impulse to the anxiety that he feels, and the desire that he cherishes, for pardon and reconciliation. III. THE TRUE PENITENT APPLIES TO GOD FOR SALVATION THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF PRAYER. "Save me, O Lord." The moment that the sinner feels the real burden of his transgressions, and is made fully sensible of his need of Divine mercy, that moment he as naturally, and as necessarily, cries to God, for the requisite communications, as the hungry child craves bread from its bountiful parent, or as the condemned criminal supplicates pardon from his compassionate sovereign. And the penitent transgressor not only feels his heart naturally lifted up to God in prayer, when convinced that it is He "from whom cometh his aid"; he also applies in that way, in conformity to the Divine institution. He knows that prayer is the appointed method of seeking for and of obtaining the blessings of salvation. IV. THE CONFIDENCE WHICH THE TRUE PENITENT FEELS, THAT IF THE SALVATION WHICH HE ASKS BE GRANTED, IT WILL BE ALTOGETHER SUCH AS HIS CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRE, AND SUCH AS WILL MORE THAN GRATIFY HIS UTMOST WISHES. It is as if the penitent said to God whom he is addressing, "Were any other being to undertake my salvation, I should not be saved. There would be some imperfection in the achievement. It would be an attempt, but not attended with success. But if Thou Thyself save me, I shall be saved indeed. There will be no feebleness in the purpose; no inadequacy in the power; no deficiency in the means; no failure in the result. The perfection of Thy nature must reign in all Thy works; and that provides a security that nothing can occur to frustrate or to impair the work of my salvation." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

Prayer for healing and salvation:—These are great biblical words: "heal" and "save." We all know what it is to get a wound healed. The man with the gift of healing is sent for, and he binds up the wound and anoints it with the ointment. But God's healing goes far deeper than bodily wounds. Each heart is here its own interpreter. And then, "save." That means more than heal. We shall have to wait till the hereafter to know all that is meant by that great word. Now the prayer implies a helpless condition, in which we can only cry to God for healing and salvation. There is a place sometimes called "the back o' beyond," another name for it being "wit's end" (*Psa. cvii.*). With regard to the soul, it is well to find ourselves there, and the sooner the better; for it is not a hopeless place by any means. The Help of the helpless is ready there at the call of distress. He can do little for us indeed till we thus learn that really there is no other help but He. The Earl of Aberdeen tells how on one occasion, going up the Nile in his yacht, he saw a little steamer coming puffing rapidly down. He was told it was Gordon's steamer, who was Governor of the Soudan at the time. On hearing that, he was anxious to speak with Gordon, if possible; but the question was how to accomplish it, for in a few minutes the steamer would be past. Suddenly a brilliant idea struck the earl. He gave orders to his men to hang out signals of distress. He was sure Gordon was not the man to pass by heedless a signal of distress. The ruse proved successful. The steamer began at once to veer round, and in a very short

time was alongside the yacht. Now we all know that the helpful spirit was very characteristic of Gordon, but where was it he learned it? Just by sitting at Jesus' feet. And we may be sure that the disciple is not greater than the Master in that readiness to heed and help at the call of need, and that what Jesus was in the days of His flesh, He is now and ever will be. One thing more is implied in the text—the assurance that the help will be all-sufficient. The prophet is sure that God will perfect His work of healing and saving. And that is a great matter, to know that it is something that lasts. Our soul shall be restored and shall bless the Lord who healeth all its diseases. Yea, and so will the world in the good time coming, when all lands shall be healed, and God's saving health shall be known among all nations. (*J. S. Mayer, M.A.*) **Thou art my praise.—God the believer's praise:—**I. THE NATURE OF TRUE EFFECTUAL HEALING.

1. Spiritual healing is a gradual and progressive thing. It begins with a sinner's principles, for if the principle of our actions be not a part of God's holy teaching, and grafted by the Spirit of Christ into those who are the children of His adoption, it is one of the unsanctified impulses of nature. It is the soul's worst enemy, a wandering, faithless state, that will never lead us to Bethlehem, and as the seed of the bond-woman must be utterly cast out. When this terribly diseased principle is healed, the Spirit's work is in operation; and we begin to apprehend what that unearthly life is, which leads every other life that is worth possessing after it. From the principle the work of healing is carried forwards to the various actions that branch from it; the wild grape is no longer the curse of the vineyard. When the husbandman takes the plant itself in hand, it yields naturally to the superior excellency of the graft, and partakes of its very character and condition. We cannot now indulge the senses as we did; we were once their slaves, they are now our handmaids, and enter freely with us into the liberty of the Gospel. 2. It is free and unpurchasable by any creature who has the heart and disposition of a sinner. There is no buying the skill and medicines of our Physician. When He heals, it is "without money and without price." Nay, He was Himself compelled to purchase at the hands of justice, the power of stopping the ravages of corruption, and drawing a line, beyond which the sin of leprosy should not spread. No one, neither man nor angel, will ever be capable, I say not of estimating, but of imagining, the greatness of that purchase. 3. It is an effectual and everlasting healing. Christ's balm goes down to the very depth of the diseased places; He sifts, and tries, and searches the wound before He closes it. II. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN HEALING AND SALVATION. Both of these blessings are the precious and enduring treasures of redemption; though one of them is but a mean to an end; if I am not healed I cannot be saved; my earthly heart must not only be emptied of its enmity and rebellion, and deceivableness of unrighteousness, but of whatever hinders it, on its way to glory. Yea, and it must be refilled, with that measure of Divine love which will spur it forward, and strengthen and advance it on its journey towards Zion. When I am healed, my bosom glows with delight that I shall not go down in my natural uncleanness to the grave: my self-interest has quite wrapped itself up in the sweet security of the blessing; the depths of a wounded spirit are fathomed by the only hand that can get to the bottom of them. I have lost the distress, and pain, and poignancy of guilt; the scars are indeed mercifully left upon me, to be my remembrancers of what a gracious and loving Jesus has done for my sick soul, but the killing sickness is gone, and I seem to apprehend the wonderful reality of my being plucked as a brand out of the burning. The act of healing may, perhaps, with more propriety belong to the office of the Holy Spirit, than to the incarnate Son,—but salvation is that chariot of fire which exclusively holds the triumphs, the royalties, the priceless riches of Christ. We identify salvation with conquests and suffering, and a vesture stained with blood; it calls us, in special language, to draw near, and kiss the Son, and to support our everyday trials, by giving our thoughts to that surpassingly severe trial which He passed through as a Conqueror upon the Cross. III. IN WHAT WAY THE LORD IS GLORIFIED AS THE BELIEVER'S PRAISE. It is no question of conjecture in this place, whether God, under every one of His providences, in dark and clouded days, as well as in clear bright sunshine, is worthy to be praised; for that will admit of no discussion, if we believe that He is the perfection of wisdom, and goodness, and love; but this is a matter for individual, experimental inquiry, and so is limited to a narrower space. Have you, and have I the right apprehension of our God as a Father? and of ourselves as His children? to be able to

go down deep into the spirit of the text, and to say, "Thou art my praise"? 1. If the Lord is your praise, your hearts will be full of desire to honour Him in every act of your lives; and your continual longing will be to plead with Him, that every fresh song you sing to His glory may savour of this unselfish spirit. 2. If God be our praise we shall labour to be conformed to His likeness. 3. If God be our praise, all the heart-springs must be so full of it as to throw the precious living water into the life. (*F. G. Crossman.*)

Ver. 17. **Be not a terror unto me: Thou art my hope in the day of evil.**—*Divine wrath an object of fear*.—I. THE PETITION. 1. God's majesty is in itself an object of fear and dread (Heb. xii. 21; Isa. vi. 5; Hab. iii. 16; Hos. iii. 5). 2. Divine chastisements are to be feared (Jer. x. 24; Psa. vi. 1; Job ix. 34). 3. God's wrath is still more dreadful. 4. The prophet prays for support and comfort in the time of trial. II. THE EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE. 1. The grace exercised is hope. (1) God is the object of His people's hope (Psa. lxxi. 5, lxxviii. 5). (2) God is the end of their hope. They need no more (Psa. xvi. 11, xvii. 15). 2. The time when this grace is exercised. "Day of evil." (1) Sin and sorrow make every day an evil day; still let us hope (Psa. lxii. 8, lxxi. 14). (2) Yet there are peculiar days of evil. National calamity; reverses in business; disappointments; affliction; old age (Psa. lxxiii. 26; 2 Tim. i. 12). Learn—1. That hopes and fears are blended together in the experience of the godly (Psa. cxlvii. 11). 2. If God is sometimes a terror to His own people, how much more to the wicked? (*B. Beddome, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. **Whereby the kings of Judah come in.**—*Courage and fearlessness before kings*.—When King Don Pedro was unexpectedly brought into the hall in Chicago in which Moody was speaking on "Accepting Christ," the obsequious usher, after showing the king to a seat on the platform, whispered to Moody, "King Don Pedro is on the platform." Moody took no notice, but at the end of his powerful appeal turned to the king and said, "And that is a question that kings cannot postpone, for on their decision depends what God will do with the king." The king afterwards spoke of him as "a man to be heard and believed." (*G. Campbell Morgan.*) *Preaching before the greatest King*.—Latimer, while preaching one day before Henry VIII., stood up in the pulpit, and, seeing the king, addressed himself in a kind of soliloquy, thus, "Latimer, Latimer, take care what you say, for the great King Henry VIII. is here." Then he paused, and proceeded, "Latimer, Latimer, take care what you say, for the great King of kings is here."

Ver. 22. **But hallow ye the Sabbath day.**—*Cheating God out of Sunday*.—An old Christian, living at Salem, was much annoyed by the conduct of some of his neighbours who persisted in working on the Sabbath. One Sabbath, as he was going to Church, his Sabbath-breaking neighbours called out to him sneeringly from the hayfield, "Well, father, we have cheated the Lord out of two Sundays anyway!" "I don't know that," replied the old gentleman, "I don't know; the account is not yet settled." *The design of the Sabbath*.—The true spirit of the Sabbath appointment is, not that we should condense the religion of the week into the Sabbath, but that we should carry forth from the Sabbath its hallowed impulses and feelings into the other days of the week, to elevate and sustain us amid its wearisome secularities and depressing cares. The Lord has given us the Sabbath, not to relieve us of our religion, but so to revive our religion on that day as to impel its healthy tide into the remotest nook and corner of everyday duty. (*Andrew Thomson.*)

CHAPTER XVIII.

VERS. 1-10. **Go down to the potter's house.**—*The potter and the clay* (with Rom. ix. 19-24).—The potter and the clay! Is not that parable the germ of all that is most oppressive in the "terrible decree" of Calvinism? Does it not justify the Moslem's acceptance of the will of Allah as a destiny which he cannot understand, but to which he must perforce submit? Is not this the last word

of the apostle, even when he is most bent on vindicating the ways of God to men. in answer to the question which asks now, as Abraham asked of old, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "Why doth He yet find fault, for who hath resisted His will?" I do not purpose entering into the thorny labyrinth into which these questions lead us. We shall do well to trace the history and to note the bearings of this parable. Does it really teach what men have imagined that it taught—the powerlessness of man and the arbitrary sovereignty of God? or does it lead us to acknowledge a wisdom and righteousness and mercy in the history of men and nations? Does it simply crush us to the ground with the sense of our own impotence? or does it rightly take its place in that noble argument which makes the Epistle to the Romans, more than any other part of Scripture, a true *Theodicæa*, a vindication of the ways of God to man? I. IT WAS IN A DARK AND TROUBLOUS TIME THAT JEREMIAH WAS CALLED TO DO HIS WORK. The purpose and promises of Jehovah to His people Israel seemed to fail utterly. It was in this mood that there came to him an inner prompting in which, then or afterwards, he recognised "the Word of the Lord." Acting on that impulse he left the temple and the city, and went out alone into the valley of Hinnom, where he saw the potter at work moulding the clay of the valley into form and fashioning it according to his purpose. The prophet looked and saw that here too there was apparent failure. "The vessel that he wrought was marred in the hands of the potter." The clay did not take the shape; there was some hidden defect that seemed to resist the plastic guidance of wheel and hand. The prophet stood and gazed—was beginning, it may be, to blame the potter as wanting in his art, when he looked again and saw what followed. "So he returned, and made it another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." Skill was seen there in its highest form—not baffled by seeming or even real failure—triumphing over difficulties. And then by one of those flashes of insight which the world calls genius, but which we recognise as inspiration, he was taught to read the meaning of the parable. "Then the Word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine, O house of Israel." Did the thought which thus rushed in on his soul crush it as with the sense of a destiny arbitrary, supreme, not necessarily righteous, against which men struggled in vain, and in whose hands they had no freedom and therefore no responsibility? Far otherwise than that. To him that which he saw was a parable of wisdom and of love, working patiently and slowly; the groundwork of a call to repentance and conversion. When he passed from the potter and his wheel to the operations of the great Work-Master, as seen in the history of nations, he saw in the vessels that were being moulded, as on the wheel of providence, no masses of dead inert matter. Each was, as it were, instinct with a self-determining power, which either yielded to or resisted the plastic workings of the potter's hand. The urn or vase designed for kingly uses refused its high calling, and chose another and less seemly shape. The Supreme Artificer, who had determined in the history of mankind the times before-appointed and the bounds of men's habitations, had, for example, called Israel to be the pattern of a righteous people, the witness of truth to the nations, a kingdom of priests, the first-fruits of humanity. That purpose had been frustrated. Israel had refused that calling. It had, therefore, to be brought under another discipline, fitted for another work: "He returned, and made it another vessel." The pressure of the potter's hand was to be harder, and the vessel was to be fashioned for less noble uses. Shame and suffering and exile—their land left desolate, and they themselves weeping by the waters of Babylon—this was the process to which they were now called on to submit. But at any moment in the process, repentance, acceptance, submission might modify its character and its issues. The fixed unity of the purpose of the skilled worker would show itself in what would seem at first the ever-varying changes of a shifting will. True it was that a little later on in the prophet's work he carried the teaching of the parable one step further, to a more terrible conclusion. The Word of the Lord came to him again, "Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; and go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom" (Jer. xix. 1), and there in their sight he was to break the bottle as a witness that, in one sense, the day of grace was over, that something had been forfeited which now could never be regained. But not for that was the purpose of God frustrated. The people still had a calling and election. They

were still to be witnesses to the nations, stewards of the treasure of an eternal truth. In that thought the prophet's heart found hope and comfort. He could accept the doom of exile and shame for himself and for his people, because he looked beyond it to that re-moulded life. II. THE AGE IN WHICH ST. PAUL LIVED was like that of Jeremiah, a dark and troublous time for one whose heart was with his brethren, the children of Abraham according to the flesh. Once again the potter was fashioning the clay to high and noble uses. "To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile," was the law of all his work. But here also there was apparent failure. Blindness, hardness, unbelief, these marred the shape of the vessels made to honour. Did he for that cease to believe in the righteousness and faithfulness of God? Did he see no loving purpose behind the seeming severity? No, the vessel would be made for what men hold dishonour—exile lasting through centuries, dispersion over all the world, lives that were worn down with bondage—but all this was in his eyes but the preparation and discipline for the far-off future, fitting them in the end for nobler uses. III. THE HISTORY OF NATIONS AND CHURCHES HAS THROUGH ALL THE AGES BORNE WITNESS OF THE SAME TRUTH. Each has had its calling and election. Dimly as it has been given to us to trace the education of mankind, imperfect as is any attempt at the philosophy of history, we can yet see in that history that the maze is not without a plan. Greece and Rome, Eastern or Latin or Teutonic Christendom—each nation or Church, as it becomes a power in the history of mankind, has been partly taking the shape and doing the work which answered to the design and purpose of God, partly thwarting and resisting that purpose. So far as it has been faithful to its calling, so far as the collective unity of its life has been true to the eternal law of righteousness, it has been a vessel made to honour. Those who see in history, not the chaos in which brute forces are blindly working from confusion to confusion, but the unfolding of a righteous order, can see in part how resistance, unfaithfulness, sensuality, have marred the work,—how Powers that were as the first of nations have had written on them, as it seemed, the sentence passed of old on Amalek, that their latter end should be that they should perish for ever. Spain, in her decrepitude and decay; France, in her alternations of despotism and anarchy; Rome, in the insanity of her claims to dominate over the reason and conscience of mankind—these are instances, to which we cannot close our eyes, of vessels marred in the potter's hands. Each such example of the judgment of the heavens bids us not to be high-minded, but to fear. We need to remember, as of old, that the doom which seems so far from us may be close at hand, even at our doors, that that which seems ready to fall on this nation or on that, Turk or Christian, Asiatic or European, is not irreversible. "At what time soever," now as in the prophet's days, "a nation shall turn and repent," and struggle over the stepping-stones of its dead self to higher things, there is the beginning of hope. The Potter may return and mould and fashion it, it may be to lowlier service, perhaps even to outward dishonour, but yet, if cleansed from its iniquity, it shall be meet for the Master's use. IV. THE PARABLE BEARS UPON THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE OF EVERY CHILD OF MAN, and it is obviously that aspect of its teaching which has weighed most heavily upon the minds of men, and often, it would seem, made sad the hearts of the righteous whom God has not made sad. Does it leave room there also for individual freedom and responsibility? Did the inspired teachers think of it as leading men to repentance and faith and hope, or as stifling every energy under the burden of an inevitable doom? The words in which St. Paul speaks of it might be enough to suggest the true answer to that question. To him even that phase of the parable which seems the darkest and most terrible does but present to man's reverential wonder an instance of the forbearance of God enduring with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. The Potter would fain return and mould and re-mould till the vessel is fit for some use, high or humble, in the great house of which He is the Supreme Head. By the discipline of life, by warnings and reproofs, by failures and disappointments, by prosperity and success, by sickness and by health, by varying work and ever-fresh opportunities, He is educating men and leading them to know and to do His will. Who does not feel in his calmer and clearer moments that this is the true account of the past chances and changes of his life? True, there is a point at which all such questionings reach their limit. In the language of another parable, to one is given five pounds, to another two, and to another one—to each according to his several ability. But the thought that sustains us beneath the burden of these weary questions

is that the Judge of all the earth shall assuredly do right. Men's opportunities are the measure of their responsibilities. "To whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more." The bitter murmur and passionate complaint are checked by the old words, "Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" The poorest and the humblest may find comfort in the thought that if his work be done faithfully and truly, if he sees in the gifts which he has received, and the outward circumstances of his life, and the work to which they lead him, but the tokens of the purpose of the great Designer, he, too, yielding himself as clay to the hands of the potter, may become in the least honoured work, a vessel of election. What is required in such a vessel when formed or fashioned is, above all, that it should be clean and whole, free from the taint that defiles, from the flaws that mar the completeness of form or the efficiency of use. The work of each soul of man is to seek this consecration, to flee the youthful lusts, the low ambitions, the inner baseness, which desecrate and debase. Our comfort is, that in so striving, we are fellow-workers with the great Work-Master. Our prayer to Him may well be that He will not despise what His own hands have made. (*Dean Plumptre.*)

Man in the hands of God:—I. Man in the hand of God as MORALLY DEFECTIVE.

1. Humanity throughout all ages and climes has been defective—(1) In moral judgment; (2) In moral affections, and (3) In moral conduct. 2. How this defection occurred is a question that lands us into the mysterious region whence evil sprang.

II. Man in the hands of God as MORALLY IMPROVABLE. 1. God can improve the "marred" vessel of humanity. (1) He can emotionally. He has the heart for it. He is great enough in love to forgive the past, and bless the future. (2) He can magisterially. The mediation of Christ enables Him to do so in a way consistent with the justice of His character, the honour of His government, and the stability of His throne. (3) He can reformatively. He has all the moral instrumentality necessary to reform the soul. 2. The Gospel is the power of God.

III. Man in the hands of God as MORALLY FREE. 1. Man is responsible for his conduct. The social history of the world, the universal consciousness of man, and the concurrent teachings of the Bible all show this. 2. Man is responsible for his destiny. Humanity will be "plucked up," and "pulled down" by God, or built up and planted according to its conduct. (*Homilist.*) *The potter and the clay*:—I. EVERY MAN NATURALLY ENGENDERED OF THE OFFSPRING OF

ADAM, IS, IN THE SIGHT OF AN ALL-SEEING, HEART-SEARCHING GOD, ONLY AS A PIECE OF MARRED CLAY. 1. As man was created originally "after God in knowledge," as well as righteousness and true holiness, we may rationally infer that his understanding, in respect to things natural as well as Divine, was of a prodigious extent: for he was made but a little lower than the angels, and consequently, being like them, excellent in his understanding, he knew much of God, of himself, and all about him; and in this, as well as every other respect, was, as Mr. Collier expresses it in one of his essays, a perfect major: but this is far from being our case now. Men of low and narrow minds soon commence wise in their own conceits; and having acquired a little smattering of the learned languages, and made some small proficiency in the dry sciences, are easily tempted to look upon themselves as a head taller than their fellow mortals, and accordingly, too, too often put forth great swelling words of vanity. But persons of a more exalted and extensive reach of thought dare not boast. No: they know that the greatest scholars are in the dark in respect to many even of the minutest things in life. 2. This will appear yet more evident, if we consider the perverse bent of his will. Being made in the very image of God; undoubtedly before the fall, man had no other will but his Maker's. God's will, and Adam's, were then like unisons in music. There was not the least disunion or discord between them. But now he hath a will as directly contrary to the will of God, as light is contrary to darkness, or heaven to hell. 3. A transient view of fallen man's affections will yet more firmly corroborate this melancholy truth. These, at his being first placed in the paradise of God, were always kept within proper bounds, fixed upon their proper objects, and, like so many gentle rivers, sweetly, spontaneously, and habitually glided into their ocean, God: but now the scene is changed; for we are now naturally full of vile affections, which, like a mighty and impetuous torrent, carry all before them. 4. The present blindness of natural conscience makes this appear in a yet more glaring light. In the soul of the first man Adam, conscience was, no doubt, the candle of the Lord, and enabled him rightly and instantaneously to discern between good and evil, right and wrong.

And, blessed be God! some remains of this are yet left; but, alas! how dimly does it burn, and how easily and quickly is it covered, or put out and extinguished. 5. Nor does that great and boasted Diana, I mean unassisted, unenlightened Reason, less demonstrate the justness of such an assertion. The horrid and dreadful mistakes which the most refined reasoners in the heathen world ran into, both as to the object as well as manner of Divine worship, have sufficiently demonstrated the weakness and depravity of human reason: nor do our modern boasters afford us any better proofs of the greatness of its strength, since the best improvement they generally make of it is only to reason themselves into downright wilful infidelity, and thereby reason themselves out of eternal salvation. Need we now any further witness that man, fallen man, is altogether a piece of marred clay? 6. But this is not all, we have yet more evidence to call; for do the blindness of our understandings, the perverseness of our will, the rebellion of our affections, the corruption of our consciences, the depravity of our reason, prove this charge; and does not the present disordered frame and constitution of our bodies confirm the same also? Doubtless in this respect, man, in the most literal sense of the word, is a piece of marred clay: for God originally made him of the "dust of the earth." II. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY THERE IS OF THIS FALLEN NATURE'S BEING RENEWED. Archimedes once said, "Give me a place where I may fix my foot, and I will move the world"; so, without the least imputation of arrogance, with which perhaps he was justly chargeable, we may venture to say, Grant the foregoing doctrine to be true, and then deny the necessity of man's being renewed, who can. I suppose I may take it for granted that all hope after death to go to a place which we call heaven. But permit me to tell you, heaven is rather a state than a place; and consequently, unless you are previously disposed by a suitable state of mind, you could not be happy even in heaven itself. For what is grace, but glory militant? what is glory, but grace triumphant? This consideration made a pious author say, that "holiness, happiness, and heaven, were only three different words for one and the self-same thing." And this made the great Preston, when he was about to die, turn to his friends, saying, "I am changing my place, but not my company." To make us meet to be blissful partakers of such heavenly company, this "marred clay," I mean these depraved natures of ours, must necessarily undergo a universal moral change: our understandings must be enlightened; our wills, reason, and consciences, must be renewed; our affections must be drawn toward, and fixed upon things above; and because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven, this corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality. Christ hath said it, and Christ will stand. "Unless a man," learned or unlearned, high or low, though he be a master of Israel as Nicodemus was, unless he "be born again, he cannot see, he cannot enter into, the kingdom of God." If it be required, Who is to be the potter? and by whose agency this marred clay is to be formed into another vessel? Or in other words, if it be asked, how this great and mighty change is to be effected? I answer, not by the mere dint and force of moral suasion. Neither is this change to be wrought by the power of our own free-will. We might as soon attempt to stop the ebbing and flowing of the tide, and calm the most tempestuous sea, as to imagine that we can subdue, or bring under proper regulations, our own unruly wills and affections by any strength inherent in ourselves. And therefore I inform you, that this heavenly Potter, this blessed Agent, is the Almighty Spirit of God the Holy Ghost, the Third Person in the most adorable Trinity, co-essential with the Father and the Son. This is that fire which our Lord came to send into our earthly hearts, and which I pray the Lord of all lords to kindle in every unrenewed one this day. (*G. Whitefield, M.A.*) *A visit to the potter's house*.—I. MIND ORIGINATES POWER. The work is a work on the wheels; but the power begins with the workman; it is spirit that presides, it is will that controls; an intelligent being makes use of the power he has set in motion to fashion his design. The perfect type is in the mind of the workman, and he must give it form and shape, and impress it on matter. All power originates with God, and is under His control. II. DIVINE PATIENCE IS ASSOCIATED WITH DIVINE POWER. You do not see in the potter at work what God can do if it pleases Him, but what it pleases Him to do; not what He may do with the clay, but what His purpose is. We are taught the intention of the Divine worker to mould men and nations according to a Divine pattern, that there is nothing arbitrary in His procedure; that every act is regulated by a reference to His plan, and that Divine patience is constantly and perse-

veringly at work. III. DIVINE PATIENCE PERSEVERES IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF ITS DESIGN. How often have you been marred through want of submission to a perfect and loving will, manifested in God's providential dealings with you or in His Gospel? The clay may be broken so often that it loses all its adhesive properties, and when placed on the wheels may splinter into fragments and become utterly worthless. Conclusion—1. There is a fixed and settled plan, an original idea in the Divine mind, according to which His work is to be conformed. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning." Man is God's work. God found in Himself the pattern of this wondrous creation. He made man in His own image, in His own likeness. Man was a failure; the world therefore was a failure, and the flood was brought in, and the work destroyed. There was to be a new manifestation of humanity. Men were to be distributed into families and tribes, into nations and kingdoms. We are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son." We are to be "like Him": our bodies are "to be fashioned like unto His glorious body." There is a perfect type of society. There is to be the universal diffusion of truth and righteousness. There is a perfect type of a Church. 2. God does not make anything for the sole purpose of destroying it. See the interest God takes in what is going on in the world, and the effect it has on Him. 3. That there is no waste in life. There is no waste in nature. There was in Christ's miracles no waste of power. There is no waste in human life. That part of it which is introductory to the rest, which we call childhood, is not waste; it has its relations to the rest of life. That portion which is tried and tested, which is subjected to many experiments, is not waste. The sorrows and tears of life are not the waste of life—toil, strife, agony, are not lost. All these things that seem to fall from life, are worked up again into new forms. Life may be a marred and broken thing, but God can work it up into a form of Divine beauty. 4. Life is a "work on the wheels." Character is in the course of formation: it will come out either marred or perfected, just as you submit to the Divine will, or resist the influences brought to bear upon you. (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Pottery*.—Such was the invitation which came to me as I spent a holiday among the potteries of North Staffordshire. 1. The preparation of the clay. In my ignorance I had thought very lightly of that. I supposed that the clay was brought from some place or other, and, after being kneaded, would be used for the purpose of the potter. But as we looked over the various processes, several things astonished us very much in this preparation of the clay. In the first place, we were astonished at the materials used. There was, of course, the clay as we understand it, but in addition we found stones of the very hardest description and flints also used. In one factory some eight or ten mills did nothing else but grind to the very smallest powder these hard flint stones mixed with the clay. And then these ground flint stones were further churned with water until it became a fluid mass. Another interesting feature was the straining, and the use of magnets to extract any iron that might be there. At last it was run into bags placed under a press and the water squeezed out, and the clay left behind. It was then turned out as plastic clay for the potter's use. We often speak of the potter and the clay, and we are warranted by the Scriptures to use this simile for the sovereignty of God. And, no doubt, we must hold fast the eternal sovereignty of God. But I am not quite sure that we do not see here the process anterior to what we speak of as the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God is shown in the form of the vessel made from the clay, but here we have something anterior to the making of the vessel—the preparation of the clay. And while we believe in the sovereignty of God, we also believe that salvation is perfectly free. Your heart may be as hard as a flint, or without any stamina as that liquid mass, and yet it is quite possible from that hard flinty rock, or from that fluid liquid mass, to make the clay which shall be plastic for the Potter's use. Are you willing to be made clay?—willing to be just put into His hands? 2. The making of the vessels. Nothing could be more beautiful than to watch the skilful potter mould the clay upon his wheel until it became a beautiful vessel under his touch. Here I learnt what a great variety of vessels the potter made. Here were vessels which would adorn the tables of the rich, and also vessels necessary for the poor; here were vessels which might only be for ornaments, and others of the greatest practical use. Oh, if you are only willing to be as clay in the Great Potter's hands, He is able to make you vessels meet for the Master's use. The use may be very varied, and the vessels may differ in form and beauty, but if you are willing to be as clay in His hands, He will fashion you so that you may

be a vessel for His glory, and for the benefit of those around you. 3. The varied processes to fix the shape of the vessels. Until the vessel was fired, the potter could break it up, as he did, and throw it back into the mass, but when once the vessel was fired, its shape and form were fixed. Two things about the firing interested me. The one was the gradual preparation that the vessel had to go through. I asked why it was necessary to dry it so slowly by steam first, before it was put into the great oven. I received the reply that if it was put into the oven at once, it would break. There must be the slow process of drying by steam. Ah! and is it not so with our Great Potter? Does He not gently train us? He does not put us into the fiery oven all at once. He prepares us by less difficult temptations for the fiery heat which we must all go through. Every man must pass through the fire in order that the stability of his own character may be brought out. God knows the amount of heat which is necessary, and He will not send one temptation more than we are able to bear. Another interesting thing in the firing was, that every vessel had to be separate from the others. They were packed up in the saggars so that not one single clay vessel should touch another. And the reason, they told us, was that the two vessels would be so fused in the fire that both would be spoilt. Is it not true with the great fiery oven through which the Great Potter passes us? We must pass through the fire alone. 4. Then we came to the decorative process. First, there was the making of the pattern. The pattern was made upon a copper-plate, and then taken off upon the tracing-paper and placed upon the plate. The pattern in many cases was very similar. One machine rolled off some millions of patterns. The Christian has only one pattern—the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His purpose that we should be conformed to His image. The next thing that struck us was the number of hands through which the pattern had to pass. An ordinary dinner plate had to pass through some ten or twelve different hands—one filling in one colour, and another another colour, until it passed down the whole line; one filling in a little stroke of blue, another red, another colouring a leaf, until at last the whole pattern was brought out upon the one plate. Is it not so with the Christian? The pattern must be the same, but the pattern is variously brought out. It may be a very different colour. We take our pattern from those we mix with day by day, and if we are only upon the lookout we may find many things to colour the pattern of Jesus Christ in our lives. Here we may colour with a little bit of unselfishness, here a little bit of charity, here a little bit of self-sacrifice. You may take from one and another impressions which will bring out the grand pattern. Another interesting thing was the firing in order to fix these colours. The vessel must be put into the kiln to fix the colours. There is intense scorching heat in there. And is it not so with the Great Potter? Does He not often put us Christians into the kiln in order to fix the colour? How many Christians you see who have had their colours fixed by adversity! This one's love is brought out by trial; this one's charity by temptation. Then came the last process. Once more the vessel is put into the kiln, and the fire brought to bear upon it, and then the colour and pattern come out still more glorious than before. The glaze is now dry, and the work of the potter now finished. And so oftentimes the Christian is plunged into despondency, losing all the evidences of his faith; is plunged once more into the fire; and in the fire he sees that there is One walking with Him, and His form is as the Son of God, and he sees the pattern is being brought out by the great Potter. 5. At last we were taken up to the showroom, and here were displayed all the triumphs of the potter's art, and we could have spent hours in admiring the work of the potter. So we look forward to the showroom when we leave all the dross of the workshop and the whirl of the factory; and when we ascend up to the showroom where we shall see the triumphs of the Great Potter's art, we shall simply wonder that out of these stones and liquid clay it is possible to make such vessels as He has prepared for His glory. (*E. A. Stuart, M.A.*) *The teaching of the potter*:—Divine revelation is a possible thing only because of that great and earliest fact in the record of human history, "And God made man in His image," a fact which nothing, not even sin, can destroy. God's words to men are made possible and meaningful because of the fact that, in spite of rebellion and fall, there is enough deep, true kinship left to afford resting-place for His appeal and interpretation of His speech. As long as spiritual being lasts, this must be true. Now proceed a further step. The method of communication is not a matter of essential importance. So long as I make you understand what I mean, the way in which I do this does not matter

much. We meet with those who do not speak our language, or perhaps any tongue that we can speak and understand; but we find that some sufficient things can be said by signs. We can buy this or that by pointing to it, and showing the value in coin. There is one further step to take, and then we shall arrive at the position from which I want to look at the words of this text. The activities and occupations of men are full of resemblances to the activities of God. What we have to do, and are doing every day, illustrates much more fully than, perhaps, we have ever thought, what God is doing around us and within us; so that we may rise somewhat to comprehend His work in its grand patience and victory over hindrance and pauseless triumph, by means of a fuller understanding of our own. And, significantly enough, this is the more completely true of those occupations which are simple and manual, most necessary and least artificial, compelled by the wants which are common to us all, rather than of those which are the creation of empty social custom and artificial routine. The Divine word to Jeremiah, both in itself and in the manner of its communication to him, is strikingly suggestive. What was the word? Jeremiah had been a very faithful minister and messenger, and yet his endeavours had been unavailing to stay the torrent of national disaster. As a rock, staunch in mid-stream, only adds to the tumult of the waters that dash, and break, and hurry on their way, this man's obedient and firm obstruction only made him to suffer the fretful wrath of the people, whose downward rush would not be stayed. It seemed as though he were a protest and nothing more. For the people there was nothing but hopeless ruin. God wants to show His servant that such despair is not true. What the people might have been they refused to be, but they might yet be something. What the potter does with the clay with which he works, the Lord can do with the men with whom He deals. What is that? Well, go down to the workman's house and watch him. See the frame, and the wheels, and the mass of ready clay. See the man's tutored hands and nimble fingers. He has purpose, ability, design. His power is complete. He can do what he likes. He can take the lump of clay in his hands and say, "This shall be a fair and stately vase fit to stand on the table of a king"; or, "This shall be a thing for common use, one among a thousand like itself, winning no regard or admiration, to be appraised at no appreciable value." He can bid the clay be what he chooses. Can he? Let us see. Now the workman has put clay upon the wheel, and it begins to whirl; the beginning of the design is manifest, some outline of a shape appears under the touch of his plastic hand. But then comes a pause: something has gone wrong. Where is the fault? Not in the care and genius of the workman? Surely not in the clay? Yes, there is a flaw, a rebellious and intractable mingling of impurities, and the workman cannot do as he had purposed. What will the potter do? Toss the clay away? Clay is plentiful and cheap. No, not if the workman's heart is right and his enthusiasm true. A fellow-workman may say, "I would not trouble with it. No one can make anything of that piece; it is utterly useless." But the right-souled man says, "I waste nothing, and despise nothing. I can make something of this clay if you cannot; and I shall make what can be made, if not what I hoped, at least the very best that is according to its nature possible." "So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (xviii. 4). And so can I do, says the cheery word to the prophet, so can I the Lord do with this apparently hopeless and intractable nation. With them, as with the piece of clay, there is a resolute, rebellious intermingling. They show themselves unworthy. They make themselves incapable of the high destiny among the nations to which My call would lead them. They must lose their crown. My purpose must be fulfilled in other ways, and by other instruments and ministries. But—and here speaks the heart of generous, patient love—I have not done with them. I shall do the very best that can be done with them, and put them in a place which they can fill. This is My pleasure; anything short of it would be anguish. But, to do the possible best, even with the most unpromising material, is the object and aim of My redeeming hand. The right-hearted workman is like-minded of God, and, in his sphere, does an identical work. The man who makes two ears of corn grow where only one would grow before; the man who shapes wood, or beats and moulds metal into fashions of use, beneficence, and comeliness, is, besides all the wage-profit that his industry brings, doing a redemptive work that is akin to Divine. Industry, cleanliness, usefulness, beautifying labour—these are far more than means of livelihood, they are means of night and spiritual life. (*D. J. Hamer.*) *The relation of*

the will to character and destiny :—The figure of the potter is of frequent occurrence in Scripture ; and its meaning is the more easily understood, because there is scarcely any craft of which the principal tools have been less altered in the lapse of the centuries. The purposes for which the figure is used in the Bible may be arranged under two chief heads. In every case the power of the potter over the clay is emphasised. But while some passages stop with that fact,—that the potter's power is absolute, without measure or limit, that he can do what he likes with the clay,—others teach distinctly that the potter is not ruled by his fancy or caprice, or by any momentary or arbitrary impulse, but the exercise of his power is itself determined by something, some quality or fitness, within the clay. Of these two lessons, the former is most frequent in Isaiah and in Paul, although other writers adopt or enforce it. That is the most obvious meaning of the figure, to be found in almost every literature, never to be forgotten by the reverent—the potter has complete command over the clay. He, at his wheel, is the symbol of power: the clay, of helplessness and necessary submission. There has probably never been a man who believed that more thoroughly than did Jeremiah. In this very chapter he represents God as saying to the house of Israel, “Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand.” In his account of his own call, the prophet describes a Divine voice as speaking to him : “Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.” He never hesitates in his ascription to God of the right and power of complete control over man, or to man of the necessity of submission, and the obligation of obedience. But according to Jeremiah that is not a complete account of the relation, either of God to man, or of man to God. And in this chapter he uses the figure of the potter to show, on the one hand, that the potter's power is not exercised arbitrarily, and on the other, that its exercise is determined, and even in some sense conditioned, by the clay itself.

1. With regard to the figure, it is in the particulars of the fourth verse that Jeremiah's use of it differs from that of most other scriptural writers. As soon as the potter saw that the clay he was dealing with would not answer the purpose he had in view, with a slight touch of his hand he crushed it down into a shapeless heap of mud, began anew, and made it into “another vessel.” In other words, the potter's treatment of the clay depends upon his knowledge or discovery of its qualities, its capability, or its faultiness. Or, dropping the figure, God does not always act upon and complete His first apparent design with a man ; and any change of design on His part is determined by some adequate cause, which is always to be found in the man himself—in the way in which he exercises his freedom of will, or in the attitude in which he puts himself towards conscience, and duty, and truth. There has sometimes been a disposition, amongst nations and amongst individuals, to imagine that some moral character had been stamped indelibly upon them by God, and was permanent and unalterable, whatever they did. So far was Jeremiah from believing that, and so far is the Bible from teaching it, that it represents man's will as in a sense entrusted with the supreme control over his spirit and over his destiny. The plastic skill and power of the Great Potter, in themselves immeasurable and without limit, are yet not applied arbitrarily, under the impulse of fancy or caprice, but depend at least for their direction upon the clay itself.

2. That truth is sometimes overlooked, or qualified, or even rejected. Some of the current philosophies deny it in theory, but, when pressed, will reluctantly acknowledge that consciousness can be quoted in its favour, or, as the greatest English psychologist of the day puts it, “The assumption of the freedom of the will is in a certain sense inevitable to anyone exercising rational choice.” In the Old Testament it is an especial favourite of Jeremiah's, though not confined to him ; and in this single paragraph he is not contented with the dubious form it assumes in the figure, but recurs to it once and again afterwards. When verse 14 is compared with the preceding verse, it becomes evident that the prophet wanted to point a contrast between the steadfastness of the phenomena and laws of nature, and the apparent fickleness of those of morals. To the one the eternal will of God which knows no change is central ; to the other, the uncertain will of man. The forces that seem to play in the cloud-forms and the winds, to move with slow rhythm in the solid structures of the ages, or with quick inapparent catastrophe and explosion, the life that modifies the cell and pulsates in a myriad forms through the universe—all simply fulfil their Sovereign's will ; and the only power, not in the same way subject to His rule, but permitted to rebel against Him, and to check and alter His purposes,

is that of the personality or will of man. To that extent the Potter renounces His power over the clay, and the clay is allowed to determine the design of the Potter. 3. The same truth is put in a third way in verses 7-10. The inference evidently is, that neither God's threats nor His promises are absolute, in the sense that they are incapable of diversion or of change. Every word that goes forth from His lips is of necessity law; but the nations, the individuals, are left at liberty to choose which of the words shall govern them, and the occasions of choice are more than one. It appears accordingly that men can actually, by their choice of evil or carelessness concerning right, frustrate God's purposes of grace, just as by penitence and self-reform they can avert a doom that is impending. That is the word of the Lord by others than Jeremiah (Ezek. xviii. 20-24). Nor does the New Testament reject such a lesson, which is in accordance further with the teaching of reason and with the fundamental conception of justice. There is no finality in God's design for a man, until the man's will has either frittered itself away, or hardened itself into invincibility. But by the attitude towards God into which men put themselves, they determine the pattern according to which His methods mould them, and every change of attitude on their part is quickly followed by its appropriate and necessary change of design. Nor is this modification of God's design represented as confined to nations or communities. Jonah himself was called of God to be a prophet, but the action of his own will made him a sacrifice to appease the sea, until, when he willed better things, God's plan for him changed back again. There is thus cumulative evidence, in Scripture, in history, in human experience, that God does not always act to the end upon His original design for a man, but that His designs are sometimes changed on account of something in the men themselves. What is that something? This chapter alone, to say nothing of teaching that abounds elsewhere, leaves no room for doubt. "If that nation turn from their evil," is laid down with all emphasis in the eighth verse as the one condition upon which the modification of God's purpose depends; and the most powerful and essential human factor in every act of moral turning is of necessity the will. The responsibility for a man's character rests substantially, it would be hardly too much to say entirely, upon himself. It is a terrible responsibility, of which men have tried to rid themselves in many ways; but so long as human nature remains what it is, free to choose the right or the wrong, it is a responsibility which every man must face and every man must bear. God gives, in the conscience and by His Spirit, a clear revelation of what is right, and in His Son a source of strength that is sufficient for every duty. He gives opportunities, allurements, warnings without number; and having given those, ceaselessly present with us, His part in the formation of character may be said to be done. The man has then to determine, by the action of his own will, whether the law of perfecting or the law of perdition shall work in him. (*R. W. Moss.*) *The potter and the clay* :—The whole revealed Word of God takes for granted, appeals to, and proceeds upon two facts: first, that nothing can proceed from God which is not like God; next, that man is a co-worker with God in the shaping out of his own destiny. The Bible is all quick with the great truth that man can escape from evil, and that the work to which the good God has, more than anything else, set Himself is to help him to escape. Even the heritage of misery and disease which a bad parent leaves to his child is—in God's world—not so potent but that the child may rise above it. I. EVERY HUMAN LIFE IS, FIRST OF ALL, AN IDEA IN THE MIND OF GOD. The potter is an artist, and it is the thoughts of his head he embodies in the vessels he makes. He is thus a likeness to us of God. Such men as Bernard Palissy and Josiah Wedgwood did not spend their instructive lives only to make clayware for human use, but also to reveal to us, and enable us to understand, the working of the Divine Artist in the formation of human lives. Can you recall, you who have read Palissy's life, the passionate eagerness with which he sought out beautiful forms in nature? Do you remember how his unresting brain toiled to make new combinations of colour and form? And with what unwearied zeal he sought to bring beauty and strength and polish into the vessels he made? It is all a far-off portrait of God. The human artist who never saw a wonderful conjunction of natural objects, of form and colour, in field or wood, without bringing it in straightway to his workshop in the brain, is but an outshadowing to us of the Divine Artist, and of the thought, the care, the skill, the beauty, which God expends on every life He makes. It is true that the Divine Artist has to work with inferior clay. He has to embody the thoughts of His creative

mind in material that has been soiled by sin—flesh that has corrupted its way, and transmitted its taints and diseases and weaknesses to the children. But, all the same, the life and the outshaping of the life are the work of God. The glad some fact, therefore, in the teaching of the potter and the clay, is that our lives are not shaped by accident; nor are the materials of our life combined by blind chance. My personality, as truly as my body, is the work of His hands. But here is my joy. In this very fact I have a ground of appeal to God. When my spirit is overwhelmed by the mysteries of existence, or my way hedged up by moral difficulties, which I have in myself no strength to overcome, I can go to Him and say: "O Maker of my being, O Planner out of my lot, Thou faithful Creator, I am poor and needy: wilt not Thou have respect to the work of Thy hands, and make haste to help me?"

II. EVERY HUMAN LIFE IS SHAPED FOR A DIVINE USE. When the potter turns a vessel on his wheel, the first pulse of thought concerning it touches its use. It is the use which determines the shape. And this holds good in the shaping of human life by God. Anterior to the infinite variety of shape in our lives is this grand common fact for all life. We are not driftwood on a tumbling sea. We are created to be vessels for God and of God, vessels of His sanctuary, set apart to His service, and filled with all sweet and wholesome things. This great primal purpose of the Creator seeks to fulfil itself many ways in our lives. But in all ways the Divine intention is that we shall contain and give forth some fair measure of His own life. One is set to fulfil this purpose on one level, another on a level higher or lower. One must do it by work, another by suffering. But for one and all this is the Divine purpose and requirement, that we be vessels of truth and righteousness, embodiments and manifestations—up to the measure of our natural capacities and shapes—of the Divine character and life. It is the sad fact, as we all know, that this primal use intended by our Creator is not fulfilled in all. But our shortcomings do not alter the fact that we were made for this purpose. In the fulfilment of this end our happiness consists. He who made us has linked the right use of life and our personal well-being together.

III. LIVES TRIED IN ONE SHAPE ARE SOMETIMES BROKEN UP AND RESHAPED TO FULFIL THEMSELVES IN NEW SPHERES OR DIFFERENT CAPACITIES. And He breaks up Joseph the dreamer and the slave, and forms Joseph the wise statesman, administrator, and prince of Egypt. That was a strong well-formed vessel who went forth from Jerusalem to Damascus, carrying fiery zeal for God, cruel death for God's people. The Divine Artist takes this vessel—formed of good clay, impact of such energies, such zeal—and breaks it up and puts it on the wheel, and reshapes it for higher levels and wider ends. Christian biography is full of such instances. Here is one who was only a timid lad at the outset, shrinking from boisterous companions, retiring to woods for meditation on God's Word. The timid lad becomes a fearless preacher, and the founder of the Society of Friends. Here is another, a poor cobbler, piecing together little scraps of different coloured leathers to make a map of the world, and by the black pieces to point out to his friends the extent of heathenism. The poor mapmaker becomes William Carey, the founder of Missions to India and the translator of the Bible into Indian languages. A third is at first a poor piecer in a spinning factory on the banks of the Clyde. But at last he is the voice of one crying in a wilderness: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make a highway in the desert for God." And so great in this ministry that black men carry his bones, when he dies, a year's journey from the depths of Africa to England; and white men there reverently bury them in the sepulchres of their kings, because he had done good to God and to man. God breaks up the first-shaped clay which has promise in it to make better vessels for His use. Shall we turn aside and look at the Divine Artist at this work of reshaping? Those awful times in the experience of His people when He comes with a succession of trials, when He sends whole tides of sorrow into the soul, are the times when we shall best see God at His work, when He reshapes for higher ends the clay that was shaped for lower ends before.

IV. GOD HAS LEFT IT TO MAN HIMSELF TO DECIDE WHETHER HE WILL BE A VESSEL OF HONOUR OR OF DISHONOUR. "Hath not the potter power over the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?"—that is one side of this mystery. "If a man purge himself"—from being a vessel unto dishonour—"he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use"—this is the other. But the one side does not contradict the other. The Creator has power over the lives He moulds; but it is never so wielded as to quench the power of choice He has given to us. In respect

of natural capacity, position in society, function, time and place of birth, joy and sorrow, health and sickness, this power of God is absolute. He appoints the bounds of our habitation. He alone designs the fashion of our personality. He alone fixes the doom on sin. But at those points in the development of life, where the real battle of the soul is waged, where the decisive shocks of the conflict between righteousness and unrighteousness have to be sustained, and the burden of responsibility taken up, we are in a region where God leaves man as absolutely free as He is Himself. The Creator has power over the life; but, as put forth by God, it is a power tempered with justice and mercy, and quick with all the goodness of the Divine character. V. BE TRUE TO THE DIVINE INTENTION AND SHAPING OF YOUR LIVES. Do not lower yourselves to evil shapes. Do not suffer yourselves to degenerate into vessels set to vile uses and filled with base, unwholesome things. What the great King desires is that we should all be vessels for Him, vessels to carry and pour forth His love, His life, His purity, in all we do and wherever we go. And what He seeks to fill our souls with is His own life as God, that eternal life which He has poured out for us all in Christ. And this is eternal wisdom to receive that life of God into the heart. This is the one grand, informing, outshaping, abiding power for human life. This will reshape the most unshapely into the very image of God. (*A. Macleod, D.D.*) *The Divine Potter*:—Am I clay in the hands of the Divine Potter? The Bible does not say so: yet apparently this is the very thing that it does say. The context does not teach us that God is speaking about the individual man, or about personal salvation, or about the eternal destiny of the individual soul: the Lord is speaking about nations, empires, kingdoms, vessels which He only can handle. Moreover, He Himself descends into reasoning, and therefore He gives up the arbitrary power or right, if He ever claimed it. He bases His action upon the conduct of the nation spoken about. So His administration is not arbitrary, despotic, independent, in any sense that denies the right of man to be consulted, or that undervalues the action of man as a moral agent. The potter did not reason with the clay: God did reason with Israel. The analogy therefore can only be useful up to a given point; never overdrive any metaphor; always distinguish between the purpose of the parable, its real substance and its accessories, its incidental draperies and attachments. Let us take the inquiry in its crudest and most ruthless form. Can He not do with a man as this man does with the clay? The answer is in a sense Yes, in a larger sense No. As a matter of power, crudely defined, God can do with us as the potter does with the clay: but God Himself has introduced a new element into power; He is no longer in relation to the soul simply and merely omnipotent, He has made Himself a party. In so treating Himself He exercised all His attributes. He need not have done so, but having done so He never shrinks from the conditions which He has created and which He has imposed. Observe, He does not give up any part of His sovereignty. In the first instance He created man, devised a great scheme and ministry of things: all this was done sovereignly; it was not man that was consulted as to his own creation, it was the Triune God that said, "Let us make man." The Lord, then, having thus acted from the point of His sovereignty, has Himself created a scheme of things within which He has been pleased to work as if He were a consenting and co-operating party. When did God say, By the exercise of a potter's right I will break you, the soul, in pieces, although you want to be preserved and saved? When did Jesus Christ ever say to any man, You want to be saved, but I do not want to save you; I doom you to everlasting alienation from the throne of light and the sceptre of mercy? Never. May not a man, changing the level of inquiry, do what he likes with his own? No. Society says No; law says No; the needful security without which progress is impossible says No. Yet we must define what is meant by "can" and "may" and "cannot." Then in the use of the word "can" we always come upon the further word "cannot" at the same time. You can and you cannot, in one act. Why, how is that? Is not that a simple contradiction of terms? No, that statement, though apparently paradoxical, is one, and admits of easy reconciliation in both its members. If it were a question of mere power or physical ability, as we have often seen in our study of this Bible, we can do many things: but where are we at liberty simply to use ability or power in its most simple definition? Power is a servant; power is not an independent attribute that can do just what it likes: power says, What shall I do? I am an instrument, I am a faculty, but I am intended by the Sovereign of the universe to be a servant—the servant of judgment and

conscience and duty and social responsibility. Power stands in an attitude of attention, awaiting the orders of conscience. Mere power therefore is one thing, mere ability, and it is a faculty that never ought to be exercised in itself, by itself, for itself. It must be always worked in consent, in union, in co-operation. I repeat, power—great, self-boasting power—must obey orders. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." May not a man do what he likes with his own? What is his own? Not his child. He says, This child is my own; we say, Yes and No. Once more we come upon the double reply. Every child has two fathers. There is a little, measurable, individual father, and there is the greater father called Society: may we not recognise a third, and say, there is the Father in heaven? Your child cannot speak, and yet you cannot do with it what you like; your child has no will, no opened judgment, and yet you cannot do with the child as you please. Society has taken its name, and its age, and the eyes of Society are upon that child night and day, and if you slew it at midnight you would have to answer for its blood at midday. Here, then, we rest, in presence of this great doctrine of Divine sovereignty in relation to man. We may search the Bible from beginning to end to find that the sovereignty of God ever said to a man, I will not save you when you want to be saved, and we shall find no such instance in the record. With regard to nations, it is perfectly evident from the face of things that there is a Power that is placing nations where they are, and working up the great national unit to great national ends. God has always had, as it were, a double policy, and it is because we have confounded the one policy with the other that we have been all our lifetime subject to bondage through fear lest God may have predestinated us to hell. He never predestined any man to such a place. He predestined unrighteousness to hell, and nothing can ever get it into heaven; into that city nothing shall enter that is unholy, impure, defiled, or that maketh a lie. Eternity has never been at peace with wickedness. The infinite tranquillity of immeasurable and inexpressible duration has never been reconciled to one act of trespass, one deed of violence, one thought of wrong. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The potter's wheel*:—Does God rule the nations of the earth? When men set themselves in opposition to what are believed to be the laws of righteousness, will the nation prosper as it would have done if righteousness had been its aim? That was the question which perplexed the prophet. God's work, he believed, was not frustrated by man's sin, only the nation which set itself against God was broken. Somehow the human mind came to suspect that each man was in direct and intimate relationship with God, that He was dealing with him as truly as if there were no other being in the universe. Every word of Jesus tended to deepen that impression. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered. . . . Not one sparrow falleth to the ground without your Heavenly Father. Are ye not of more value than they?" I. The first thing which attracts our notice is the CLAY. It is of different qualities. Some of it is very pure and pliable, other is too soft—"fat" the potter calls it—to be used in its present state; some is almost white, and will make the finest porcelain, other has such an excess of iron that it will make only coloured ware; some is doubtful,—it will form, but it will twist or crack in the firing. The clay of the potter is human nature, good, bad, and indifferent. Is there any of it so bad that it cannot be used? Not if it be clay. There is no clay that the potter cannot employ. He cannot use stone, and he cannot make a vase of water. There are men so hard that they seem to be stone; there are others so flabby that it seems as if they never could hold together on the revolving wheel; still, if they be men, something can be done. It may not be possible to make poets and statesmen of them, any more than it is possible to make Sevres china of Jersey clay; but they can be moulded and fixed into some form of usefulness as long as they are men. The difficulty, however, which arises in some men's minds, even when that is settled, is this: Is not the best what we want? Can we rest satisfied with any dealing with human nature which leaves the large majority of the race on a low plane, and exalts only a chosen few? Now, if we cannot, how can the Creator? Must we not suppose that He too is disappointed in His work, and that He is limited in His operations? How, then, can we believe in One who is omnipotent? Is not He too limited by necessity, and are we not right in saying that that which determines character is the previous condition of the material with which God works? And does not this lead finally to disbelief in God? It certainly does lead to a disbelief in such a God as we have fancied. But it may lead to a belief in a nobler God than that. The potter puts his hand on a lump of clay. He

can never make pure porcelain out of it. Well, who said that he intended to? Who told us that he tried to and failed? Did not the potter bring the clay into the house? Did he not know what he would find there? Not so. The fineness of the pottery is determined by the quality of the clay, and so is its colour, but not its form. That is the work of the potter alone. It is in that that we see the power of his genius. And the coarser the material and the cruder its colour, the more are we led to marvel at the genius and the goodness which was content to embody itself in such material. The more we study human nature, the more we become convinced that God never intended all men to be alike. The more we study sociology, the more we feel convinced that it would be a fatal thing to have a town with but a single industry, a nation with no variety of employments, a world perfectly homogeneous. We all admit that it is not possible for every man to have all the moral qualities in an equal degree. The important thing in life is that each man should be faithful in the employment of those which he has. It is with individuals as with nations. We say that we cannot, and God ought not to be content with anything less than the best. But what is best? Is it best that all the clay in the world should be turned into Dresden china? By no means. What is best is that there should be a great variety fitted for different purposes. There are certain virtues which would be out of place in certain conditions of civilisation—that is, in certain individuals. Refined sensibility would be as embarrassing to a frontiersman as a carriage hung on delicate springs. What is needed is that he should be brave and just. We say that it is not as high a type as the courteous gentleman who would shrink from profanity as from physical pollution. But the test is to be found not in the quality of the virtue, but in the faithfulness with which it is used. Two things, then, ought to be learned from a consideration of the clay in the potter's house. The first is, that God is dealing with men as individuals indeed, yet not as isolated beings, but as members of a great family. It is to the advantage of the family that they should differ, and it is to their own advantage too. This difference in the clay, of which we have many theories, such as the law of heredity, or the influence of environment, are the conditions which God Himself has ordained. All creation is self-limitation. God is working in clay. He must make what the clay is capable of expressing; only, there is no clay which is not capable, on a higher or lower plane, of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. II. The second thing which we see in the potter's house is the **WHEEL**. On it the lump is placed, and the unseen foot presses the treadle, and the wheel revolves. About the wheel, too, men have formed a theory. First they began with the clay—the substance of human nature. And there was evolved many a philosophy. It has produced the spirit of agnosticism. Men, weary with speculations which lead to nothing, have said there is nothing to be known of the constitution of the clay nor the mind of the worker. And they are right: there is nothing to be known by the exclusive study of the human mind. And so they have turned to the study of the revolutions of the wheel. The clay is on the wheel, and it turns and turns, and slackens not its speed, still less stops in answer to curses or groans. If you ask whence came the clay, the answer is, the wheel made it. If men asked how it took forms of beauty, the answer was given by pointing out that, if the wheel went slower by one revolution in a thousand years, the thing of beauty would be marred; that if it increased its speed but the fraction of a second, the clay would be destroyed. The wheel never changes. Well, how does the case stand to-day? Men have roused themselves, and asked at length, What moves the wheel? Such a simple, natural question! But no one can answer it. "We do not know," say the wisest students of nature. "Every increase of knowledge only serves to widen the surrounding abyss of nescience. And what is more, nothing can ever be known of that secret, for we have learned enough of nature to know that no study of it will tell us any of those things which we would like to know." The study of the clay was formulated in metaphysics, and led to agnosticism. The study of the wheel has done the same. There are, however, certain impressions which the mind has received from the study of nature which nothing will ever shake. The first is the universality of law—that nothing happens anywhere except in accordance with invariable rules, which are never changed. That is the one thing we have learned from the study of nature, and almost the only thing we have learned which throws any light on the great problem which perplexes us. Is this all that can be learned from the potter's house? So many tell us, but as we turn away there comes, we cannot tell how, a feeling that we have not seen all. And to me that is, after all, the greatest mystery

of life. How did it ever come to pass that man should dream that there is more to be known than can be seen? That is the mystery. From what does it arise? How is it that I, a creature of a moment, without power, an infinitesimal particle in the universe, should come to believe that this is not the whole story of my life, but that there is a hand upon me fashioning me and moulding me, making me walk in the paths which I would not, and comforting me, and filling me with hope? It is because of something else which is in the potter's house. That which the prophet saw first of all: "I saw the potter work a work on the wheels." It is on that that our eyes must be fixed if we would gain comfort and hope. It is on that that the eyes of thoughtful men must be fixed before we can have a philosophy of life. The study of the clay will show us only the limitations of the clay. The study of the wheel will teach us nothing but the conditions under which the clay is moulded. The contemplation of the hand alone will yield nothing but unsubstantial dreams. The result of the first has been formulated in philosophy; of the second in science; of the third in theology. Should there ever be a complete philosophy of life, it must be from the combination of what each thing in the potter's house has to teach us. The clay we can analyse. The wheel we can watch. How can we learn from the hand? Only by taking the testimony which the clay itself bears to its own experience, only by noting the effects produced on the human soul by the awful, mysterious experiences of life. The limitations of your life and mine were fixed long before we saw the light. We have learned that to begin with. The experiences which come to you and me are not made to break in upon the course of this world, violating the law which governs life. They come by rule. There is an undeviating law which governs life. That, too, we have learned. Where, then, is Providence? That is to be seen in the moulding of our life. God's hand is on us, and in the turn of the wheel which brings joy He lifts us up, and in the turn which brings calamity He moulds us for some use. That is what men forget. The race has always believed that there was overruling, but supposed that the proof of it was to be found in the events of life, and then was dumfounded when these events proved different from what had been expected. It is not in the events, but in the result of them, that we shall find the proof of the hand of God. That thought frees us at once from the deadness of spirit which comes with the knowledge of inexorable law. If there be a hand fashioning, we may be sure that it chose the clay to make that which it knew the clay could become. If there is a hand moulding our souls, it must be that these laws were prepared by it because He knew that no condition which those laws produce is unfavourable to the development of the life which He loves. And more than that, if there be laws for the clay and laws for the wheel, there are likewise, we may be sure, laws for the moulding hand as well. What are these laws? That we do not know, and that is why there is so much confusion and fear. There is one thing more to be said, and that is, that the parable is incomplete in one respect. There are times when we can speak of humanity as clay in the hands of the potter, but we all know that this human clay has the power of resistance. It can tear itself from the moulding hand; it can fatten itself in sin, so as to frustrate the work on the wheels. So the house of the potter has an exhortation for us, as well as an object lesson. What it is saying to every man is, Do not resist, but co-operate. Look at the clay—it is yourself, it has its limitations. Two things are before you when that truth has entered into your soul. You may despair; you may throw away your life because it is physically, mentally, or morally incomplete or marred. Or you may submit. You may learn to be content; you may rise to thank God that you are what you are. You may be made useful, and in the eyes of the Master beautiful, because expressing the love of God. Look on the wheel. It is the revolving life, with all its manifold experiences. They may be so joyous that we forget that we are here for a purpose, and pass the time in the enjoyment of things which unfit us for beauty or power. They may be hard and bitter, and you may upbraid God. You may say, I have been a religious man, and look at me, old and poor and sad! Are not these laws, which He established, and which now bear heavy on me, for a purpose? We may go further, and say, "The consolations of God are not small with us." We may hear the voice of the apostle saying, "My brethren, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial as if some strange thing happened to you; there hath no trial taken you but such as is common to man." He wrought a work on the wheels. Let nothing shake that faith. Submit your souls to God. Do not ask Him to make you great, only to make you useful. The hand of the Potter is on your life, mould-

ing it in the midst of manifold experiences. It is the hand of your Father—the same hand which was on Jesus, and moulded that sweet Jewish boy into the perfect manifestation of His own glory. Remember that, and He will make you a thing of beauty, fit for the Master's use. (*Leighton Parks.*) *The Potter and His clay* :—You can really see the prophet in his loose flowing robes, walking slowly and softly out of the temple, and away through the narrow streets of Jerusalem towards the Eastern Gate. Then selecting his road, he wanders down the slopes into the Valley of Hinnom. The voice of God is in his ear. The Spirit is directing his steps. Listen! He is reciting over the pathetic words of his great predecessor, with almost as much pathos as Isaiah himself. "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." The prophet has come forth from a night of sore travail of spirit. The deep thought of his soul was ever this, "How different may have been the course of Israel, and the flow of their national life, if only God's rule had been supreme." He had chosen them to be a light to the Gentiles, but, alas! they were darkness. In their evil choice and deeds they had foiled the Divine plan, and frustrated the Divine purpose. A father loves his boy dearly. He conceives a plan unto which to shape his life. The boy is the one object for which he lives; to carry out his ideal he saves his hard earnings and seeks to inspire the lad to its lofty attainment. But there is resistance, and the plan is abortive. Again the father tries to shape the lad's life according to another plan, only to result in another failure. Still the father never despairs, he will try again and again, until upon some noble model he has shaped the career of his lad. Now, while Jeremiah was wandering on, he was thinking something like that about Israel. Presently the prophet reaches the base of the Valley of Hinnom, and pauses in front of a potter's bench. Here he stands and observes. He sees the potter take the clay that is on his bench, knead it until it is soft and pliable to the touch. What was the great truth that God forced home upon the prophet's heart? Some have thought it was that men are irresistibly in God's hand, that He is the absolute Sovereign, "working all things after the counsel of His own will." We do not deny this truth, but we do not believe that was the lesson God taught Jeremiah by the side of the potter's bench. I. It is not a discussion of "FIXED FATE, FREE WILL, FOREKNOWLEDGE ABSOLUTE." God's will had not been absolute in Israel, or there would have been no Divine pleadings, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die." But another and more hopeful lesson came into the prophet's heart. When the vessel was marred, the potter did not throw away the clay, but changed the pattern, and remoulded it. When God first called Abraham the type was patriarchal, afterwards it was theocratic, when God governed them by the dispensation of angels, prophets, and judges. After this there was set up a kingdom, wherein David was God's viceroys, but now, as the 11th verse of the 19th chapter makes clear, God was about to change the pattern again, and ever will, until Shiloh shall come. Israel shall yet be perfected.

II. THE SYMBOLS EMPLOYED. The clay, the worker, the wheels, and the production. The people are the clay. God made man of the dust of the earth, and breathed into him the breath of life. Though made in the image of God, man fell; but God lifts man out of the pit of destruction and from the miry clay, that He may by regeneration conform him into the image of His Son. That clay is resistant or pliable. It was not for want of skill on the part of the potter that the vessel was marred, but there was some hidden defect in the clay itself, that would not yield to the plastic guidance of wheel and hand. But where the clay is pliable the potter perfects the vessel. The Worker is plainly God Himself. He is represented as possessing will, intelligence, and ability to execute. There are two wheels, an upper and a lower, a heavenly influence and an earthly circumstance. His hand is on the upper, His foot upon the lower. While the Divine Potter by His Spirit moulds us, He keeps His foot upon the lower wheel. Providence is under His control as well as grace. The productions are various. He may mould of the clay a common vessel or a beautiful vase. But we are all to be vessels for the King's use, we are all to bear a likeness to His dear Son.

III. GOD HAS DESIGN IN THE LIFE OF EVERY BELIEVER. What is the difference between the work of an unskilled workman and an artisan? We may define it thus. The unskilled man creates his design as he proceeds, according as necessity determines, or his ideal grows. A skilled man designs first, and then constructs according to plan. The Divine Potter is not shaping our lives indefinitely, but is moulding our character according to His will and purpose. You cannot under-

stand the drift of your life, there is so much mystery in it ; it often seems chaotic, a mere tangled skein. But patience ! " Hope thou in God." Be of good courage. We are not the creatures of chance, the subjects of a blind force that is whirling us round and round without purpose or aim. God employs all things to accomplish His will. God's unique power is to use all things in our life to His glory, and our highest good. There may be a full flowing river, with a desert land on either side, but its larger usefulness is lost until it is skilfully employed to irrigate the land through which it flows. In the economy of God's providence, nothing runs to waste. " All things " are turned to good account. All defeats, as well as victories, all the blightings of our hopes, as all fulfilments, are made to " work together for good to them that love God." Herein is the power and the wisdom of the Master Potter. God works wonders out of the most disappointing lives. " O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God ! "

IV. MUCH DEPENDS ALSO UPON THE MATERIAL. With one piece of wood you may be able to do much, but with another nothing—it flies off into chips, and breaks into fragments at the touch of the chisel. There are some souls that never yield to God's moulding ; others only when they are melted in the fires of affliction. There our wills bend. Now see this vessel that is marred in the hands of the potter. But why is it marred ? There is no lack of skill. No, but there is some gritty substance there, some stubborn resisting quality that will not yield to the deftness of the potter's hand. Human nature is often resistant, rather than pliable, to God's touch. An evil disposition in our nature mars the vessel in the hands of the Potter. V. THE PATIENCE OF THE POTTER. Jeremiah was not particularly impressed with the fact that the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, but what made the deepest impression was, that when the clay was spoilt there was no sign of anger upon the face of the potter. That was the great lesson for Jeremiah, and for us. He had laboured for Israel, and failed ; but had he been as patient as this ? Had he not despaired when he should have commenced afresh ? And have not we been Jeremiahs, and do we feel this rebuke ? I have seen a mechanic spoil a piece of handicraft, and because he spoils it, in a passion of wrath, dash it to the ground. That is never God's way. If Israel has failed to answer to the one mould, He will try another. There are broken ideals, over which we all mourn. But God is patient, and if He cannot make us of such a glorious pattern as He first designed, He will go on shaping our life according to another pattern, and finally perfect us for the palace of the King. VI. THE PROCESS TO WHICH THE CLAY WAS SUBJECTED. Had the clay possessed mental, sensitive being, it might have complained of the method, the pressure of the kneading hand, the spinning of the wheel. But objection is unwisdom. We are sometimes whirled round and round upon the wheel of life, until the head is giddy and the heart sick. But there is not one unnecessary pang. " Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Courage ! Trust in God. God's will is of the highest purpose. Character can only come by discipline, and through suffering we pass into the perfect beauty of holiness. (*F. James.*) *On the potter's wheel* :—Perhaps this second vessel was not quite so fair as the first might have been, still it was beautiful and useful. It was a memorial of the potter's patience and long-suffering, of his careful use of material, and of his power of repairing loss and making something out of failure and disappointment. O vision of the long-suffering patience of God ! O bright anticipation of God's redemptive work ! O parable of re-made characters, and lives, and hopes ! Who is there that is not conscious of having marred and resisted the touch of God's moulding hands ? Who is there that does not lament opportunities of saintliness which were lost through the obduracy of the will and the hardness of the heart ? I. THE DIVINE MAKING OF MEN. 1. The potter has an ideal. Floating through his fancy there is the vessel that is to be. He already sees it hidden in the shapeless clay, waiting for his call to evoke. Before the woman applies scissors to the silk, she has conceived the pattern of her dress ; before the spade cleaves the sod, the architect has conceived the plan of the building to be erected there. So of God in nature. The pattern of this round world and of her sister spheres lay in His creative thought before the first beam of light streamed across the abyss. So of the mystical body of Christ, the Church, His Bride. So also of the possibilities of each human life. See that mother bending over the cradle where her firstborn baby son lies sleeping ! Mark that smile which goes and comes over her face, like a breath of wind on a calm summer's day ! Why does she smile ? Ah ! she is dreaming ; and in her dreams is building castles of the future eminence

of this child—in the pulpit or the senate; in war, or art. If only she might have her way, he should be foremost in happiness, renowned in the service of men. But no mother ever wished so much for her child as God for us, when first cradled at the foot of the Cross. 2. The potter achieves his purpose by means of the wheel. In the discipline of human life this surely represents the revolution of daily circumstance; often monotonous, common-place, trivial enough, and yet intending to effect, if it may, ends on which God has set His heart. Many, on entering the life of full consecration and devotion, are eager to change the circumstances of their lives for those in which they suppose that they will more readily attain a fully developed character. Hence, much of the restlessness and fever, the disappointment and wilfulness of the early days of Christian experience. Do not, therefore, seek to change, by some rash and wilful act, the setting and environment of your life. Stay where you are till God as evidently calls you elsewhere as He has put you where you are. In the meanwhile, look deep into the heart of every circumstance for its special message, lesson, or discipline. Upon the way in which you accept or reject these will depend the achievement or marrying of the Divine purpose. 3. The bulk of the work is done by the potter's fingers. How delicate their touch! How fine their sensibility! It would almost seem as though they were endued with intellect, instead of being the instruments by which the brain is executing its purpose. And in the nurture of the soul these represent the touch of the Spirit of God working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. But we are too busy, too absorbed in many things, to heed the gentle touch. Sometimes, when we are aware of it we resent it, or stubbornly refuse to yield to it. The wheel and the hand worked together; often their motion was in opposite directions, but their object was one. So all things work together for good to them that love God. God's touch and voice give the meaning of His providences; and His providences enforce the lesson that His tender monitions might not be strong enough to teach. II. GOD'S RE-MAKING OF MEN. "He made it again." The potter could not make what he might have wished; but he did his best with his materials. So God is ever trying to do His best for us. How often He has to make us again! He made Jacob again, when He met him at the Jabbok ford; finding him a supplanter and a cheat, but, after a long wrestle, leaving him a prince with God. He made Simon again, on the resurrection morning, when He found him somewhere near the open grave, the son of a dove—for so his old name Bar-jonas signifies—and left him Peter, the man of the rock, the apostle of Pentecost. Are you conscious of having marred God's early plan for yourself? Whilst into the soul the conviction is burnt: "I had my chance, and missed it; it will never come to me again. The survival of the fittest leaves no place for the unfit. They must be flung amid the waste which is ever accumulating around the furnaces of human life." It is here that the Gospel comes in with its gentle words for the outcast and lost. The bruised reed is made again into a pillar for the temple of God. The feebly smoking flax is kindled to a flame. III. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE GREAT POTTER. Yield to Him! Each particle in the clay seems to say "Yes" to wheel and hand. And in proportion as this is the case, the work goes merrily on. If there be rebellion and resistance, the work of the potter is marred. Let God have His way with you. We cannot always understand His dealings, because we do not know what His purpose is. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *A shattered life restored*:—Dr. Pope says, "When I was in Florence I saw a triumph of restorative patience and skill. There is a statue there which had been found broken into a thousand fragments, and a patient man, with fine tact, replaced the shattered particles, and eventually the broken image was restored; and there it stands in its elastic beauty, as wonderful and as perfect as in the ancient years. And I say that in Christianity we have a supreme Artist who can pick up the most shattered life that the philosopher would cast to the void with the rubbish, and He can hold that life up in moral beauty and perfectness, and He does do it every day." *Restored manhood*:—Restored! Men can restore many things. I have read of them restoring pictures, cleansing them from the dust and filth that have gathered in the course of years, and restoring them to something like the brilliance and beauty they had when they left the painter's easel. I have read of them restoring old buildings—grand old cathedrals, monuments of the genius and devotion of past generations—which have begun to show signs of decay. But there is a restoration work greater far than the restoration of one of the old masters or the restoration of a cathedral,

and that is the restoration of man himself. For man is a wreck, a ruin; a wreck so complete, a ruin so utter, that his restoration has seemed hopeless and desperate. The best of men gave up the task, shook their heads over publicans and sinners, and said, "The ruin is beyond restoration." But Jesus came and looked upon these wrecks of humanity, and said, "These, too, can be restored," and He has justified His word. He found Zacchæus a wreck, and restored him; He found Onesimus a wreck, and restored him; He found Augustine a wreck, and restored him; He found Henry Barrowe a wreck, and restored him; He found J. B. Gough a wreck, and restored him. Out of these battered ruins and shattered wrecks of humanity He has made temples of the living God. (*J. D. Jones, M.A.*) O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord.—The answer is Yes—and No. So far as all physical energy is concerned, the Lord can do with us as the potter does with the clay; but the Lord Himself cannot make a little child love Him: there is a point at which the clay lives, thinks, reasons, defies. The potter can only work upon the clay up to a given point; so long as it is soft he can make it a vessel of honour or a vessel of dishonour, he can make it this shape or that; but once let him burn it, and it is clay no longer in the sense in which he can fashion it according to model or design. A marvellous thing is this, that the Lord has made any creature that can defy Him; and that we can all defy Him is the testimony of every day's experience. Let the Lord say, Can I not crush the universe? and the answer must be, Yes, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; Thou hast but to close Thy fingers upon it, and it is dead, and Thou canst throw the ashes away. But almightiness has its limits. There is no almightiness in the moral region. The Lord cannot conquer the human will by any exercise of mere omnipotence: the will is to be conquered by instruction, persuasion, grace, moral inducement, spiritual ministry, exhibition of love upon love, till the exhibition rises into sacrifice and indicates itself in the Cross of Christ. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Why does He not go in? Because He has no key of that door that can open it by force. Why does He not break it with one tremendous blow? Because then the heart would be crushed and killed, and would not be persuaded into becoming a guest-chamber for the King. We have it in our power to say No to God, to defy the Lord, to withdraw ourselves from the counsel and guidance of heaven. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 7, 8. If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent.—*Fast sermon*.—I. THE BEING AND CONDITION OF COUNTRIES AND COMMUNITIES, OF NATIONS AND KINGDOMS, ARE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE MOST HIGH. To suppose Him watchful of the operations in the universe, and yet not active in the management of them, would seem irreconcilable with the inefficacy of all laws without His might; with the appearance of design in most events; with the effects of a sublime power which many of them display; and with the existence, on peculiar occasions, of some occurrences which have been departures from the ordinary course of nature. To believe any affairs to be under the guidance of His providence, and yet to imagine that the fortunes of whole countries and people are free from His observation and care, would be inconsistent with the variety and magnitude of the interests which are in those fortunes always involved. But it may be objected, if it is thus certain that the events of time are under the superintendence of God, why are there so great evils both in the natural and political world? To this it would be sufficient to reply, that in us beings of yesterday, who see but a few links of the vast chain in which the Almighty hath connected all occurrences in the universe; who with the utmost effort of our faculties are unable, in this our low position, to perceive the final results of any of His operations; it is vainly presumptuous to attempt to fathom the counsels of His mind; and worse than presumptuous, with the evidences which He hath vouchsafed to give us in His word and works, of His wisdom, goodness, and rectitude, to doubt that all His arrangements will terminate to the honour of His government, and the greatest possible benefit of His creatures. As the objection, however, is plausible, it may be well to observe further, that our estimate of what appears to be evil may often be erroneous. Somewhere I have seen it with striking force and beauty asked, whether the insect whose habitation the ploughshare overturns knows that its motions conduce to that fertility of the earth which is to sustain many intelligent creatures? In like manner, from the convulsions and terrible occurrences in the moral world, there may be educed by the Being who bringeth good out of evil, such results

as will advance His purposes, and the general welfare. II. THE GREAT CAUSE OF PERPLEXITIES AND TROUBLES, CALAMITIES AND RUIN, IN ANY REGION, IS THE PREDOMINANCE OF CORRUPT PRINCIPLES AND MANNERS. For the evils which the Divine Providence sends upon the world, there can be no other cause than the transgressions of the inhabitants thereof. The Scriptures again and again represent the calamities of a people as the punishment of their sins (*Hos. xiv. 1*; *Jer. v. 9, 25, xviii. 9, 10*; *Hab. iii. 12, 13*; *Psa. lxxv. 9, 10*; *1 Kings ix. 7-9*). Nor is reason less explicit upon this truth than revelation. Upon a little reflection she perceives that the Almighty, being perfectly holy, wise, and good, will approve and encourage virtue. This necessarily implies the condemnation and punishment of vice. In beings destined to exist hereafter, there is extensive opportunity for the fulfilment of the Divine intentions. Their immortality opens a wide field for the display of the justice of God. And hence it is, that in this present state vice does not always in the individual meet its retribution, nor virtue its reward. But nations and communities, as such, are not immortal. It should therefore seem reasonable that they should in their present existence enjoy the rewards due to their virtues, and endure the punishments which their vices deserve. To place the point beyond dispute, experience, weeping as she reviews her venerable annals, declares from them that the indignation of Heaven has frequently been brought upon whole communities by their sins: that debasement, calamity, and ruin have resulted to them from the predominance of depraved principles and manners. III. BY A TIMELY REFORMATION OF THEIR PRINCIPLES AND LIVES, COMMUNITIES MAY AVERT THE DISPLEASURE OF THE ALMIGHTY. Contrition is estimable, and acceptable through the Redeemer, in an individual. It has turned away the wrath of Heaven from many an offender. But when a community, as one body, is roused by a sense of danger, or by the calls of the Most High, in alarming occurrences, in foreign examples, or in His holy Word, or by their own consciousness of a relaxed state of religion and morals, to "consider their ways," and turn with sincerity to God, to humble themselves before Him, and to express their earnest desire to be made objects of His forgiveness and favour: if ever He may be said to be taken with holy violence, it is by such an act. (*Bishop Dehon.*)

Ver. 11. Return ye now every one from his evil way.—"Return! Return!"—My text is all about repentance; it is an exhortation from God, very brief and sententious, but very earnest and plain: "Return ye now every one from his evil way." I want you all to notice that this is the call of mercy. God would have you saved, and therefore He cries to you, "Return," because He is willing to receive you, and to blot out all your sin. But remember that it is equally the call of a holy God, the God who knows that you cannot be saved except you turn from your evil ways. Thou must be made to hate thy sin, or else, where God is, thou canst never come. I. WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY? The picture is that of a man who is going the wrong way. He is trespassing, he is on forbidden ground, he is advancing in a dangerous road, and if he shall continue to go in that direction, he will by and by come to a dreadful precipice over which he will fall, and there he will be ruined. A voice cries to him, "Return!" What does that word mean? It is very simple, and that I may make it plainer still, perhaps, for practical purposes, let me say that the first thing such a man would do would be to stop. If I was out in the country, on a road which I did not know, and I heard a voice crying out to me, "Return," I should certainly stop, and listen; and if I heard the cry repeated, with great eagerness and earnestness, "Return! Return!" I should pause, and look round, and try to see who it was that had called to me. I wish that all of you who are wandering away from God, would stop, and consider where you are going. In God's name, I would arrest thee; as God's officer, I would put my hand on thy shoulder, and say to thee, "Thou must stop; thou shalt pause; thou shalt consider thy ways. I cannot let thee go on carelessly to thy ruin, like a sheep into the slaughter-house, or a bullock going to be killed." Stop, I pray thee. Suppose a man did stop, that would not be returning; it is but the commencement of the return when a man stops, but it will be necessary for him, next, to turn round. The order for him to obey is, "Right about face." There must be a total, a radical change in you, if you are really to obey the command, "Return." I think I hear you ask, "Who can effect this change?" And I am glad to hear that question, for I trust it will lead you to pray, "Turn me, O Lord, and I shall be turned!" There is something done towards returning when a man stops,

there is still more done when he turns round; yet he does not actually return until, with persevering footsteps, the wanderer hastens back to him from whom he had departed. What God desires is that all His prodigal children should come home, that His stray sheep should be brought back to the fold, that the lost pieces of silver should be put into the treasury again; that, indeed, you who have wandered in sin should be as they are whom Christ has washed in His precious blood, whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated, and whom the Father has adopted, and put among His children. II. WHEN ARE SINNERS TO RETURN? "Return ye now every one from his evil way." The voice of God bids you to return now, and I would urge you to do so, because life is so uncertain that, if you do not return now, you may not live to return at all. He who would have his estate rightly ordered when he is dead should have his will made, everybody says that; and he who would have his eternal estate ordered aright should yield himself at once to the sovereign will of the Most High, for life is uncertain. Return, now, for the calls of grace may not always come to you. Recollect, also, that your sin will be increased by delay. If you keep on in the wrong path, not only will you have sinned the more, but that sin will have taken a more terrible hold upon you. Habits begin like cobwebs, but they end like chains of iron. Moreover, it is well for you to return unto our God now, because the sooner we return to Him the sooner we shall enjoy His favour, and the more delightful will our life become. Peace with God makes even this life to be a blessed life; and he who has it begins, even here, to enjoy the felicities of the glorified. Do you not see, too, that God will have the more service from you? The sooner you are brought to Him, the longer will you have of life in which to serve Him. If any of you have gone past youth, into manhood, and to middle age, or even to old age, then the word "now" should come to you with a sharp, clear crack, as of a rifle. It comes like a staccato note in music, "Now! Now! Now!" Yet once more, return now, because, if ever there is a reason for returning, that reason points to the present moment. If there is a hope that a man will leave his sin some time or other, there must be a better hope that he will leave it now than that he will leave it in a year's time. Wisdom's voice cries, "Now!" It is folly that says, "Tarry." III. WHO IS THE PERSON THAT IS TO RETURN? "Every one." Many of you have returned. But every man, every woman, every child who has not returned, should hear the voice of the Lord repeating this message. "Well," says one, "perhaps there will be some people converted through this sermon." Do not talk so, I pray you. Will you be converted through it? Possibly some of you are like the man we read of in the papers some time ago. He was walking by the seaside, and trod on a large chain, and slipped his foot right through one of the links. When he tried to draw it back again, he could not, for he was held fast. The tide was coming in, and there he was a prisoner. He had to call long and loud before anybody came; and by the time the people arrived, he had very much hurt his foot in endeavouring to extricate himself. He begged them to run for the smith, that he might come, and break the iron. He came, but he brought the wrong tools with him, so he could not accomplish the task. It would be some time before he could be back, and, meanwhile, the tide had come in, and the water was up to the man's feet, so he cried, "Run for the surgeon. Let him come, and cut my leg off; it is the only hope of saving my life." But by the time the surgeon came, the water was up to the man's neck, so the doctor could not get down to where his foot was fast in the iron chain, and there was nothing that could be done for him. There he was, poor fellow, and the tide rolled over him, and he was drowned. Some of you seem to me to be just like that man, held fast by some invisible force; yet, when I try to get at the chain, I cannot find out what it is, it is so far under the water. Perhaps you do not yourself know what it is. I am going to make a dive to try to get at it, as I ask my last question concerning the text. IV. FROM WHAT ARE THESE PEOPLE TO RETURN? "From his evil way." Then, each man has a way of his own,—an evil way of his own,—some personal form of sin. What is your own way? Is it some constitutional sin to which you are prone? "Well," asks one, "what do you think is my evil way?" I will answer by putting another question to you, What is the sin into which you most frequently fall? I should think you can tell that, and that is the evil way from which you have most to fear. It is from that one way that you are called upon specially to return. To-night, if you were tempted, to which temptation would you be most likely to yield? You do not know, you say; well then, let me

put another question to you. When do you get most angry if anybody rebukes you? What is it in the preaching that makes you say, "There, I will never go to hear that man again; he cuts my hair so short, he comes quite close to the skin"? Well now, that will help you to find out what is your own personal evil way; and it is from that way that you are to return. Again, what sin of yours eats up the other sins? Where does your money mostly go? You could have told that Joseph was Jacob's favourite, because he made him a coat of many colours; and there are some sins that wear the coat of many colours, and often, as it were, it is dipped in the man's own blood, for everything goes for that particular sin. But I have not hit on your sin yet, my friend, have I? You have an evil way which you will not tell to any one; it is not as bad as any I have mentioned; it is a very respectable kind of evil way which you have. Your evil way is this, the evil way of self-righteousness. It makes out that the death of Christ was a superfluity; it tells God that He is wrong in charging a man with sin; it raises a clamour against God; it claims as a right every good thing that God has to give; it does, in fact, uncrown the Saviour, bid the Holy Spirit go His way as no longer needed, and throws the Gospel, which is the crown jewel of God, into the mire. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Returning from evil ways*:—There are two things proper to a man that returneth: first, to go a way clean contrary to the way he went before; secondly, to tread out and obliterate his former steps. First, I say, he must go a way clean contrary to his former way. Many men think that the way to hell is but a little out of the way to heaven, so that a man in a small time, with small ado, may pass out of the one into the other; but they are much deceived: for as sin is more than a stepping aside, namely, a plain, a direct going away from God; so is repentance, or the forsaking of sin, more than a little coasting out of one way into another. Crossings will not serve; there is no way, from the road of sin to the place we seek, but to go quite back again the way we came. The way of pleasure in sin must be changed for sorrow for the same. He that hath superstitiously worshipped false gods must now as devoutly serve the true; the tongue that hath uttered swearings, and spoken blasphemies, must as plentifully sound forth the name of God in prayer and thanksgiving; the covetous man must become liberal; the oppressor of the poor as charitable in relieving them; the calumniator of his brother a tender guarder of his credit: in fine, he that hated his brother before must now love him as tenderly as himself. (*Joseph Mede.*) *Repentance useless without amendment*:—Repentance without amendment is like continual pumping in a ship, without stopping the leaks. (*J. Palmer.*)

Ver. 12. *There is no hope.—Hope, yet no hope—No hope, yet hope*:—There are two phases in spiritual life which well illustrate the deceitfulness of the heart. The first is that described in my first text (*Isa. lvii. 10*), in which the man, though wearied in his many attempts, is not and cannot be convinced of the hopelessness of self-salvation, but still clings to the delusion that he shall be able somehow, he knows not how, to deliver himself from ruin. When you shall have hunted the man out of this, you will then meet with a new difficulty, which is described in the second text. Finding there is no hope in himself, the man draws the unwarrantable conclusion that there is no hope for him in God; and, as once you had to battle with his self-confidence, now you have to wrestle with his despair. It is self-righteousness in both cases. In the one case it is the soul content with self-righteousness; in the second place it is man sullenly preferring to perish rather than receive the righteousness of Christ. I. Considering the first text, we have to speak of A HOPE WHICH IS NO HOPE. "Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved." This well pictures the pursuit of men after satisfaction in earthly things. They will hunt the purlieus of wealth, they will travel the pathways of fame, they will dig into the mines of knowledge, they will exhaust themselves in the deceitful delights of sin, and, finding them all to be vanity and emptiness, they will become sore perplexed and disappointed; but they will still continue their fruitless search. Carnal minds with all their might earth's vanities pursue, and when they are wearied in their pursuit they still say not, "There is no hope," but change the direction, and continue the idle chase. They turn to another and another of earth's broken cisterns, hoping to find water where not a drop was ever discovered yet. 1. The text applies very eminently to those who are seeking salvation

by ceremonies. If you shall addict yourself to the fullest ceremonial, if you should be obedient to it in all its jots and tittles, keeping its fast days and its feast days, its vigils and matins and vespers, bowing down before its priesthood, its altars, and its millinery, giving up your reason, and binding yourself in the fetters of superstition; after you have done all this, you will find an emptiness and a vexation of spirit as the only result. It is only grace that can enable us to follow Luther's example, who, after going up and down Pilate's staircase on his knees, muttering so many Ave Marias and Paternosters, called to mind that old text, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God," and springing up from his knees forsook once and for ever all dependence upon outward formalities, and quitted the cloistered cell and all its austerities to live the life of a believer, knowing that by the works of the law there shall no flesh living be justified.

2. A great mass of people, even though they reject priestcraft, make themselves priests, and rely upon their good works. A poor and wretched man dreamed that he was counting out gold. There it stood upon the table before him in great bags, and, as he untied string after string, he found himself wealthy beyond a Croesus' treasures. He was lying upon a bed of straw in the midst of filth and squalor, a mass of rags and wretchedness, but he dreamed of riches. A charitable friend who had brought him help stood at the sleeper's side and said, "I have brought you help, for I know your urgent need." Now the man was in a deep sleep, and the voice mingled with his dream as though it were part of it: he replied, therefore, with scornful indignation, "Get ye gone, I need no miserable charity from you; I am possessor of heaps of gold. Can you not see them? I will open a bag and pour out a heap that shall glitter before your eyes." Thus foolishly he talked on, babbling of a treasure which existed only in his dream, till he who came to help him accepted his repulse and departed mournfully. When the man awakened he had no comfort from his dream, but found that he had been duped by it into rejecting his only friend. Such is the position of every person who is hoping to be saved by his good works. You have no good works except in your dream.

3. Many persons are looking for salvation to another form of self-deception, namely, the way of repentance and reformation. It is thought by some that if they pray a certain number of prayers, and repent up to a certain amount, they will then be saved as the result of their praying and repenting. This, again, is another way of winning salvation which is not spoken of in Scripture. This is a way by which neither law nor Gospel receive honour. To repent is a Christian's duty, but to hope for salvation by virtue of that alone is a delusion of the most fearful kind. Repentance is a part of salvation, and when Christ saves us He saves us by making us repent, but repentance does not save; it is the work of God, and the work of God alone. Now wherefore dost thou weary thyself in this way also? for surely in it "there is no hope."

4. Until thou art clean separate from all consciousness of hope in thyself, there is no hope that the Gospel will ever be any power to thee; but when thou shalt throw up thy hands like a drowning man, feeling, "It is all over with me! I am lost, lost, unless a stronger than I shall interpose." Oh, sinner, then there is hope for you.

II. We now turn to the second text. Here we have **NO HOPE—AND YET HOPE**. When the sinner has at last been driven by stress of weather from the roadstead of his own confidence, then he flies to the dreary harbour of despair. As if there were nobody in the world but himself, and as if he were to measure God's power and God's grace by his own merit and power. Hopelessness in self is what we want to bring you to, but hopelessness in itself, and especially in connection with God, would be a sin from which we would urge you to escape. If you are sitting down in despair, I want to speak to you first of the God of hope. His name is God, that is good. He delighteth in mercy: it is His soul's highest joy to clasp His Ephraims to His bosom. But you say, "Wherewithal shall I come before the Most High God? I have sinned, and what shall I bring as a recompense? If I had a mint of merits, if I had godly impressions, if I had high moral excellence, I would come with that to God, and hope to obtain a hearing." But hearken, sinner, dost thou not know the name of the Second Person in the Trinity? It is Jesus Christ, the Son. Now, if thou wantest merit, has not He enough of it? Oh, sinner, if thou hast no merit, thou needest not wish for any. Take Christ in thy hand, for He is made of God unto thee, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and all this for every soul of Adam born who trusts in Him alone. But I hear you complaining again, "Oh, but I have not the power to repent. You have told me this, and I cannot believe:

I cannot soften my heart; I cannot do anything; I am so powerless. You have been teaching me that." I know I have; but there is another Person in the Trinity, and what is His name? It is the Holy Spirit. And do you not know that the Holy Spirit helpeth our infirmity? A great divine has said—and I think there is some truth in it—that a very great number of souls are destroyed through the fear that they cannot be saved. I think it is very likely. If some of you really thought that Christ could save you, if you felt a hope that you might yet be numbered with His people, you would say, "I will forsake my sins, I will leave my present evil way, and I will fly unto the strong for strength." In the first place, would it not be wise, even if there were only a "peradventure," to go to Christ, and trust Him on the strength of that? The King of Nineveh had no Gospel message; he had simply the law preached by Jonah, and that very shortly and sternly. Jonah's message was, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown"; but the King of Nineveh said, "Who can tell?" Surely if but on the presumption of "Who can tell?" the men of Nineveh went and did find mercy, you will be inexcusable if you do not act upon the same, having much more than that to be your comfort. Go, sinner, to the Cross, for who can tell? But, in the next place, you have had many clear and positive examples. In reading Scripture through you find that many have been to Christ, and that there never was one cast out yet. Moreover, you have comfortable promises in the Word of God. "Your hearts shall live that seek Him." If you do seek Him your heart shall live. Leap on the back of that promise, and let it bear thee, as the Samaritan's beast bore the dying man, to an inn where thou mayest rest—I mean to Christ—where thou mayest have confidence. "Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now you do call upon His name. There are many others: they have been quoted in your ears till you know them by heart. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"; and you know that precious one, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Spiritual desperation*.—One instance of this is related by a well-known religious writer. He says: "A zealous minister went to the house of an aged respectable man, a man who bore an unstained character, and there addressing him and his family, he told simply of the salvation that is in Christ, and urged those who listened to a hearty acceptance of it. The minister finished what he had to say, and when he left the house, his friend accompanied him; and when they were alone together said something like this: Spend your time and strength upon the young; labour to bring them to Jesus; it is too late for such as me. I know, he said, that I have never been a Christian. I fully believe that when I die I shall go down to perdition." 1. ITS CAUSES. 1. One is the judgments of God, especially those severer dispensations with which the Almighty sometimes visits us. Their real significance, I need hardly say, is that our heavenly Father still loves us and cares for us—that He has not forgotten us, nor given us over to destruction—that He still thinks there is good in us, and a chance for us; and that He is bound by loud and louder calls to warn us back from ruin, and by heavier and heavier blows, if necessary, to drive us from the perilous paths in which we tread. Nevertheless, with the perversity of a chastised child, we put upon them precisely the opposite construction. 2. The discovery of one's sinfulness, and added to it the realisation of the jeopardy in which it places the soul, will often bring on a fit of hopelessness. That was the case with Judas. The author of the "Pilgrim's Progress" has testified to a similar experience. When conscience had turned the light upon his life, and sharply reproved him for it, says Bunyan, "I had no sooner thus conceived, in my mind, but suddenly this conclusion was fastened on my spirit that I had been a great and grievous sinner, and that now it was too late for me to look after heaven, for Christ would not forgive me, nor pardon my transgression." 3. Not only does the discovery of our sins produce this effect, but the same is also apt to follow upon long and unsuccessful conflict with them. For instance, if a man has struggled a great while with some besetting fault, with an appetite that has tyrannised over him—like that for strong drink, to give a common example, or with some passion, like a hasty temper or an uncontrollable tongue—if it seems to him that he has never conquered it, and never can, then there begins to spread over his soul that dark cloud of despair our text represents. 4. Finally, this feeling of despair may be sometimes accounted for by supposing it to be simply a satanic suggestion. Dante saw over the portals of hell this terrible sentence, "All hope abandon ye who enter here." It is the

devil's trick, his masterpiece of malice and cunning, to copy that inscription and trace it on the hearts of men—All hope abandon. II. THE PROGRESS THAT THIS DISORDER OF THE SOUL MAKES WHEN LEFT TO RUN AN UNCHECKED COURSE. 1. The first stage of it is misery. It must be. There is a very dramatic scene in the life of Bonaparte, depicted by Guizot. It is the moment when "on that solitary road (to Paris) at the dead of night, the grand empire, founded and sustained by the incomparable genius and commanding will of one man alone, had crumbled to pieces, even in the opinion of him who had raised it." It is the moment when the officers announce to the great General that his capital is evacuated, and the enemy at its gates; and he realises that nothing is left for him to do but abdicate. The agony that pierced that dauntless soul who can paint! Napoleon, it is said, "let himself fall by the roadside, holding his head in his hands and hiding his face." The onlookers stood by, silently contemplating him with heartfelt sorrow, unable to utter a single word. But oh! what is the fall of a kingdom to any monarch—what is his despair, what can it be compared to the anguish which must seize upon one, when the full conviction rushes over him that he is really doomed—that no chance is left him to avert damnation—when he must answer in his heart, There is no hope! 2. The second stage of progress is when insensibility sets in. You know that some diseases occasion excruciating pain at the start. Then after a while all disagreeable sensations cease. The patient has got "past feeling." Well, so it is with the soul when attacked by spiritual desperation. From great suffering at the outset it is liable to pass on into a state of numbness and indifference. It is a condition worse and more alarming than the first. The individual I was alluding to a moment since is an instance in point. I mean the one who begged his clergyman not to waste time upon him, because he had become persuaded that he was predestined to destruction. I did not quote to you then all his conversation upon this subject. Let me give it more in detail now. He said, "I fully believe that when I die I shall go down to perdition. But somehow I do not care. I know perfectly all you can say, but I feel it no more than a stone." 3. The third and last stage is when one arrives at recklessness. That was the stage reached by those Jews who spoke our text. They said there is no hope. Then they added, "But we will walk after our own devices," &c. They sinned yet more and more, until Nebuchadnezzar came and carried them away captive. On the deck of a sinking ship, when rescue is impossible, and the end of all is nigh at hand, a curious scene, it is said, may often be witnessed. Here is a group weeping over their impending fate; there is another knot contemplating with utter apathy a watery grave; and yonder, is the strangest sight of all—men in the very frenzy of despair, cursing and swearing with their latest breath, and preparing, with wine-cup in hand, and senses steeped in intoxication, to go to their last account. Most singular and dreadful influence this latter, which unavoidable physical danger exercises over the minds of men. But it is no more singular or dreadful than the influence of spiritual hopelessness at times over the soul. The more terrible the doom hanging over it, the more mad does the soul become to sink itself to lower and ever lower abysses of guilt and shame. III. IS THERE ANY FOUNDATION IN FACT FOR SPIRITUAL DESPERATION? Is there any truth in the feeling, there is no hope? No. It is not true of any living soul that there is no hope for it. I was reading the other day of an accident that befell an innkeeper of the Grindelwald. He "fell into a deep crevasse in the upper glacier which flows into that beautiful valley. Happening to fall gradually from ledge to ledge, he reached the bottom in a state of insensibility, but not seriously injured." What would you say of that man? Well, you would say of him, if you understood what it was to fall into a crevasse, that it was all over with him—that there was before him only a lingering death. In fact, the man himself was at first, when he returned to consciousness, of the same opinion. But no, the event proves you both mistaken. "When he awoke from his stupor he found himself in an ice cavern, with a stream flowing through an arch at its extremity. Following the course of this stream along a narrow tunnel, which was in some places so low in the roof that he could scarcely squeeze himself through on his hands and knees, he came out at last at the end of the glacier into the open air." So we see a man fallen into the crevasse of terrible sins. There he lies, spiritually insensible, at the bottom of the awful abyss of iniquity into which, by careless walking, he has slipped at last. You think there is no help for him, no opportunity or place of repentance and restoration left. You dare to say there is no hope. And in his troubled dreams, mayhap

(for sinners dream), the poor unfortunate himself repeats your words, no hope. But it is false. A chance for even him still remains. The fallen sinner may yet wake from his stupor, and like that innkeeper of the Grindelwald, creep out on hands and knees into the open air and sunlight of God's forgiveness and eternal love. Once, it is said, the servants of Richelieu refused to obey his dictates. "Our Father," they pleaded, "it is useless, we shall but fail." The great Cardinal drew himself up, fixed upon them his piercing eye, and in a tone that left no place for further parley, replied, "Fail! there's no such word!" And when I see anyone to-day, a servant of the living God, perhaps afflicted, conscience-stricken, baffled, and mocked by whisperings of the Evil One, stand up and say there is no hope, I must despair, I hear a voice, loud as the wail of the dying Christ, ring out through the darkness from Calvary and its blood-stained cross, "Despair! there's no such word!" (G. H. Chadwell.) *The sin, danger, and unreasonableness of despair:—*

I. TO DESPAIR OF GOD'S MERCY IS SINFUL. 1. The ancient divines were accustomed to call despair one of the seven deadly sins. It well deserves this character. It is directly contrary to the will of God. He, we are told, taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, and hope in His mercy. He must, therefore, be displeased with them that refuse to do this. It is also a great insult to the character of God. It calls in question the truth of His word; nay, it gives Him the lie; for He has told us that whosoever cometh to Him, He will in no wise cast out. It calls in question, or rather denies the greatness of His mercy. It also limits the power of God. He has said, Is anything too hard for Me? But despair says, It is impossible that He should renew my heart, subdue my will, and make me fit for heaven. 2. Despair is the cause or parent of many other sins. As hope leads all who entertain it to endeavour to purify themselves, even as Christ is pure, so despair leads all under its influence to wander farther and farther from God, and plunge without restraint into every kind of wickedness. II. DESPAIR OF GOD'S MERCY IS DANGEROUS. When a man gives himself up to this sin, he does, as it were, give himself up to the power and guidance of the devil; for he voluntarily throws away everything which can protect or deliver him from the adversary. III. DESPAIR OF GOD'S MERCY IS GROUNDLESS AND UNREASONABLE.

1. It is unreasonable to despair of God's mercy, because He continues to you the enjoyment of life, and the means of grace. Will you say, There is no hope, while the walls of God's house encircle you, while the light of the Sabbath shines upon you, while the Word of God is before you, and while the Gospel of salvation sounds in your ears? 2. The character of God, as revealed in His Word, shows that it is unreasonable for you to despair of His mercy. 3. The grand scheme of redemption revealed in the Gospel, renders it still more unreasonable to indulge despair. 4. The person, character, and invitations of Christ, show in the most striking and conclusive manner, that despair of salvation is unreasonable. 5. That it is unreasonable to despair of God's mercy, is evident from the characters of many to whom it has already been extended. (E. Payson, D.D.) *Hopelessness condemned:—*I. SOURCES OF THIS DESPAIR OF AMENDMENT. 1. Indolence. It is the property of that quality of mind to be always seeking an apology for leaving things as they are. Sometimes it imagines difficulties, and sometimes dangers, neither of which have any real existence. There is what may be termed a *vis inertiae*, a power of indolence, in mind as well as in matter; and perhaps at the great day of account it will be found that where profligacy has slain its thousands, indolence has slain its ten thousands. 2. The secret love of sin. If we wish to be bad, how ready are we to believe that it is impossible to be better! The fallen heart is that marsh of corruption in which all things monstrous and mischievous find their birth and their dwelling-place, and from whence they issue to the destruction of the peace of the individual and the injury of those around him. 3. A want of faith in the declaration of God. Will a merciful God command impossibilities? and yet He says, "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect": "Be ye holy, as God is holy." Will the holy God promise what He will not perform? II. SOME OF THE MOTIVES FOR ENDEAVOURING TO ESCAPE FROM IT. 1. This despair of amendment is altogether groundless. Imagine even your case to be as bad as possible. Suppose not only the spiritual health impaired, but the soul in a sense "dead,"—still I am privileged, on the authority of God, to affirm that this death is not necessarily either final or fatal. It is rather suspension than extinction. It is a state from which your Redeemer is willing to raise you. 2. The despair of amendment is irrational. Right reason in every instance demands an implicit acquiescence

in the revealed will of God. But I name the unreasonableness of this despondency of improvement on purpose to touch on a particular point. If it be possible that you may fail by the one process, it is certain that you must fail by the other. If the success of vigilance and prayer be equivocal, the ruin which must follow despair is inevitable. 3. Such despair of growth in grace and holiness is deeply guilty. There is a sort of morbid humility on this subject, which leads men to value themselves on those doubts in the compassionate promises of God, which are in fact nothing short of a capital offence against Him. Is the earthly parent flattered by his children refusing to place confidence in his declarations of pity and love? And can the God of truth and compassion be gratified to find that, in spite of the language of Scripture, of His past dealings with His creatures, and in the constant experience of His Church, we should still presume to question His mercies, and doubt whether He, who spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will with Him also give us all things? (*J. W. Cunningham, M.A.*)

Desperation dangerous.—I. A DESPERATE CONCLUSION. 1. In reference to themselves: despair as to their own amendment or reformation. There are people desperate in this regard because of—(1) An absolute indisposition and averseness to all kind of good (*Job xxi. 11*). This proceeds from—a neglect of religious duties and exercises; a persisting in some loose course of life; a walking contrary to light; worldliness and too deep an implunging into secular affairs. (2) An absolute thralldom and subjection to all kinds of evil. Spiritual laziness, unbelief of God's promises, carnal confidence, indifference to the thing itself. 2. In reference to Jeremiah and his ministry; despair as to the value of preaching God's messages amongst them. There are fortifications to this purpose, which men raise to themselves to hold out against the workings of the ministry.

(1) Pride and self-conceit. (2) Cavillings and wranglings against the Word of the ministry. (3) Prosperity and outward welfare. 3. In reference to God Himself. They despair of the grace of God, and call it in question. (1) From the suggestions of Satan. (2) From the infidelity which is in their hearts. (3) From a measuring of God by themselves. II. A PEREMPTORY RESOLUTION. 1. Simply and absolutely they declare that they will walk after their own devices. (1) There is implied here that the nature of man is very prone and subject to evil devices. (2) There is expressed here that there is in men an affection towards these devices. Their obstinacy and perverseness. Grounded upon security and presumption. Proceeding from the power which Satan has over them. They are not persuaded of the truth of God's Word. Their conspiracy and combination. Their wilful transgression and sin against knowledge. 2. Reflexively and derivatively, they said this. (1) Expressly in so many words. (2) Practically in that which they did. (*T. Horton, D.D.*)

The terrors of a despairing heart.—Bunyan very aptly pictures Diabolus when he was attacking the town of Mansoul, as making Captain Past-hope unfurl the red colours which were carried by Mr. Despair, and he also speaks of the roaring of the tyrant's drum, which sounded forth terribly, especially by night, so that the men of Mansoul had always in their ears the sound of hell-fire. Hell-fire and all this to keep them from submitting to their gracious prince. Thus, for once, the devil craftily co-operates with the law of God and conscience; these would drive men to self-despair, but Satan would go farther, and compel them to despair as touching the Lord Himself, so as to believe that pardon for transgression is quite impossible. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

The despair of a man who abandoned his belief in God.—Mr. Quintin Hogg tells a remarkable story of an incident which happened quite recently in a great London club. He was chatting with a friend about a man who had died by his own hand. His friend spoke rather indignantly of such an ignoble termination to life, and characterised it—rightly enough—as a cowardly thing for a man to leave others to meet the troubles and reap the bitter harvest he had sown. A well-known scientific man, who was sitting close by, turned round and said, "I consider you have expressed a very harsh judgment. I don't consider it the action of a coward; and for myself, the only rest I can look forward to is the grave." Mr. Hogg's friend, thinking that perhaps the gentleman had lost some relative by suicide, qualified his remarks by saying that such crimes were generally committed with deranged minds, and that, of course, his words did not apply to a man irresponsible for his acts. "There is something worse than derangement," was the reply, "and that is despair." Mr. Hogg says that his friend was very much shocked at the words and at the tone in which they were uttered, and began to speak to the scientist as best he could about the love of God. He told him he could

not imagine how those who accepted the help of God could ever despair. "Ah," was the sad reply, "I gave up my belief in God long ago, and I have had nothing but a deepening despair ever since. I repeat that the grave is the only rest I can hope for—the only home that remains for me." (*The Young Man.*)

Ver. 14. *Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field?—Man severed from the inexhaustible resources.*—The idea of the text is that a man will cut himself off from the main, will cut himself away from the eternally feeding snow of Lebanon, and will begin to make himself a little cistern—ah me, a broken cistern, a cistern that can hold no water. Let us think of the suicide of isolation, the madness of amputating our life, of leaving the inexhaustible, the eternal, the infinite—and living little, miserable, self-devouring lives. "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon and the fountain that rises from the rock?" You would not allow it in business. Shall I tell you what I have heard some of you business men say? Did not one of you point out a man to me, and say, "You see that man crossing from the Mansion House to the Bank of England?" "Yes." "Very singular case," you say; "that man is living on his capital." I said, "What harm is there in that?" "Why, he is eating himself up, consuming himself. He ought to have his capital so invested that it will bring him in revenue day by day, year by year, and the capital should be kept intact if possible, and still the income should be accruing." "I see!" That is the text from a secular point of view. "This man is living on his capital, he has cut himself off from payable, remunerative, compensative agencies, and he is eating up what he has." The worst thing that can happen in military operations is for the enemy to get behind and to cut off the supplies. That is the horrible possibility and the dreadful mischief, that the supplies should be cut off. Take care how you dwell upon this as an instance of misfortune. I charge you, in the presence of God and the holy angels, foolish man, with doing this very thing. You have cut off your supplies, you have dismissed prayer, you are trying to live on your own miserable individuality and selfhood. Get back to your supplies—back to God, back to the fountain. Live and move and have your being in God, and then no man can impoverish you, until he has impoverished God. (*J. Parker.*)

Ver. 17. *I will scatter them; . . . I will shew them the back.*—*The sinner's doom.*—I. THE CAUSE OF THE EVIL THREATENED. 1. Rejecting the Divine government. 2. Guilty of idolatry. 3. Rejecting the mercy of God. 4. Conduct characterised by the greatest folly. 5. A manifestation of basest ingratitude. II. THE NATURE OF THE EVIL THREATENED. 1. God sometimes shows His back in a way of mercy (Exod. xxxiii. 23; Job xxv. 9). 2. But this threat is expressive of Divine wrath. 3. The wrath of God is retributive. 4. A final departure. III. THE TIME WHEN THE EVIL SHALL BE INFLICTED. 1. In the time of adversity. 2. In sickness. 3. When deserted by friends. 4. In old age. 5. In hour of death. 6. At last day. (*Helps for the Pulpit.*) *East winds.*—The east winds referred to by the prophets appear to be a violent form of sirocco. It was the east wind which brought the plague of locusts upon the Egyptians. It was by an east wind that the ships of Tarshish were broken (Psa. xlviii. 7), and the ships of Tyre (Ezek. xxvii. 26). Jeremiah takes an east wind as the symbol of Jehovah's punishment of His people, while references to its withering and scorching properties are numerous; from the seven thin ears of wheat of Pharaoh's vision in Egypt to the sultry blast which helped to afflict Jonah outside the walls of Nineveh. The east wind still breaks at times with terrific violence upon the coasts of Palestine, and the records of victims tell of tents that have been blown away by its fury. (*H. B. Freeman, M.A.*)

Ver. 18. *Come, and let us smite him with the tongue.*—*The reformers' task difficult and dangerous.*—If there were a hundred violins together, all playing below concert pitch, and I should take a real Cremona, and with the hand of a Paganini should bring it strongly up to the true key, and then should sweep my bow across it like a storm, and make it sound forth clear and resonant, what a demoniac jargon would the rest of the playing seem! Yet the other musicians would be enraged at me. They would think all the discord was mine, and I should be to them a demoniac. So it is with reformers. The world thinks the discord is with them, and not in its own false playing. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

CHAPTER XIX.

VERS. 1-13. *Go and get a potter's earthen bottle. — Dramatised truth:—* There is a point up to which the potter can do what he pleases with the clay: he can make the vessel high or low, broad or narrow, shapely or ungainly; he can play with the wet clay. There was a time when the Lord could do this with man; when He took the dust out of the ground and shaped it, and prepared it for the reception of inspiration; He could have broken it, or re-shaped it, or done what he liked with it, but not after He had breathed into man the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Reverently, then, God conditioned and limited Himself. The Lord cannot convert the world without the world's consent. In Almightiness the Lord still reigneth in the fulness of His power. He can make the nations, and put them down; but what can He do with a little child's heart when that heart is set in deadly animosity against Him? He could break the child upon the wheel, but breakage is not conversion, destruction is not reconciliation. How does He propose to proceed in this matter of bringing the world to Himself? We find the answer in the music of the New Testament. What is there? Any hint of omnipotence? Not one. What is the tone of the New Testament? Reasoning, entreaty, persuasion. Everything depends, then, upon the state in which the potter's vessel is found. Jeremiah is to take a potter's earthen bottle for dramatic uses. He is to go forth, not personally, but officially: "Take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; and go forth." Cruelly have these prophets been used, as if they intended all the harsh expressions they used. They had nothing to do with them; they were errand-bearers; they were sent with messages of thunder, and all they had to do was to deliver them. They themselves trembled under the very burden they carried. The Lord has made men different. Some men could not read a prophecy aloud without taking out of it all that is distinctive of its intellectual energy and spiritual dignity. Such men would turn a denunciation into a kind of lying benediction. Others, again, could not read the Beatitudes as they ought to be read, with musical tremulousness, with tears, with infinite suggestiveness of tone, with sympathy that would not irritate a wound. Each man must operate according to his own gift and function. We need some such introduction as this to the tremendous sentence which Jeremiah pronounced when he went unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate. He was there to recite a lesson: "proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee," at the moment. How he must have writhed under the torture! How his lips must have been made again to speak this molten lava! How he must have lost consciousness in a certain way for a time, and have become a mere instrument or medium for the using of Almighty God! Man never conceived these supreme judgments; they bear an impress other than human. What an awful cataract of judgment—what complaining of neglect and forsakenness—what an exhibition of treachery, blasphemy, self-idolatry, and all shame! And what resources of retaliation—what mockery—what taunting! What then happened? Jeremiah, having thus denounced the judgment of the Lord, took up the bottle and broke it in the sight of the men that went with him. Then he was to say: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city," &c. Sometimes we need graphic displays of God's meaning. The Lord resorts to all manner of exhibition and illustration and appeal, if haply He may save some. This is the reason why He dashed your fortune to pieces. You remember when the sum was large, and you said you would die in your nest, how He took you up the bottle and broke it at your feet, and you started, and wondered as to what was coming next. It was thus that God broke the bottle of your little child's life; He saw that this was the only way in which your attention could be excited, for you were becoming imbruted and carnalised; you were losing all spiritual life and dignity and value, and were rapidly amalgamating yourself with the dust; therefore He had to send infinite trouble before your eyes could be opened in wakeful and profitable attention. Thus the Lord is defeating crafty politicians, and selfish statesmen, and ambitious kings, and families that are bent on their ruin through their dignity: and thus, and thus, by a thousand breakages, God is asking man to think, ere it be too late. Throughout this condemnation there is a spirit of justice. We never have mere vengeance in the providence of God, any more than we have mere power in the miracles of

Christ. The miracles of judgment and the miracles of Providence are all explained by a moral impulse or purpose. The Lord condescends to use the explanatory word, "Because." Thus we read: "Because they have forsaken Me." Why this Divine wail because God has been left, neglected, forsaken? This is not the complaint of mere fastidiousness; this is the revelation of the Divine nature. He condescends to cry that we may understand that He has a heart; He is willing to send upon the earth a shower of tears that we may know how capable He is of being grieved. There is, then, a spirit of justice in the whole condemnation. Verily, there is a reason or an explanation of all the judgment that falls upon our life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The potter's vessel broken.*—I. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PARABLE OF THE MARRED VESSEL AND THAT OF THE BROKEN VESSEL. The one parable speaks of reformation, the other of destruction. The vessel was made of clay which had become hard, and it was impossible to re-model it. Therefore it was broken to shivers. II. THE INSIGHT WHICH THIS PARABLE GIVES INTO THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE TO WHOM IT WAS SPOKEN. People who needed to have the messages of God brought home to them by such signs as this, who seem to have been incapable of laying to heart God's Word unless it was accompanied by some external manifestation, must have had little spiritual perception, and were therefore most likely to be in a low state as regards moral character. III. THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE PARABLE. It declares that the nation would, in time, fill up the full measure of its iniquity. The Divine Potter never breaks what can be mended. The message which accompanied the parable, being a repetition of the curses threatened by Moses in Deut. xxviii., is intended to make the people feel that the fault was with themselves alone if the curses therein foretold were fulfilled, and the promised blessings withheld. We come into this world and find laws in existence which we soon understand are prophecies. They tell us beforehand that their observance will be accompanied with blessings, and their non-observance with penalty. We can choose for ourselves which shall be fulfilled in our case. The people to whom Jeremiah brought this message found themselves in such a position. God had set before them "life and good, and death and evil" (Deut. xxx. 15). So that the terrible woes foretold in this chapter were the choice of the people of Israel, and not unheard-of penalties now promulgated for the first time. (*A London Minister.*) *Opportunities and their limit* (with chap. xviii. 3, 4).—I. THERE IS A DIVINE IDEAL POSSIBLE FOR EVERY MAN. God has not made any man simply for destruction. There was one ideal possible for Egypt, another for Assyria, and another for Babylon, with their respective privileges and opportunities, and quite another for Israel, with its pre-eminent advantages. And what is true thus of nations is true also of individuals. He has one ideal for those who, like ourselves, are favoured to the full with Gospel blessings; and another for such as have not our original advantages. But there is a possible result that shall be worthy of His approval for each; and that each may reach that, has been His original and primary design in the creation of each. II. THIS IDEAL IS TO BE ATTAINED BY A MAN ONLY THROUGH IMPLICIT FAITH IN GOD AND WILLING OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMANDS. It was a profound saying of a great philosopher in regard to physical things that "we command nature by obeying her." He meant, for example, that by complying with the requisite conditions in electricity, we can command that agent to do our work. And similarly we may affirm that we command God by obeying Him (Isa. xlv. 11). By obeying God we secure His approval and co-operation with us and in us by His Spirit for the attainment of that which He has designed to make us. III. IF SUCH FAITH AND OBEDIENCE ARE REFUSED BY A MAN, THAT MAN'S HISTORY IS MARRED, AND IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO BECOME WHAT OTHERWISE HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN. That is seen by us every day in common life. The youth who trifles through these years which ought to have been devoted to education, may possibly, as the saying is, "take himself up" in after days, but he can never attain such a position as might easily have been his if he had been diligent all through the formative period of early life. And the same thing holds morally. Sin mars the Divine ideal for a man. It deprives him of the full advantage of the skill and help of God in the development of his character. IV. IF THE MAN SHOULD REPENT AND RETURN TO THE LORD, HE MAY YET, THROUGH THE RICH FORBEARANCE OF GOD, RISE TO A MEASURE OF EXCELLENCE AND USEFULNESS WHICH, THOUGH SHORT OF THAT WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY POSSIBLE TO HIM AND INTENDED FOR HIM, WILL SECURE THE APPROVAL OF THE MOST HIGH. There will always be in you and about you,

indeed, the marks of your former lives; but God has you yet upon the wheel, and He will make you "another vessel as it pleases Him." Think here of such a case as that of Manasseh. But why need we go so far back for illustrations of this truth? I think of John Newton in the pulpit, doing a noble work for God and men in spite of his early sins and shameful habits. He was never such a man as he might have been had he been all through his days truly devoted to his God, but he was a good and useful man after all, saved by grace through faith in Christ and repentance unto life. I think of some, long enslaved by intemperance, and even yet feeling degraded at the thought of what but for it they might have been, but now emancipated from the thralldom of habit, by the power of the Holy Ghost, through faith in Jesus, and living mainly "for the good that they can do." And with such cases before me, I proclaim the willingness of God to save all who penitently turn to Him, and to make them vessels of mercy which He will "prepare for His glory." V. IF THE MAN HARDEN HIMSELF INTO PERSISTENT REJECTION OF GOD, AND SHOW STUBBORN IMPENITENCE, THERE COMES A TIME WHEN IMPROVEMENT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE, AND THERE IS NOTHING FOR HIM BUT EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD AND THE GLORY OF HIS POWER. The clay that was plastic was made into another vessel; but the bottle that was burned into hardness and was found to be worthless, was broken into pieces and cast out. So when impenitence is perversely persisted in there comes a point at which the heart is so hardened thereby that repentance is neither thought of, nor prompted to, nor desired, and the man is abandoned to perdition. Do not dream of probation after death. Even if it were true that such a thing were to be given to the heathen, there would still be no hope for you. And so, while you may, before the day of grace ends and the door of opportunity is shut, return to the Lord by faith in Jesus and in obedience unto Him. I conclude with a word of exhortation especially addressed to the young. I have tried to show you that the morning of sin will prevent you from reaching the highest excellence of character in life, and I have pointed out also that, though you may afterward turn to God, the result, at last, will be short of that which otherwise you might have gained. How important it must be, therefore, to give yourselves to God, in Christ, with the first dawns of your moral intelligence! (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

A broken vessel.—An earthen vessel is a true emblem of human life, so frail, so brittle. But there is something frailer yet in our resolutions and efforts after holiness. And when once these have failed us, we can never be again what we were. Always the crack, the rivets, the mark of the join. In Gideon's days there was a light within the earthen vessels; and when these were broken it shone forth. There is, therefore, a breaking of the vessel which is salutary and desirable. If there be in any one of us a proud and evil disposition, a masterful self-will, which frets for its own way and makes itself strong against God, then indeed we may ask to be so broken as never to be whole again. "Take me—break me—make me," is a very wholesome prayer for us all. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Punishment made to tally with the sin.—How exactly God's judgments tally in their attendant circumstances to the sin which has provoked them. The valley of Hinnom, the scene of the Jews' greatest guilt, was made the scene of the denunciation of their doom, and was to be the scene of its execution (ver. 2). As its name Tophet once indicated the loud drumpeal of joy (ver. 6), so it was hereafter to be noted as the scene of unmingled woe. Once it resounded with the cries of "innocent" (ver. 4) children cruelly put to death, hereafter it was to resound with the death-groans of adult men who richly merited their retributive punishment. As the "houses of Jerusalem" were defiled by the burnt offerings "unto the host of heaven" upon the flat roofs, so were they to be "defiled as Tophet" and to be burnt with fire by the enemy, as the Jews "estranged" the place (ver. 4) which was God's from Him who was its rightful owner, so was the land to be estranged from them and given to strangers, whilst they themselves must sojourn as captives and strangers in a strange land. (*A. F. Fausset, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XX.

VER. 7. *O Lord, Thou hast deceived me.*—*The arduous character of God's service forgotten.*—Too often the servants of God are impatient under present crosses, and give way to the infirmity of their old nature. Like Jeremiah, they complain as if God had done them some wrong, and had not let them know in entering His service what trials were before them. But it is not God who has dealt unfairly with them, but themselves who have lost sight of the appointed conditions of His service. The Lord never allures any to follow Him without plainly telling them the cross that awaits them.—(*Fausset.*) He deals with them as brave Garibaldi did with his recruits. When Garibaldi was going out to battle, he told his troops what he wanted them to do. When he had described what he wanted them to do, they said: "Well, General, what are you going to give us for all this?" "Well," he replied, "I don't know what else you will get; but you will get hunger and cold, and wounds and death." How do you like that? (Rev. ii. 10.) *The ideal and the real; or, does God deceive?*—A religious man in the nineteenth century is not accustomed to speak of God as a deceiver. And yet, once we allow for the difference of phraseology and get behind the words, we find that the experience which Jeremiah expressed here is one through which we ourselves have passed, and the problem which he tries to solve is still on our hands. He had now been preaching for several years. He had set out with all the ardour of young enthusiasm. His was no reckless rush into the ministry. Objections and difficulties there were, and he took account of them. But the impulse to preach was too strong to be resisted, and the young prophet had no doubt that that impulse was the voice of God. His obedience involved an expectation. He expected, of course, that his work would tell; the God who called him would be with him, and the "work of the Lord" would "prosper in his hands." After several years' hard, faithful work, what does he find? A people not only obdurate and disobedient, but revengeful and cruel. He had seen the reformation under King Josiah, and he had seen also the terrible relapse. It grieved his heart to see the fearful idolatrous practices restored in the Valley of Hinnom. He went down there one day to protest against it in the name of God. While he delivered his message he held in his hand a potter's earthen bottle, which, at one point in his discourse, he dashed to pieces on the ground, and assured his hearers that so the Lord would break them and their city in pieces. The result of this was not, as he might have hoped, the turning away of the people from sin. On the contrary, Pashur, the chief officer in the house of the Lord, struck Jeremiah and put him in stocks to be jeered at. Though liberated the next day, this treatment caused the prophet seriously to reflect upon the whole question of his mission. He looked upon that mission in the light of results, and he confessed to a great disappointment. That is what he expresses in the words, "Lord, Thou hast deceived me." Results seemed to tell him to give up, and he tried to give up. He said: "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name." But what did he find? A burning fire in his heart, and he could not forbear. Here, then, was the prophet's dilemma. The language of actualities to him was "stop," but there was an imperative in his soul, and he could not stop. Now the practical question to him was—Which of these two conflicting voices was the voice of God? Was it the voice of history, or was it the prophetic impulse of his heart? If the latter, then there was the hard fact for him to face, that "the word of the Lord" made him a laughing-stock, a derision, and a reproach. Jeremiah decided for the latter, spite of the tremendous odds against him, and preached on in the faith that God would some day vindicate his cause. The problem which Jeremiah had to solve for himself is still with us. There does appear to be a contradiction between the world as it is and the world as we feel it ought to be, which is very puzzling. To many minds that contradiction is altogether inexplicable. The so-called moral ideal is an illusion of the mind, and if we call it the voice of God, then God deceives men. There always have been ideals of justice and goodwill, but the real world is all the time in dead opposition to them. Now, which of these expresses the will of God? Is it the world of fact, or the world of aspiration? Is it in our sight of what is, or in our hope of what may be? Shall we learn His character from what He has actually done, or from an ideal which He has always promised but never realised? Does God deceive men? Reformers die with their hopes unfulfilled; lives have been given to the cause of righteousness, and yet

might remains right, and the tyrant prevails. Do our ideals simply mock us? If these are the voice of God, why do they not prevail? Is God defeated? What shall we say? Let us not try to escape the difficulty by denying it. We may purchase a cheap optimism by blinking the ugly facts of the world. Let us admit to the full that the history of moral reform has its sore disappointments. The world has not only opposed the reformer, but it has always put him in stocks. It changes the kind of stocks as time goes on, but they are stocks all the same. Official religion and real religion are often engaged in deadly conflict, a conflict which frequently results to the reformer, as to Jeremiah, in a sore sense of disappointment. And every man who seeks to do good soon comes upon many discouraging facts. There are times when he says: "I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought." Nor is it by ignoring such and similar facts, and dwelling only on the bright side, that we have to support faith. On the other hand, we must beware of the temperament which ever occupies itself with life's disappointments, and fails to see its progress and success. Now, I admit that if there were that complete breach between the real and ideal which appears to be, the problem would be utterly insoluble. But it is not so. In the first place, it is not correct to speak of the world of fact and the world of aspiration as separate and distinct, for the aspiration is one of the facts. It is a part of that unto which it aspires. The aspiration after goodness is itself good, and all prayer for spiritual excellence is part of its own answer. There is no clear line between the ideal and the real, for the ideal is a part of man as he is, and he is a part of the world as it is. When we ask whether we shall learn God's character from that which He has accomplished in the world, or from the ideal which stirs the soul, we forget that that soul with its ideal is a part of what He has done. Man, with his sense of duty, with all his yearnings for purer and diviner being, is a part of the world as it is; the ideal is partly actual; prophecy is history at its highest range. If only one man desired that society should be righteous and pure, society could not be judged without that man. The power of an ideal may culminate in a great person, find in him an exceptionally brilliant expression, and reach the point at which it commands the world; but he is always a sharer in the conditions he condemns, and the men he condemns have helped to make him what he is. He may be as different from the average society as the blossom is from the stem on which it grows, but that society conditions him as the stem conditions the blossom. This is the fact which the prophet is liable to forget. It was as true of Jeremiah as of Thomas Carlyle, that he made the blackness blacker than it was. Jeremiah was not as lonely as he himself thought he was. If that nation had been utterly faithless, such faith as his could not have been born in it. So, though the prophet must condemn the actual, because he is swayed by the ideal, and is a divinely discontented man, working for progress, yet his very existence proves that that progress has already been the order of God, and has produced him. That there is a contradiction between what is and what ought to be is true, but it is not the whole truth. Strictly speaking, nothing is, but everything is becoming. We are in the process of a Divine evolution in which the ideal is for ever actualising itself. The contradiction is not ultimate, nor the breach complete. What cannot we hope, for instance, of a race that counts one Jesus among its members? He is, then, an example of what we may become, and our representative before God. In like manner, surely, when God judges the human race, He does not judge it with its best specimens left out; He takes its highest points into consideration. He does with the race what you and I do with the individual—takes its best as its real self, as that to which it shall one day fully attain. And when we think that Jesus, and all that He was, is a part of the actual history of the world, then we say that the richest ideals that ever sway our souls are justified by the history of our race—God is not deceiving us. Let us try to remember this when we come to bitter disappointments in life's work. When the prophet finds, as find he will, that multitudes do not listen, but mock and deride, let him nevertheless be sure that the good and the true must prevail. Some disappointments are inevitable. It is of the very nature of an ideal to make life unsatisfactory; a spirit so possessed can never rest in what is, but will for ever press forward to that which is before. To be content with all things as they are is to obliterate the distinction between good and bad, between right and wrong. No high-souled man will settle matters so. But some of our bitterest disappointments come from the fact that the form in which the ideal shapes itself in our mind is necessarily defective, and that our scheme of work is consequently partial and one-sided. This was a constant

source of trouble to the prophets of Israel. We get many of our disappointments in a similar way. Here are two men, for instance, whose souls are stirred by the ideal of a renovated world in which righteousness and love shall reign. Each thinks of bringing it about chiefly in one particular way, the former, perhaps by some scheme of social reform, the latter by a certain type of gospel preaching. Both will be very disappointed; the world will not come round to them as they wish. And yet while these two men are groaning under their disappointments, the fact is that the world is all the time advancing, though not in their way. The man who thinks that his particular gospel is the only thing that can possibly save the world finds the world very indifferent to that gospel, and thinks that it is going to perdition, while all the time it is going onward and upward to higher and better things. But the truth is, that the world's progress is far too great to be squeezed into any one creed, or scheme, or ordinance, and you cannot measure it by any of these. Attempt that, and while you bemoan your discouragements and think ill of the world, humanity will sweep onward, receiving its marching orders from the throne of the universe. For practical purposes we must confine our energies chiefly to one or two ways of doing good, but if we only remember that when we have selected our way it is but a small fragment of what has to be done, that other ways and methods are quite as necessary, we shall save ourselves from much personal trouble, and from much ill-judgment of others. But even when we have done our best, there will still be some adverse results. These must not dishearten us. If there be in our heart "as it were a burning fire," and we become weary of silence and cannot contain, then let the fiery speech flow, however cold the world. We must obey the highest necessities of our nature. Our best impulses and purest desires are the word of God to us, which we have to preach. With this conviction we can go on with our work, disappointments notwithstanding. Nothing is more evident in reviewing history than the continuity of Divine purpose. It is the unfolding of a plan. It is full enough of evil and of sorrow, and yet "out of evil cometh good," and "joy is born of sorrow." It is full enough of error, and yet, somehow, even error has been used to preserve truth. Out of mistakes and superstitions have come some of the greatest truths. The greatest tragedy of history was the crucifixion of Jesus, yet Calvary has become the mount of our highest ascensions, and the altar of our best thanksgivings. So often, indeed, has the best come out of the worst, so often has the morning broken when the night was darkest, so often has peace come through war, that no discouragements of to-day shall weaken our faith, or bedim our hope, or mar the splendour of our expectation. We believe in God. There are dark places in history, tunnels through which we are not able to follow the train of the Divine purpose, but we saw it first on the one side, and then on the other, and conclude it must have gone through—the tunnel, too, was on the line of progress. The history of the world is an upward history. And those who know God are ever looking up; men with a Divine outlook are ever on the march. And, friends, whatever you do, cling to the ideal. Let no discouragement release your hold. Be active and practical; yes, but do not be bound within the limits of any one scheme. Climb the mount of vision, and have converse with God, and you will carry down with you a faith that can stand any disappointment, and hold itself erect amid the rush of the maddest torrent. (*T. R. Williams.*)

Ver. 9. Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name.—*Jeremiah discouraged*.—I. JEREMIAH'S MOMENTARY RASHNESS. Oh! it was a rash speech—like the rashness of Job, like the petulance of Jonah. It is useful for us to have set before us the failings of the most distinguished of God's people. We learn from these failings, that after all they were mere men, and "men of like passions with ourselves," that they were encompassed with the same infirmity, that they carried about with them the same weakness, and that therefore the same grace which was triumphant in them in the result can be equally triumphant in our support and in our ultimate victory. II. HIS MANY AND GREAT DISCOURAGEMENTS. 1. They arose partly from the very nature of his message. His was not a pleasing burden. The message of God's Word is a message of wrath as well as of mercy; there are denunciations in it as well as promises. And we must be as faithful and as earnest in the delivery of the one as we are in the delivery of the other. 2. The unbelief and opposition which that message experienced. 3. Nor were the hearers of Jeremiah satisfied with the discouragement that would be occasioned by their opposition to and unbelief of the message of the prophet;

they added to this bitter reproach, misrepresentation and persecution. What though earth meets us with its opposition? What though calumnies are flung against the cause in which we are engaged? We are not looking for earthly honours; we are not seeking the gratitude and encomiums of the world. Our record is with God; our reward is on high. We appeal to His judgment seat; we labour as in His sight. **III. THE PERSEVERANCE, BY WHICH THE COURSE OF THE PROPHET WAS MARKED, NOTWITHSTANDING ALL.** Mark, then, it was only a momentary fit of despondency. They are the moments of God's people, that are the seasons of their giving way; it is not the characteristic of their entire life. Though they may now and then say, "I will not make mention of Him nor speak any more in His name," follow them a little—they are at it again, and again, and again; and on to a dying hour, and with their dying breath, that name is on their lips; and when the tongue is silent, it is still engraven on the heart. (*W. H. Cooper.*)

Pulpit experience.—**I. THE POWER OF THE OUTWARD TO INDUCE A GODLY MINISTER TO DISCONTINUE HIS WORK.** I will state a few of the things which often induce this depressing state of mind. 1. The momentous influences that must spring from our labours. In every sentence we touch cords that shall send their vibrations through the endless future; that shall peal in the thunders of a guilty conscience, or resound in the music of a purified spirit. 2. The incessant draw upon the vital energies of our being. To preach is to teach as well as to exhort and warn; and to teach the Bible requires a knowledge of the Bible, and to know the Bible requires the most earnest, continued, and indefatigable investigation. Physical labour tires some limb, but this labour tires the soul itself; and when the soul is tired, the man himself is tired. 3. The seeming ineffectiveness of his labours. 4. The inconsistent conduct of those who profess to believe the truth. **II. THE STRONGER POWER OF THE INWARD TO INDUCE A GODLY MINISTER TO PERSEVERE IN HIS WORK.** Look at this inner force; it is like a "fire." Fire! What a purifying, expanding power! it turns everything to its own nature. So it is with the Word of God. This fire was shut up in the bones of the prophet; it became an irrepressible force. The thoughts that passed his mind about resigning, feel as fuel to increase its force. If a man has God's truth really in him, he must speak it out.

1. This word kindled within him the all-impelling "fire" of philanthropy. Many waters cannot quench love. All the waters of ministerial annoyance, disappointment, anxieties, and labour, shall not quench this "fire," if the Word of God is "shut up in his bones." 2. This word kindled within him the all-impelling "fire" of piety. It filled him with love to God. David felt this "fire" when he said, "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved." Paul felt this "fire" at Athens, when he "felt his spirit stirred within him." 3. This word kindled within him the all-impelling "fire of hope." The Word of God kindles within us a fire that lights up the future world, and makes us feel that what we are doing, however humble, is great, because it is for eternity. 4. This word kindled within him the strong "fire" of duty. "It is giving in trust," &c. "I am a debtor," says Paul. (*Homilist.*)

The soul under discouragement.—**I. THE EFFECTS OF DISCOURAGEMENT AS A PIOUS SOUL.** 1. In our labours for the good of others. 2. In our exertions for our own souls. Such apprehension is most enervating. **II. THE EFFECT OF PIETY ON A DISCOURAGED SOUL.** 1. To shame querulous impatience. 2. To resuscitate drooping energies. Conclusion: 1. Expect discouragements in every part of your duty. 2. Make them occasions for glorifying God the more. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*)

Ministers, their discouragements and supports.—**I. MINISTERIAL DISCOURAGEMENTS DISTRESSINGLY FELT.** 1. Here is a rash resolution formed. 2. An insuperable obstacle presented to his meditated abandonment of his work. **II. POPULAR DETRACTION SENSITIVELY DEPLORED.** 1. Explain the nature of popular detraction. 2. Adduce Scripture precepts respecting the evil of popular detraction. 3. Exhibit Scripture examples of individuals who have felt the scorpion's sting of popular detraction. 4. Analyse more particularly the case of the prophet as exhibited in the text. **III. DIVINE SUPPORT HAPPILY REALISED.** 1. From a sense of the presence and power of God. 2. Expectation of the future failure and confusion of his opposers. 3. From a belief of the omniscience of God. 4. From the efficacy of prayer. Learn—(1) To expect detraction. (2) Follow the Saviour's rule: speak to the detractor alone. (3) Cultivate habits of circumspection. (4) Lay our cause before God. (5) Anticipate through the merits of Christ a world where there will be no defaming. (*J. Redford.*) *The burning fire.*—We have sometimes seen a little steamer, like *The Maid of the Mist* at the foot of the Falls of Niagara, resisting and gaining upon a stormy torrent, madly

rushing past her. Slowly she has worked her way through the mad rush of waters, defying their attempt to bear her back, calmly and serenely pursuing her onward course, without being turned aside, or driven back, or dismayed. And why? Because a burning fire is shut up in her heart, and her engines cannot stay, because impelled in their strong and regular motion. Similarly, within Jeremiah's heart a fire had been lit from the heart of God, and was kept aflame by the continual fuel heaped on it. The difficulty, therefore, with him was, not in speaking, but in keeping silent—not in acting, but in refraining. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *A heart on fire*.—But, after all, our main desire is to know how we may have this heart on fire. We are tired of a cold heart toward God. We complain because of our sense of effort in Christian life and duty; we would fain learn the secret of being so possessed by the Spirit and thought of God that we might be daunted by no opposition, abashed by no fear. The source of the inward fire is the love of God, shed abroad by the Holy Ghost; not primarily our love to God, but our sense of His love to us. The coals of juniper that gave so fierce a heat to the heart of a Rutherford were brought from the altar of the heart of God. If we set ourselves with open face towards the Cross, which, like a burning lens, focuses the love of God, and if, at the same time, we reckon upon the Holy Spirit—well called the Spirit of Burning—to do His wonted office, we shall find the ice that cakes the surface of our heart dissolving in tears of penitence; and presently the sacred fire will begin to glow. When that love has once begun to burn within the soul, when once the baptism of fire has set us aglow, the sins and sorrows of men—their impieties and blasphemies, their disregard of God, of His service and of His day, their blind courting of danger, their dalliance with evil, will only incite in us a more ardent spirit. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 10-18. *All my familiars watched for my halting.*—*Pathetic experiences*.—In these verses we have two distinct aspects of human experience. Within this brief section Jeremiah is on the hill-top and in the deepest valley of spiritual dejection. How much depends upon circumstances for man's estimate of life! That estimate varies with climate, with incidents of a very trivial nature, and with much that is only superficial and transitory. Life is one thing to the successful man, and another to the man whose life is one continual series of defeats and disappointments. It is well, therefore, that all men should have a touch of failure, and spend a night or two now and then in deepest darkness that cannot be relieved: such experience teaches sympathy, develops the noblest faculties, brings into beneficent exercise many generous emotions, and in the morning, after a long night's struggle with doubt, there may be tears in the eyes; but those tears denote the end of weakness and the beginning of strength. The year is not one season, but four, and we must pass through all the four before we can know what the year is. So with life: we must be with Jeremiah on the mountain-top, or with him in the deep valley; we must join his song, and fall into the solemn utterance of his sorrow, before we can know what the whole gamut of life is. How impossible it is to realise all the conflicting experiences at once, and to be wise. There is an abundance of information, there is a plentifulness of criticism that is detestable; but wisdom—large, generous wisdom, that understands every man's case, and has an answer to every man's necessity—oh, whither has that angel-mother fled? We need now and again to come into contact with those who know us altogether, and who can speak the word of cheer when we are cheerless, and the word of chastening when our rapture becomes riotous. Consider the vanity of life, and by its vanity understand its brevity, its uncertainty, its fickleness. We have no gift of time, we have no assurance of continuance; we have a thousand yesterdays, we have not one to-morrow. Then how things disappoint us that were going to make us glad! The flowers have been blighted, or the insects have fallen upon them, or the cold wind has chilled them, and they have never come to full fruition or bloom or beauty; and the child that was going to comfort us in our old age died first, as if frightened by some ghost invisible to us. Then the collisions of life, its continual competitions and rivalries and jealousies; its mutual criticisms, its backbitings and slanderings; its censures, deserved and undeserved: who can stand the rush and tumult of this life? Who has not sometimes longed to lay it down and begin some better, sunnier state of existence? And the sufferings of life, who shall number them?—not the great sufferings that are published, not the great woes that draw the attention even of the whole household to us in tender regard; but sufferings we never mention, spiritual sufferings,

yes, even physical sufferings; sufferings that we dare not mention, sufferings that would be laughed at by unsympathetic contempt—but still sufferings. Add all these elements and possibilities together, and then say who has not sometimes been almost anxious to “shuffle off this mortal coil,” and pass into the liberty of rest. Jesus Christ understands us all. We can all tell Jesus, as the disciples did, what has happened. He can listen to each of us as if His interest were entranced and enthralled. He knows every quiver of the life, every throb of the heart, every palpitation of fear, and every shout of joy. Withhold nothing from Him. You can tell Him all, and when you have ended you will find that you may begin life again. In your hope is His answer. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Evil watchers:—“All my familiars watched for my halting”: the original word does not mean my innermost friends, for true friendship can never be guilty of such treason, but the Hebrew word means, The men of my peace; the men who used to accost me on the highway with, “Is it peace?”—the men who salaamed me out of civility, but who never really cared for me in their souls: these men, behind their painted masks, watched for my halting; they all watched. Some men take pleasure when other men fall. What is the answer to all this watching of others? It is a clear, plain, simple, useful answer: Watch yourselves; be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. It is not enough that others watch you—watch yourselves; be critical about yourselves; be severe with yourselves; penetrate the motive of every action, and say, Is it healthy? Is it honest? Is it such as could bear the criticism of God? Dare we take up this motive and look at it when the sun burns upon it in its revealing glory? If a man so watch himself he need not mind who else watches him. Watch the secret places; watch the out-of-the-way doors, the postern gates, the places that are supposed to be secure against the approach of the burglar; be very careful about all these, and then the result may be left with God. He who does not watch will be worsted in the fray. He who does not watch cannot pray. He who watches others and does not watch himself is—a fool. (*Ibid.*) But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one.—*The best Champion* (as a mighty terrible one):—As a strong giant, and mine only Champion on whom I lean. Here the spirit begins to get the better of the flesh, could Jeremiah but hold his own. But as the ferryman plies the oar, and eyes the shore homeward where he would be, yet there comes a gust of wind that carrieth him back again; so it fared with our prophet (vers. 14, 15). (*John Trapp.*) Cursed be the day wherein I was born.—*Existence regretted*:—Job and Jeremiah were alike in wishing they had never been born. They were both men of sorrow. I. A PREFERENCE ALIKE IRRELIGIOUS AND IRRATIONAL. 1. Good men should not for a moment think that non-existence is preferable to life and being. These were both good men, children of God; existence was therefore a blessing to be prized, not an evil to be mourned over. Had they been versed in the design and results of Divine dispensations, as Paul, they would have said, “Our light affliction,” &c. With such a destiny before them, instead of cursing the day of birth, they would have blessed it as the dawn of an eternal existence, to be hereafter crowned with a glory that fadeth not away. 2. Ungodly men may with some degree of reason prefer non-existence; because in trouble they have no Divine support, in death no good hope, in eternity no expectation but the penalty of sin. II. NON-EXISTENCE IS PREFERABLE TO EXISTENCE UNLESS EXISTENCE POSSESS MORE PLEASURE THAN PAIN. 1. If every ungodly man lived out threescore years and ten, and the whole was spent in pleasure, yet, as that period is but momentary as compared with his eternal existence, and as that existence is to be one of pain, he might curse the day of his birth. 2. Existence, eternal existence, is a blessing to all unfallen ones, and also to such fallen ones as are redeemed by the death of Christ. 3. But perpetuity of existence can be no blessing to “the angels who kept not their first estate,” nor to those of the human race who by impenitence and unbelief reject the great salvation and bring upon themselves the double condemnation of the law and the Gospel. III. HELL AND HEAVEN ARE TWO GREAT TEACHERS. 1. Hell teaches—the folly of wickedness, the full enormity of sin in the penalty it has entailed, and leads all its victims amid the consequences of their depravity to curse the day they were born. 2. Heaven teaches—the wisdom of holiness, the full benefits of redemption in the felicity it has secured, and leads all the ransomed to bless the day of their birth as the morn of their noontide of glory. IV. GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD HAVE OCCASION FOR PREFERRING NON-EXISTENCE.

1. He has devised and carried out a costly plan by which the existence of fallen ones might be made an eternal blessing. 2. Every man who now wishes for a glorious existence has only to look to Jesus and be saved. (*D. Pledge.*)

CHAPTER XXI.

VERS. 1, 2. *Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us. — A distressed king seeks Divine counsel :—*Of Galba the emperor, as also of our Richard III., it is recorded that they were bad men but good princes. We cannot say so much of Zedekiah. Two things he is chiefly charged with—1. That he brake his oath and faith plighted to the King of Babylon (*Ezek. xvii. 18*). 2. That he humbled not himself before Jeremiah, speaking from the mouth of the Lord. Hitherto he had not; but now in his distress he seeketh to this prophet; yea, sendeth an embassy. Kings care not for soldiers, said a great commander, till their crowns hang on the one side of their heads. Sure it is that some of them slight God's ministers till they cannot tell what to do without them. (*John Trapp.*) *Kings have their cares :—*Kingdoms have their cares, and thrones their thorns. Antigonus cried of his diadem, "O base rag," not worth taking up at a man's feet. Julian complained of his own unhappiness in being made emperor. Diocletian laid down the empire as weary of it. Thirty of the ancient kings of this our land, said Capgrave, resigned their crowns; such were their cares, crosses, and emulations. Zedekiah now could gladly have done as much. But since that might not be, he sendeth to Jeremiah, whom in his prosperity he had slighted, and, to gratify his wicked counsellors, wrongfully imprisoned. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 6. *They shall die of a great pestilence. — Pestilence :—*In a romance, "The End of an Epoch," by A. Lincoln Green, "the hero, Adam Godwin, makes the acquaintance of a German professor, bearing the ominous name of Azrael Falk, who comes to London, bringing with him a large quantity of an active and deadly germ poison, which would depopulate any country where it might be turned loose. His idea is to make an enormous fortune by selling it to either Russia or Germany, between whom at the time discords had arisen. The catastrophe is brought on in a simple way. The professor, with his jars in his possession (he is too jealous and suspicious ever to part from them), carries out a long-cherished fancy to see the Derby, and on Epsom Downs is taken for a welsher, and set upon by the mob. His precious jars are broken, and he himself is removed insane and dying to a neighbouring asylum. The death-dealing contents of the jars rise in a brown mist and float in the air. Adam Godwin knows that London is in mortal peril, but he has not been told the secret of the anti-toxin, and Falk dies without recovering his reason. The most exciting pages are those in which we watch the slow creeping of the plague over London. It attacks all except aged persons, and there is no remedy. The calamity which in this book is merely fictitious was, in dire fact, to befall Jerusalem. Disobedience, stubbornness, and impenitence were the deadly germ poison by which the inhabitants of the city were to be swept away.

Ver. 7. *He shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy. — No mercy in war :—*The exploits of Surrey in Scotland are thus recorded in a letter of Wolsey: "The Earl of Surrey so devastated and destroyed all Tweedale and March, that there is left neither house, fortress, village, tree, cattle, corn, nor other succour for man; insomuch that some of the people that fled from the same, afterward returning and finding no sustenance, were compelled to come into England begging bread, which oftentimes when they do eat they die incontinently for the hunger passed. And with no imprisonment, cutting off their ears, burning them in the faces, or otherwise, can be kept away." (*Knight's England.*)

Ver. 8. *I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. — God's message of life and death :—*I. IT IS GOD'S PREROGATIVE TO MARK THE PATH IN WHICH HE WOULD HAVE US GO FOR BOTH WORLDS. 1. In His written Word.

(1) By doctrinal statements. (2) By warnings and invitations. 2. By providence and mercies: examples and instances. II. THE PATH TO LIFE IS CLOTHED WITH MANY ATTRACTIONS. 1. It is a plain way, though narrow. Only difficult and perplexed to those who are reluctant to renounce the burden of their sins and the corruption of this evil world, or would fain invent some method to reconcile the discordant claims of God and mammon, earth and heaven. 2. It is an old way, and well trodden. From Abel's time. 3. It is a safe way; for, though much contested, it is Divinely guarded. 4. It is a pleasant way. III. WE ARE DAILY ADVANCING IN ONE OR OTHER OF THESE PATHS. There can be amidst the diversities to the race but two broad divisions: wise and foolish; wheat and tares. A worldly man is one that has his chief treasure upon earth, while God and eternity are forgotten. Whereas the Christian is one who has been converted from the error of his ways; his mind has been enlightened to discern the evil of sin and the love and loveliness of Christ, and he is anxious to lay up his treasure and hopes in heaven. IV. THE DOOM OF THE IMPENITENT WILL BE AGGRAVATED BY WEIGHTY CONSIDERATIONS. 1. The path of life and death was clearly set before you, and rejected by deliberate choice. 2. The solemn providences and warnings you have abused. 3. The vanity and worthlessness of pursuits for which salvation was rejected. 4. The changeless eternity of the state to which you go. (*S. Thodey.*)

Ver. 12. **Execute judgment in the morning.**—*Justice must be prompt.*—"Execute judgment in the morning," as David your progenitor and pattern did (Psa. ci. 8). Be up and be at it betime, and make quick despatch of causes, that poor men may go home about their business, who have other things to do besides going to law. It is a lamentable thing that a suit should depend ten or twenty years in some courts through the avarice of some pleaders, to the utter undoing of their poor clients. This made one such (when he was persuaded to patience by the example of Job) to reply, "What do you tell me of Job? Job never had suits in chancery." Jethro adviseth Moses (Exod. xviii.) to dismiss those timely, whom he cannot despatch presently. (*John Trapp.*)

CHAPTER XXII.

VER. 3. **Do no wrong.**—*Wrong*:—The meaning of the word "wrong" is, something that is twisted from the straight line. Do you say you have not done wrong? When you set yourself up as a pattern of goodness, and at the same time turn up your nose at your erring acquaintance, it leads one to think that your angelic profession may cover the filthy rags of human sin. Some people profess too much. If they would acknowledge to some fault and confess that occasionally they are common metal like everybody else, we should respect them. People who will not permit you to think that they have ever done wrong, are often very unfeeling in their dealings with a person that has "made a fool of himself." The man who feels himself to be a wrong-doer, is the most compassionately helpful to those that have fallen. When I hear anybody speaking harshly or ridiculing somebody who has done wrong and been found out, I fear that the only way to save them is for God to let them also fall into the mire of iniquity. Bear patiently with wrong-doers, and give them time to repent. Had they possessed your light, your education, your good parents and your virtuous surroundings, they might have lived a nobler life. When a man or a woman has done wrong, do not cast a stone at them; let us, if we can, lead them on to the path of right. 1. Let me urge that you do no wrong in your intentions. Let us weigh well our motives. Before doing any act, we should consider its intent, and ask ourselves, "What is my intention? Is it the glory of God, the good of man, or only my own advantage—my own indulgence?" When the intention is wholly selfish it is pretty sure to cause disappointment and misery; but when the intention is unselfish, it is likely to result in happiness both to ourselves and others. 2. It is also a matter of course that every true Christian should do no wrong in his practice. We profess much; let us seek to practise what we profess. I do not suppose that we are at present on such a high level as that shown in the spirit of the life of Christ;

but let us aim at it, and though we fall, let us rise and try again. A farmer one day went to his landlord, Earl Fitzwilliam, saying, "Please, your lordship, the horses and hounds last week quite destroyed my field of wheat." The earl said, "I am very sorry; how much damage do you think they did?" The farmer replied, "Well, your lordship, I don't think £50 would make it right." The earl immediately wrote out his order for £50 and handed it to the farmer, saying, "I hope it will not be so bad as you think." So they parted. Months afterwards, the same old farmer came to the hall again, and when admitted into the library, said, "Please, your lordship, I have brought back that £50." The earl exclaimed, "Why, what for?" The farmer said, "Well, because I find that the trodden field of wheat has turned out to be a better crop than any of the others. So I have brought the money back." The earl exclaimed, "This is as it should be; it is doing right between man and man." He tore up the order and wrote another, saying, "Here, my good friend, is an order for a hundred pounds; keep it by you till your eldest son is twenty-one and then give it him as a present from me, and tell him how it arose." Now I think the honest farmer sets a good example to us all. No doubt the tempter whispered in the ear of his soul, "The earl will never miss that £50. Why, farmer, you don't mean to say you are going to give the money back!" But the honest old John Bull of a farmer replied, "It would be wrong, you know, for me to keep that £50." Do no wrong to your neighbour, either in competition of business, or in your social and political relationship. Every man has a weak side to his character, and a tendency to do wrong in some direction. In other words, every man is a spiritual invalid who wants a heavenly prescription to restore him to health. Now, when your body is ill, you send for a doctor who counts your pulse and asks where your pain is, and how you feel. If you do not tell him all the truth, he does not know how to treat you. In the same way, when we are spiritually sick, we should confess all the symptoms of our sin-disease to the Great Physician of heaven. Let us be humble and honest enough to tell Him our sins. (*W. Birch.*)

Vers. 10, 11. Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him.—*The prophet and the exile*.—I. "THE DEAD," probably Josiah, for whom a long mourning was kept (2 Chron. xxxv. 24; Zech. xii. 11). Shallum is Jehoahaz (2 Kings xxiii. 33). II. The chapter, even the text, suggests THE PICTURE OF THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE PROPHET AND THE SYMPATHY OF THE PROPHETS. 1. Jeremiah had begun to work when a better time seemed to dawn (Jer. i. 2). His hopes had been baffled, his words neglected, by "the guilt that scorns to be forgiven." Could human lot be more sad than thus to foresee the coming ruin, and to be helpless to avert it? 2. The true prophet, in spite of the people's sin, sympathises with them (1 Sam. xii. 20-22). The Prophet of prophets did so. The king's captivity was only a type and foretaste of that of the nation. III. THE LOVE OF ONE'S COUNTRY IS FREELY RECOGNISED IN SCRIPTURE (Psa. cxxxvii., cii.). National life is an ordinance of nature. National as real as home affections. The sorrows and joys which they bring are alike used for our discipline by Him who knows whereof we are made. IV. THE CAPTIVITIES, TERRIBLE AS THEY WERE, SERVED GOOD ENDS. 1. To wean the people from idolatry. 2. To draw them nearer to God. All affliction used aright does so. 3. To turn the people more to prayer, which seems to have become more common after the Babylonian captivity (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2; Dan. vi. 10, ix. 3, 19). V. THE DEAD ARE IN THE HANDS OF GOD, BEYOND OUR REACH. Weep rather for those who are living, torn away from the city of God. 1. Those who have been ensnared by their own sins and carelessness. 2. Those who are brought up in vice through circumstances of birth. Slaves of worse than Egyptian bondage (John viii. 34). 3. Those of our own countrymen who, from duty or circumstances, are in foreign lands, and away from outward tokens of the Church. But should we merely mourn for these, and do nothing for them? VI. Jeremiah a forerunner of the Lord, and A TYPE OF HIS SERVANTS IN WITNESSING TO THE TRUTH, and in the endurance of persecution and disappointment of hope. (*B. Moffett, M.A.*)

Vers. 15, 16. Did not thy father eat and drink.—*God's expostulation with Jehoikim*.—I. GOD REMEMBERETH THE PIETY AND USEFULNESS OF OUR ANCESTORS, AND OBSERVETH HOW FAR WE RESEMBLE THEM. The Eternal Mind cannot possibly forget anything. All things past, as well as present, are naked and open before His eyes. He remembers all the way in which our fathers

walked; the secret piety of their hearts; the evidences of it in their lives, and all the service they did for God and their generation. He remembered how piously Josiah walked, and mentions it to his honour. God hath a kind remembrance of His faithful servants, when they are departed out of this world; and is "not unrighteous to forget any work and labour of love" which they have performed. Let it be further observed, that God takes notice how far we resemble them. Thus He chargeth it upon Jehoiakim, that he had not trod in his father's steps. God can and will make a just estimate, what our religious advantages are, compared with theirs, and what improvement we make of these advantages. He observeth every instance of declension from that which is good, and the principles from which our departures from God and religion flow.

II. YOUNG PERSONS OFTEN FORSAKE THE RELIGION OF THEIR FATHERS, THROUGH PRIDE, AND LOVE OF ELEGANCE, POMP, AND SHOW. This was the case of Jehoiakim. No doubt it is lawful for persons of rank and fortune to build themselves houses and to beautify them; provided it be suitable to their circumstances, and no injury to justice or charity. But it was pride that led Jehoiakim to covet so much splendour, and practise so much injustice. This is a sin that easily besets the young, and often leads them to forsake the ways and the God of their fathers. They set out beyond their rank and circumstances, and begin where their wiser fathers ended. And this their pride and vanity leads them to forsake the religious profession of their fathers. Thus Jehoiakim, it is probable, turned idolater. He forsook the God of Israel, and persecuted His faithful prophets. Hence so many among us forsake the principles and profession of their ancestors; because the favour and preferences of the world and public fashion are not on that side. Set out in life, young friends, with moderate desires, wishes, and expectations. Be content with your rank and station. Endeavour to cultivate and strengthen religious principles and dispositions. Never compliment any at the expense of truth and conscience. Thus you will be able "to do justice and mercy," and will retain that steadfastness in religion which is true politeness, and improve in that humility which is the brightest ornament.

III. IT IS A GREAT DISHONOUR AND REPROACH TO ANY TO FORSAKE THE GOOD WAYS OF THEIR FATHERS. Having fully known their manner of life, their devotion, purity, temperance, patience, charity, and love to God's house and ordinances, they must act a very mean and scandalous part, if they neglect these virtues, and show themselves blind to the lustre of such good examples. How justly may such be expostulated with, as Jehoiakim was in the text! Did thy father, young man, do justice and judgment, and assist the poor and needy? Was he sober, diligent, grave, and devout? And will it be to thy credit to be giddy, dishonest, idle, extravagant, and an associate with rakes and sots? Did thy mother, young woman, fill up her place honourably? Was she active, prudent, serious, and good tempered? Did she sanctify God's Sabbath, and labour to keep thee from pride and levity, and dangerous acquaintance? And wilt thou forget all this, and run into every fashionable folly? Will this be for thy reputation and comfort? But there is a more weighty thought than this, yet to be urged; and that is, if you act thus, you will forfeit the favour of God. There are terrible threatenings, in the context and other places of this prophecy, against this wicked Jehoiakim. All his wealth, pomp, and power could not shield him from the judgments of God. A few years after this prophecy, the King of Babylon seized him, and bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon; but, being released upon his promise of allegiance, he afterwards rebelled, was slain in a sally out of Jerusalem, and was "buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (ver. 19), and had no child "to sit upon the throne of David" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6; Jer. xxxvi. 30). If you forsake the religion of your pious ancestors, it will be to your shame.

IV. THE WAY OF RELIGION IS THE WAY OF WISDOM, HONOUR, AND HAPPINESS. 1. The way of religion is the way of wisdom (Psa. cxi. 10). With this the New Testament agreeth (1 John ii. 3, 4). Many think themselves wiser than their good fathers; and perhaps they may have juster notions of religion, and be more free from superstition and enthusiasm. Yet, "while they profess to know God," they may "in works deny Him," and "love the praise of man more than the praise of God." And thus they prove that they are not so wise as their fathers. 2. The way of religion is also the way of honour. Josiah was universally esteemed while living, and much lamented when dead. The prophet Jeremiah lamented for him. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him, and "made them an ordinance in Israel," that his remembrance should be

kept up by some annual form of lamentation (2 Chron. xxxv. 25). Luxury and extravagance, splendour and show, are not the way to be truly honourable. The just, the generous, the friendly man, he who is strictly religious, and soberly singular, and who studies to do good to others, though he hath a mean house, and dresseth and liveth plain, this man will be held in reputation. 3. The way of religion is the way of happiness. It is the way to enjoy prosperity, and to have comfort in it. While we do well, it will certainly be well with us. If our views extended no further than the present life, it is our wisdom and interest to be steadfastly religious. But when we consider ourselves as in a state of trial for another world, and that our future state will be either happy or miserable for ever, according to our present behaviour, it must be the greatest folly and madness to neglect religion, to sacrifice it to anything else, or not to make it the main business of our lives. (*Job Orton, D.D.*)

Vers. 18, 19. *With the burial of an ass.*—*Dishonoured in death*:—Jehoiakim was king, and yet not one word of thanks do we find, nor one word of love, nor one word of regret expressed concerning his fate. We should learn from this how possible it is to pass through the world without leaving behind us one sacred or loving memory. He that seeketh his life shall lose it. A man that sacrifices daily to his own ambition, and never sets before himself a higher ideal than his own gratification, may appear to have much whilst he actually has nothing, may even appear to be winning great victories when he is really undergoing disastrous defeats. What is a grand house if there be not in it a loving heart? What are walls but for the pictures that adorn them? What is life but for the trust which knits it into sympathetic unity? What is the night but for the stars that glitter in its darkness? There is an awful process of retrogression continually operating in life. Experienced men will tell us that the issue of life is one of two things: either advancement, or deterioration; continual improvement, or continual depreciation: we cannot remain just where we are, adding nothing, subtracting nothing, but realising a permanence of estate and faculty. The powers we do not use will fall into desuetude, and the abilities which might have made life easy may be so neglected as to become burdens too heavy to be carried. It lies within a man's power so to live that he may be buried with the burial of an ass: no mourners may surround his grave; no beneficiaries may recall his charities; no hidden hearts may conceal the tender story of his sympathy and helpfulness. A bitter sarcasm this, that a man should be buried like an ass! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The doom of the defrauder, libertine, and assassin*:—After a life of private or public iniquity, a man's death is not deplored. The obsequies may be pretentious—flags, wreaths, catafalques, military processions; but the world feels that a nuisance has been abated; he is cast forth by reason of the contempt of men; figuratively, if not literally, he is "buried with the burial of an ass." I. There is the romance of FRAUD. The heroes of this country are fast getting to be those who have most skill in swallowing "trust-funds," banks, stocks, and moneyed institutions. I thank God when fortunes thus gathered go to smash. They are plague-struck, and blast a nation. I like to have them made loathsome and an insufferable stench, so that honest young men may take warning. II. Next, I speak of the romance of LIBERTINISM. Society has severest retribution for the impurity that lurks about the cellars and alleys of the city. It cries out against it. It hurls the indignation of the law at it. But society becomes more lenient as impurity rises towards affluence and high social position, until, finally, it is silent, or disposed to palliate. Where is the judge, or the sheriff, or the police, who dare arraign for indecency the wealthy villain? Would God that the romance which flings its fascinations over the bestialities of high life might be gone! Whether it has canopied couch of eider-down, or sleep amid the putridity of the low tenement-house, four families in a room, God's consuming vengeance is after it. III. Next, I speak of the romance of ASSASSINATION. God gives life, and He only has a right to take it away; and that man who assumes this Divine prerogative has touched the last depth of crime. Society is alert for certain forms of murder. For garroting, or the beating out of life with a club, or axe, or slung-shot, the law has a quick spring and a heavy stroke. But let a man come to wealth or social pretension, and then attempt to avenge his wrongs by aiming a pistol at the head or heart of another, and immediately there are sympathies aroused. If capital punishment be right, then let the life of the polished murderer go with the life of the ignorant and

vulgar assassin. Let there be no partiality of hemp, no aristocracy of the gallows. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **The ignominious burial of the wicked:**—Christ tells the story of a prosperous farmer who was clean intoxicated with success, and could not entertain a thought but of his gains,—how the very night that he had decided on the enlargement of his premises, a voice from heaven called his soul away; and whatever monument with flattering title his friends may have erected over his grave, God wrote his epitaph, in one word of four letters, "Fool." "Buried with the burial of an ass." No one will for a moment suppose that a splendid catafalque and imposing funeral obsequies betoken the close of a noble and honourable life. Ah! many a man is laid in one of yonder cemeteries with every form of ceremonial pomp, with gilt, and nodding plumes, and long rows of carriages and costly wreaths; and if the truth were told, a nuisance is being got rid of; the world will be better now that he is gone. Well might the artless child, who had been wandering among the tombstones, and reading the epitaphs, turn to its mother and say, "Mother, where are all the bad people buried?" (*T. Thain Davidson, D.D.*) **A king's humiliating burial:**—Our Richard II., for his exactions to maintain a great court and favourites, lost his kingdom, was starved to death at Pomfret Castle, and scarce afforded common burial. King Stephen was interred in Faversham monastery; but afterwards his body, for the gain of the lead wherein it was confined, was cast into the river. (*John Trapp.*)

Ver. 21. I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear.—**Influence of prosperity:**—In heaven, the more abundantly God's bounties are dispensed, the more is He loved and adored; but on earth, the richer His gifts, the more will He be neglected and disobeyed. A striking proof of our depravity, that constant prosperity hardens, and is unfavourable to piety. **I. ABUNDANT EARTHLY BLESSINGS DO TEND TO MAKE THE HEART REBELLIOUS TOWARDS GOD.** 1. Scripture teachings are emphatic on this matter (*Deut. viii. 12-14; Hos. xiii. 6; Prov. xxx. 8, 9.*) 2. Experience confirms Scripture. In many instances we see that the highest human virtues and holiest saints of God were unable to withstand the influence of prosperity. They could endure affliction, and profit thereby; as certain liquors ripen in the shade, which under the noonday beams turn to acidity and corruption. 3. It is doubtful whether there ever was a single instance of piety which could pass uninjured through the ordeal of unmingled prosperity. The tone of religion is lowered amid riches and honours. Where simplicity and humility of spirit are preserved amid prosperity, it is owing to some hidden trouble, which like the cord on the feet of the aspiring bird keeps the proud spirit lowly and abased. **II. WHAT, THEN, MUST BE THE EFFECT OF PROSPERITY ON THOSE WHO HAVE NO RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE TO COUNTERACT IT, AND WHO ARE AVOWEDLY LOVERS OF THE WORLD AND ITS PLEASURES?** 1. They will not heed the messages of God. 2. Religion, with its sober realities, is despised. 3. Those favoured of fortune are the most pitiable objects in the world. **III. THEY WHO HAVE WORLDLY PROSPERITY SHOULD BE LED TO SELF-INQUIRY AS TO ITS EFFECT ON THEMSELVES.** 1. Are you the same simple-hearted and sincere follower of Jesus as when you began to lay the foundation of your worldly exaltation? 2. What a caution is here to those who are seeking prosperity! Can you discover a means of preserving a lowly spiritual mind amid prosperity? Unless so, there is no alternative but that you must suffer adversity to keep you humble, or become worldly and spiritually hardened. 3. They who have become more indisposed to hear the voice of God should awake to their peril. 4. Prosperous ones may well regard their ease with apprehension (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) **Prosperity baneful:**—**I. THE EXACTNESS WITH WHICH GOD OBSERVES ALL THAT RELATES TO HUMAN CHARACTER AND CONDUCT.** 1. All our relative circumstances are immediately before His eye; and He notices with tender and faithful scrutiny the various effects which His merciful dispensations have upon the mind. 2. The circumstances of human life, however produced, are undoubtedly under the guidance of providence, and therefore subservient to a wise and perfect design. Each man's history is arranged and adapted with utmost precision to the growth of permanent character. **II. THE TENDENCY OF UNSANCTIFIED PROSPERITY TO RENDER US INSENSIBLE TO THE CLAIMS OF RELIGION, AND SEPARATE US STILL FURTHER FROM GOD.** 1. Uninterrupted comfort tends to lessen our confidence in God: to form in the mind a feeling of self-confidence: a security nothing can shake: so much so that religion can make no entrance into the mind. 2. It

hardens the heart. God would have every temporal blessing raise the inquiry, "Lord, what is man?" But wicked and irreligious men are only concerned for enjoyment, and for scope for their ambition. They feed and grovel like swine beneath the oak, without looking up to the boughs that bore the fruit, or the hand that shakes it down. 3. Then comes pride. Nebuchadnezzar. God is forgotten, prayer neglected. 4. Leaves a dulness and lethargy of mind. All Divine threatenings, warnings, promises unheeded. III. VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH GOD REBUKES THIS TENDENCY AND HUMBLER MEN. God speaks to men in various ways, and He distinctly marks the various impressions produced upon the mind by His communications. He speaks to us by His Word and ordinances, by the instructions we receive in religious education, by the various dispensations of His providence, by affliction, by mercies. (*S. Thodey.*) *The perverseness of prosperity*:—Why is prosperity so perverse? I. BECAUSE PROSPERITY OFTEN TENDS TO HARDNESS OF HEART. II. BECAUSE PROSPERITY OFTEN GROWS PROUD AND SELF-SUFFICIENT. Religion and the Bible are well enough for the poor, who need comfort, but what do they want with it, who have "more than heart could wish"? III. BECAUSE PROSPERITY IS OFTEN IMMERSSED IN CARES OR PLEASURES. There is no room for religion. The voices of the counting-house, the mart of commerce, the shop; or the voices of the pleasure-takers, who call men to partake of their pastimes, so fill their ear that they will not obey the voice of God. "I have my nest in the cedars." (*Anon.*) *The Christian prospering in business*:—The voice of God to the prosperous, which they are in danger of not hearing, concerns—I. HUMILITY. 1. This humility will be shown towards God. There is a natural tendency in wealth to foster a spirit of sinful self-sufficiency and independence of God. Many things conspire to this. Wealth is power. Not only the labour of the hands, but the thoughts, the will, and consciences of men may be bought. Wealth not only gives a sort of independence, but a sort of sovereignty. And, thus, it is an object of esteem and reverence. Now, whatever natural religion may teach us, it is certain that the Bible teaches, that "God giveth power to get wealth," and that we have nothing "which we have not received." Now, how comprehensive is the claim for humility involved in all this! It makes every difference, whether we be the authors of our wealth, or whether it be the gift of God. If we receive all, the more we have, the more we have received. The prosperous Christian should realise this; and, realising this, he will be grateful. The bounty of Providence will endear the thought of God. In proportion to his joy will be his thankfulness. 2. This feeling of dependence will respect the future, will influence the mode of regarding the continuance of good things. He who feels deeply that we are in the hands of God; that we are in a state of probation; that the great purpose of God is to try us, to reveal us, to exercise us, and especially to sanctify us; that we deserve nothing, while we receive everything; and that crosses and afflictions are often among the most gracious methods of Divine discipline; will regard the fluctuations of life as Divine dispensations. He will not say only, "It is the course of things," "It is the lot of man," "It must be expected," "It can't be helped," but he will say also, "It is the will of God." 3. Another aspect of this humility will be towards men. In pleading for humility in the rich Christian, I do not advocate an impossible equality, or a forgetfulness of outward distinctions. But I mean, that the feeling of human brotherhood and of Christian respect and affection should be displayed towards all; and that the favours of Providence should only bind us to a more careful regard to the will of our common Father, and a more delicate respect to the feelings of our brethren. II. SPIRITUALITY. 1. Spirituality is opposed to extravagance. He who prizes the manliness and integrity of his soul; he who would not render himself unfit for the possible reverses of life; he who would maintain a taste for the most exalted pleasures; he who is duly alive to the perilous corruption within him, ever ready, like a magazine of powder, to ignite from the smallest spark, or, like a river, on the removal of a little portion of embankment, to burst forth with desolating violence; he will err on the side rather of defect than of excess, and "deny himself" too much rather than smooth the way and strengthen the temptations of "the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life." 2. Spirituality is opposed to worldliness. He is worldly who "walks" not "with God"; whose "conversation is" not "in heaven"; whose "affections are" not "set on things above"; who has no keen eye for the mysteries of the kingdom, no quick ear for its voices, no delicate sensibility to its impressions. Have you not many before your minds who have become worldly through prosperity?

3. Spirituality is opposed to indolence. Prosperity says, "Take thine ease"; and men are but too ready to comply with the suggestion. The man well-to-do contributes to societies that perform the works in which he was engaged. He now works by proxy. He assigns his sphere to others. He is not idle; he supports all good things. But, my brother, the power to do this is additional to the powers you used to have, not instead of them. You did good then by personal service. That obligation remains. The ability to give does not destroy the ability to labour, and the purse cannot answer the demand for activity and effort. III. **BENEVOLENCE.** The very means of riches, the common way and method of getting rich, should teach this lesson. Why has God appointed commerce? Why given to men different faculties and spheres? Is it not all designed to impress the doctrine of brotherhood, and to draw out affections and promote deeds in keeping with it? The prosperous Christian should be a liberal Christian. It is not enough that he continue his gifts; he must increase them. Proportion is God's rule. He estimates what we part with according to what we keep. A healthy saint will delight in being able to relieve his brethren, and one of the chief charms of prosperity will be the power it gives him to be a minister for good. His first care will be "his own," the needy kindred whose trials he may soothe by generous gifts, or whom he may more worthily and wisely serve by enabling them to serve themselves. His next will be the welfare of those by whose assistance he has succeeded. He will not think his duty done by a mere payment of wages; but will seek to promote their physical and mental and moral well-being. (*A. J. Morris.*) *The danger of self-confidence:*—Christians are taught, at least in words, to believe that riches and, indeed, any kind of worldly prosperity are exceedingly dangerous to us—that they prove, very often, too great a trial for men's principles; a snare in which they are entangled to their own destruction. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," to submit himself to the mortifying precepts of the Gospel. The word in the text translated "prosperity" signifies properly "calmness, tranquillity, self-satisfaction." It does not merely mean the possession of money, and other such advantages, but also any state or business of life, which makes a person unwilling to apply to his heart or his conscience those truths of the Gospel especially, which might lessen his confidence about himself, and his spiritual estate. When "God speaks to men in this their" fancied "prosperity," how often in the pride of their hearts do they refuse to "hear." They will not hear, because they "will not consider." Thus, for instance, when things go well with a man, and he has sufficient to maintain himself and his family comfortably his case is one of great difficulty and danger. There is this which makes prosperity a greater danger to us than adversity, that it renders us less willing to listen to the voice of truth and conscience. When worldly things have gone well with a person, and he has yet neglected his eternal interests, there is still hope that adversity may bring him back to his God. But if things have gone ill with a man, and yet he is still worldly-minded and irreligious, what hope is there that prosperity will effect what adversity could not do? The reason is, because worldly business, especially if it be at all successful, is apt to intoxicate the mind, as a dram, and to make a man unable to collect his thoughts and fix them steadily on any object which is not some way or other connected with his immediate interests. But adversity, and suffering, if the heart be not quite hardened against the convictions of conscience, as they make us feel our frailty and dependency, so they have a natural tendency to make us look beyond this present scene for support and consolation. Let it also be considered, that a life of prosperity, and ease, and freedom from trouble, is the least suited for the exercise of those graces and virtues which are peculiarly Christian, and by which our souls are to be fitted for an entrance into that blessed land where sin and sorrow shall be no more. It is quite certain and unquestionable, that the Gospel of Christ is uniformly addressed to us, as to persons on their trial and probation for an everlasting reward,—to persons who have it in their power to refuse or to receive the gracious offers made to them,—to persons who are to be through life exercised and disciplined, and led on by degrees towards that perfection of holiness from which our nature was degraded by the transgression of our first parents. Here, then, we may see and acknowledge the great danger of a life of prosperity, ease, and self-satisfaction; and, at the same time, the real benefit of adversity, suffering, and self-distrust. If, then, our gracious God have spoken to us in our prosperity, and we have refused to hear; if He have spoken to us in adversity, and our hearts have been somewhat

softened at His gracious chastisement, then let us learn to bless Him for all His dispensations, indeed, but most of all for His punishments. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times.*) *Man in material prosperity* :—

I. ADDRESSED BY ALMIGHTY GOD. 1. Be humble. "Charge them that are rich," &c. Through the depravity of the heart, wealth has a tendency to fill the soul with self-sufficiency and pride. 2. Be spiritual. Through the depravity of the heart, wealth is often used so to pamper the appetites as to carnalise the soul. 3. Be generous. There is a tendency in wealth so to feed selfishness.

II. REFUSING AN AUDIENCE WITH HIS MAKER. Material indulgence deadens the moral tympanum of the heart. "I will not hear" though Thou speakest in nature, in Providence, in the Bible, in conscience, in a thousand holy ministries, I will not hear. Why?—1. Because I am happy as I am. I have all that I want; not only to supply my needs, but to gratify my passions, to satisfy my vanity and ambition. 2. Because Thy voice will disturb me. (*Homilist.*) *Sin in prosperity* :—**I. THE DIVINE CONDESCENSION.** "I spake unto thee." What is man that God should notice him at all? It is not so much that man is fallen, but he is rebellious, wilfully ignorant, deliberately sinful, and infinitely beneath God in capacity, duration, power. **II. THE HARDNESS OF MAN.** "Thou wouldst not hear." Surely, one would think that when the great God comes down to commune with man, man, out of mere reverence, would stay to listen. On the contrary, he turns away with disdain. The worm turns upon its Maker and King. This hardness is astonishing—1. On account of the disrespect it manifests. So great, so good, so merciful a Being demands our attention, our love, our all. 2. On account of the pain it gives. Could you spurn a loving friend, and not cause him grief? 3. On account of the loss it entails. Why does God speak to man? (1) In order that He may save him from evil—from the evil of sin, of death, of eternal loss. (2) In order that He may do him good—that He may raise his intellect body and soul, and exalt him to eternal life and glory. It is, then, an astonishing fact that man refuses to hear. **III. THE UNNATURAL REASON IMPLIED.** "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity." 1. This is a strange assertion. It is strange because—(1) All prosperity comes from God. The natural thought respecting it, then, would be that it would excite greater reverence and love towards Him who so mercifully bestowed it. (2) All prosperity gives greater prosperity and enjoyment, and demands a greater return in thanksgiving and sacrifice. 2. It is a true assertion, as history and experience infallibly prove. (1) When men have prosperity, they get engrossed with their possessions. (2) When men have prosperity, they get satisfied with what they possess. This makes them refuse the invitations and solicitations of God. (*Homilist.*) *Danger of prosperity* :—The long reign of Philip of Macedon—over forty years—witnessed the great decadence of the Hellenic Empire. When he came to the throne she was still a strong empire, full of fairest prospects. But he was one of those characters that are only kept within the bounds of good sense and justice by the sternest adversity. As soon as he found himself safe, his idleness, his tempers and lusts broke out. It was a misfortune both to himself and the world that he was not obliged, like his predecessors, to recover by arms the kingdom to which he had succeeded by right. Prosperity enervated him; adversity would have braced him. (*H. O. Mackay.*) *How God's voice is drowned* :—On entering a mill the noise of the machinery stunned and bewildered me. The owner of the mill explained the various processes as we went on, but it was a dumb show to me, I heard nothing. Suppose when I came out I had been asked whether the gentleman spoke to me during my visit and I had replied No! would it have been true? Certainly not. He spoke but I did not hear. His voice was drowned in the surrounding noise. And so it is with thousands of those around us. God speaks to them, but His voice is drowned in the hubbub by which they are surrounded. They are awakened in the morning with the postman's knock, and before they have time for a thought about God or eternity the noise of their own mill is all around them; before the letters are finished the morning papers arrive, and the roar of the world is added to the sound which already existed, and henceforth it is whirl and excitement till evening. (*Charles Garrett.*) *This hath been thy manner from thy youth.*—*Youthful habits retained* :—**I. HABITS FORMED IN YOUTH GENERALLY CONTINUE IN FUTURE LIFE.** This applies to those—1. Whose life is given to the luxury of pleasure. 2. Who pass the season of youth in gross vices. (1) Sabbath-breaker. (2) Profaner. (3) Drunkard. 3. Equally relevant to vices of the mind. (1) Selfishness. (2) Pride. (3) Maliginity. 4. So also as regards their attitude towards religion.

(1) Those who pass their youth in a merely formal regard to the external duties of religion usually become formalists. (2) Those who practise guile and deceit become hypocritical. (3) Those who in youth slight the Gospel, in old age are seen to be unfeeling and hardened. (4) Those who are sceptical frequently become confirmed infidels. II. CUSTOM IN ANY COURSE GENERALLY ISSUES IN CONFIRMED HABITS. 1. The commencement of a course in life is often attended with a struggle and with difficulties. 2. But continuance in a course renders habits congenial and easy. III. SOLEMN CAUTIONS AND EXHORTATIONS. 1. Cautions. Guard against slighting—(1) Parental instruction. (2) The Gospel. (3) The Sabbath. (4) Avoid ungodly companions. 2. Exhortations. (1) Accustom yourself to consider your accountability to God. (2) Study the sacred Book, by which your future should be directed. (3) Decide early in favour of religion. (Anon.)

Ver. 23. **O inhabitant of Lebanon, that maketh thy nest in the cedars.**—*The nest in the cedars* :—The inhabitant of Lebanon, that maketh his nest in the cedars, is an illustration of all those who, in the pride and security of the present, are blind to the uncertainties of the future. I. WHY IS IT THAT GOD'S MESSAGE TAKES SUCH LITTLE HOLD OF THE HEART? He pours out all His love in pleading with men. "Seek ye My face." Has the answer gone up from your heart, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek"? If not, why not? Are you making a nest for yourself among the cedars? dreaming yourself to be secure, and, like the false Church in the Apocalypse, saying to yourself, "I shall see no sorrow"? What is the ground of your security? Has the hand of diligence surrounded you with comforts? The cheerful home, the well-spread table, the smiling faces of children,—are these your portion? Oh, how often are these things as the nest in the cedars! Or the nest may be of another kind—framed out of self-righteousness and moral excellence. In short, whatever it be which holds back the heart from Christ, and prompts the vain hope that all will be well at last, though there be no conscious faith, nor any evidence of a converted heart, that is your nest among the cedars. Though now heedless to the call of God, the storm must ere long burst on the cedar, and rive it to its roots, laying in the dust the nest that seemed so safe in its towering branches. Disappointment, loss, disaster, trial, death, the judgment,—what are these in their turn but just the lightning flash which strips the cedar of its foliage, and leaves the nest exposed to the scorching of the summer's heat, and the withering of the winter's frost? What are they all but God's instruments for shivering into ruins the miserable refuges in which men seek shelter and comfort amid the experiences of time, and in the prospect of eternity? II. WHEN THE CEDARS ARE FALLEN, HOW BITTER THE DISAPPOINTMENT! The world, its business, its pleasures, its cares, its struggles, its joys, its sorrows,—all are fast vanishing. Snap the cedars go! and meanwhile there is dismay at the review of the past, and the still darker prospect of the future! Behind, a life spent with the form of godliness, but entirely without God. Before, is death, the sifting of the judgment, eternity. Behind, a life given up to earth and earthly things. Before, an immortality, over the far-reaching expanse of which no star of hope sheds a gleam of life and peace. Can we wonder if the soul shrinks back in alarm, if dark forebodings haunt the spirit, and prayers, and regrets, and vows, and promises blend together as the outward expression of anxiety and fear? III. WHERE CAN YOU BUILD YOUR HOPES AND NOT FIND THEM SHATTERED AND BROKEN BY DISAPPOINTMENT? Not among the cedars, but in the hollow of that Rock of Ages, which defies the howling of the tempest, and the sweep of the hurricane—which stands forth calm and stately in its strength, amid the shocks of time, and shall lift its head unshaken, even when the earth and all that is in it shall be dissolved and broken up. The memory of guilt and shortcoming, and the record of transgression are terrible, but to the humble and believing Christian they can bring neither harm nor hurt. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide beneath the shadow of the Almighty." (R. Allen, M.A.) *A sure refuge* :—I. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF EVERY HUMAN AID, as illustrated by the prophet in the example of the "inhabitant of Lebanon." Lebanon was a noble and a stately mountain, the pride and the ornament of the Eastern world. Its summit was crested with eternal snows, while its sides were adorned with forests of the graceful and goodly cedar. Beneath were slopes of rich pasturage, on which were fed unnumbered flocks and herds. Rivulets gushed from the fissures, and separated among the hills, which afforded refreshment to the fainting traveller, and maintained in

native purity of freshness the verdure of the mountain side. No image could more expressively convey to the mind of an Israelite all that man most highly esteems of grandeur, magnificence, and beauty. But the idea of security is also implied. In many human ills, money, as the wise man says, "is a defence"; and the rich man, in a land of commerce like our own, is as the "inhabitant of Lebanon," compared with the dweller in the plain below. The winds may rage, and the storm beat; but his airy dwelling-place is unmoved. The enemy may spread themselves over the plain; but his house of defence "is the munitions of rocks." How enviable a condition! you will say. But ah! "the things that are impossible with men, are possible with God." Lightning from heaven above may blast the towering cedar; the earthquake muttering from beneath may rend the solid rock: or even when the wave reposes without a ripple or an undulation on the surface of the mountain lake, the stroke of death may come suddenly, the strong man's fortress may be powerless in an instant, as a woman in her travail, or as the infant just struggling into birth. II. FOR ALL WHO WILL SEEK IT THERE IS A SURE REFUGE, WHATEVER MAY BE THE DANGER, AND AN INVINCIBLE ARM OF DEFENCE, WHOEVER MAY BE THE ADVERSARY. St. Paul indeed said, in reference to the times of fiery persecution in which his own lot was cast, that "if in this life only they had hope in Christ, believers were of all men most miserable"; but what was then "the present distress," has happily passed away, and godliness is now truly "profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." All creation is redolent of joy and peace to the true believer in Christ Jesus. He knows, that God hath "made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure"; that "all His ways are mercy and truth, unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies"; and that no truly good thing "will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." So long, then, as prosperity continues, enjoyment is enhanced by thankfulness; and when adversity comes upon him, suffering is lightened by faith. The "light affliction," which is upon him, will, he knows, "work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," &c. (*T. Dale, M.A.*)

Ver. 24. Though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence.—*Punishment of the impenitent inevitable and justifiable*:—I. MENTION SOME AWFUL INSTANCES IN WHICH GOD HAS VERIFIED THIS DECLARATION. 1. The apostate angels. 2. Our first parents. 3. The Flood. 4. The Jews. 5. The Saviour Himself. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He spared not His own Son. And will He then, O impenitent sinner, who by refusing to believe in Jesus Christ crucified Him afresh, will God spare thee? No; though thou wert the signet on His right Hand; though thou wert dear to Him as the Son of His love, He would not spare thee, when His violated law and His insulted justice call for thy destruction. II. STATE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY GOD HAS FORMED AND ENACTED SUCH A DECLARATION; or, in other words, why He will sooner give up all that is dear to Him than suffer sin to go unpunished. 1. It is needless to remark that, among these reasons, a disposition to give pain has no place. As God has sworn by Himself that the wicked shall die, so He has sworn by Himself that He has no pleasure in their death. 2. Nor has a desire to revenge the insults and injuries which sinners have offered to Himself any place among the motives which induce God to punish sin; for He inflicts punishment, not as an injured individual, but as the Sovereign and Judge of the universe, who is under the most sacred obligations to treat His subjects according to their deserts. 3. It is because the welfare of His great kingdom, the peace and happiness of the universe, require it. It is because a relaxation of His law, a departure from the rules of strict justice, would occasion more misery than will result from a rigid execution of His law. Were sin unrestrained, unpunished, it would soon scale heaven, as it has once done already in the case of the apostate angels; and there reign and rage with immortal strength through eternity, repeating in endless succession, and with increased aggravation, the enormities which it has already perpetrated on earth. We may add, that after God had once surrendered His truth, His justice, and holiness, and laid aside the reins of government, He could never more resume them. Nor could He ever give laws, or make promises to any other world, or any other race of creatures, which would be worthy of the least regard. (*E. Payson, D.D.*)

Ver. 29. O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord.—*The trouble*

urgency of the Gospel call.—I. The Gospel call may well be pressed with threefold emphasis, when we consider THE LIMITATION IT IMPLIES AS RESPECTS THE PARTIES ADDRESSED: it is addressed to men and not to angels—it is addressed to "earth" as contradistinguished from hell. Between these two worlds, behold the Bible, like the cloud between Israel and Egypt, with a side of brightness for the former and a side of darkness for the latter! It is surely a solemnly affecting and suggestive thought that, while the Sun of Righteousness is flinging His splendours over the earth, there is another fallen world very differently circumstanced. Do you not feel your soul, at the very thought, concentrating its energies on the inquiry, What is the Gospel message, and what are the terms it proclaims? Will not the sinking crew turn to the lifeboat that is making directly for them, and that all the more eagerly that they discern around them a foaming sea strown rough with wrecks? Will not the patient turn to the physician that proffers his aid, and grasp at the prepared medicine with all the greater eagerness that he is given to understand that no other physician is within reach, though pestilence stalks all around him? And shall we not ply the Gospel call with treble emphasis, and wilt not thou listen to it with treble interest, that it proclaims a Saviour for men, over the head of angels—that it names our "earth," but names not hell? II. UNIVERSAL AS MY TEXT IS, IT CARRIES A LIMITATION AS RESPECTS TIME: it is addressed to men in time, not in eternity—to the earth as it is now, not as it shall be hereafter. 1. As respects the individual, God "limiteth a certain day, saying, To-day, if ye will hear," &c. Each has his allotted time of probation, his day of grace. Now is that time, that golden day—the time of acceptance. Come, fellow-sinner; come as you are; come now; touch the golden sceptre, and live for ever. 2. God has also limited a certain time for our world as a whole. There is a certain hour known to God when He will address the commission to Jesus, "Thrust in Thy sickle," &c. Momentous harvest! The earth even now is rapidly ripening. All will be astir and in earnest then; but many, alas! will awake, not to touch mercy's sceptre, or the folds of her garment, but to catch the echo of her last farewell. III. This triple emphasis will be still further accounted for if we consider THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE GOSPEL CALL: it is addressed to the whole race, and not to part of it merely. All the seeming limitations in Scripture of the universal call are, in fact, the strongest proofs of its universality. Were I now to press the appeal in my text on different classes—the old, the young, the abandoned, the careless, or the anxious,—every candid man would understand that my specifying one class implied no exclusion of others, but was merely intended to give point and pungency to my appeal by breaking down the universal call into its particular applications, and thus "rightly dividing the word of truth." On this obvious principle are we to explain such descriptive phrases as "hungry," "thirsty," "weary," "heavy-laden," which some have regarded as denoting incipient spiritual attainments, or subjective qualifying prerequisites, which the sinner must have before he is entitled to believe the Gospel. Far from it. They express not our holiness but our misery, not our riches but our poverty, whether we have caught a glimpse of Christ's fulness or not. "Wide as the reach of Satan's rage, doth His salvation flow." Let us share in our Saviour's spirit. Let the universality of the Gospel provision lead us increasingly to realise the wants and woes and claims of the unnumbered myriads of mankind. It is here that the fire of missionary and evangelistic zeal is to be kindled. IV. We shall cease to wonder at the threefold emphasis here imparted to the Gospel call when we reflect on THE FACTS IT PRESUPPOSES AS TO THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD. 1. It supposes the world to be in a state of danger, for a threefold call to the earth, so pointed and energetic, implies that no ordinary catastrophe impends over the world. It is precisely such an impassioned appeal as would be given forth on the outbreak of some public danger, such as fire, or flood, or hostile invasion. 2. But, further, and as a frightful aggravation of the danger, the world is, to a lamentable extent, in a state of insensibility to it. This, too, is implied in the appeal of our text. It represents the world as asleep: hence the call "O earth"; and because that sleep is profound, the call is redoubled, "O earth, earth"; and because the world sleeps on, wrapped in a slumber deep as death, a third time peals the call, each louder than before. Some years ago, two or three men were seen floating asleep in a boat on the river Niagara, and were already among the rapids. Loud and long were the calls addressed to them by the spectators on the river side; but the unhappy men awoke only to utter a wild shriek of despair as they were borne

over the tremendous verge. This, by no means an isolated case, aptly illustrates the sinner's danger as he floats down the stream of time, his insensibility thereto, and the loud warnings addressed to him, both by God and man, to shake off the slumberous spell, and turn while he may to the marge of safety. Say not, "If I am asleep, I am not responsible." You are not in this sense asleep. You are responsible; for you are an agent rational, intelligent, moral, voluntary, unfettered and free. You are responsible; for, if you believe man, you can believe God; you can give that attention to the Bible which you lavish on the things of time; you can think upon your soul's salvation with the same faculties that you exert on your business or pleasures; and if you are reluctant to do so, this is not your misfortune, remember, but your crime. V. The Gospel call may well be urged with threefold emphasis when we consider **THE QUARTER WHENCE IT COMES**: it is not of earth, but from heaven—it is not the word of man, but "the word of the Lord." The King of heaven gives forth an utterance from His everlasting throne, but the worms of His footstool will not deign to give Him audience. Louder and louder speaks the voice which at first spake us into being—and could at any moment revoke that being,—but men sleep on; they will not consider; they say, "Who is the Lord that He should reign over us? Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." Disbelieve man if you will, spurn authority, trample on the tenderest of human ties, but oh, address not yourself to a sin that towers in solitary magnitude far above all these—venture not on the supreme blasphemy of making the God of truth and love a liar. VI. The Gospel call may well be plied with treble emphasis if we consider **THE PRECIOUS IMPORT OF THE MESSAGE IT PROCLAIMS**: it is a word of Gospel, or good news, and not of authority merely—when it might have been a word of wrath. Ah, this deepens the dye still further, of the sin of unbelief—a perpetration of which earth, and earth alone, is the theatre. The light of God's love in "the glorious Gospel" makes the darkness of human rebellion the more appallingly visible; and the thought that such mercy is within reach, and yet such wrath is in reserve—that man's destination, if not high heaven must be some nethermost abyss: ah, this, considering the magnitude of the interests involved, may well make us to intensify, redouble, and treble the call, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!" (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *The Divine appeal to man*:—I. **THE CHARACTERS ADDRESSED.** "O earth, earth, earth!" By "earth," we are to understand the dwellers upon earth—man, the lord of this lower creation; and, looking to its origin, the term is one that is appropriately employed to designate man. 1. When addressed as earth, we are reminded of our native origin. "Man is of the earth, earthy." God made man of the dust of the ground. What, then, becomes of the boastings of man? How foolish the pride of pedigree, the pride of descent! The sable sons of Africa, the swarthy Hindoo, the Red Indian of America, the stunted Esquimaux, the tribes of Europe, and of all the islands of the sea, have all of them a common origin: they are all of them of the earth, earthy. 2. When addressed as earth we are reminded also of our true nature. We are not only from the earth, but we are of the earth. "Dust thou art," is the true description of every man, of every child of man. Yes, what is that muscular frame but brittle earth? What is that beautiful countenance but tinted earth? What are those sparkling eyes but transparent earth? What are those sensitive nerves, so keenly alive to pleasure and to pain, what are they but fine filaments of earth? What is that amazing structure the brain, the seat of the thinking powers, but just a curiously-wrought mass of earth? 3. When addressed as earth, we are reminded of the source of our supplies. Not only are our bodies of the earth earthy, but it is from the earth that we derive all that is essential to their sustenance and comfort. It is on its kindly surface that we erect our habitations. It is from its yearly replenished storehouse that we derive the staff of life. It is thence we draw our supplies of corn, of wine, and of oil, while from its copious fountains issue those crystal streams that fertilise our fields and quench our thirst, and in other ways minister to our comfort; and by this, too, we are reminded to moderate our desires. Bread and water are the supplies that the earth most copiously yields, and to these only does the promise extend, "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." 4. We are reminded, when we are addressed as earth, of the earthly state of our minds, that state which is so aptly expressed in the words of the Psalmist, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust." The design of Gospel truth is to draw our affections from the world, to raise our minds above its

grovelling pursuits, and to change the current of our desires, our feelings, and our affections; and for the effecting of all this it is perfectly competent, for "it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." Why, then, is its success so limited? The reason is that the earthly is more potent than the heavenly, that the material outweighs the spiritual in our thoughts, affections, and desires. 5. We are reminded, when we are addressed as earth, of the tendency of us all. "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." These bodies, full of life and activity, must ere long drop into the grave. Those eyes, now sparkling with life and intelligence, must ere long be closed in death. Those tongues, now eloquent with the language of hope and affection, must ere long be silent in the tomb. Upon that countenance, now flushed with the bloom of health, must ere long settle the damp dews of death. Let our thoughts and aspirations, then, be tending heavenward while our bodies are tending earthward. Let it be seen, that if our bodies are ripening for the grave our souls are ripening for heaven. II. THE EXERCISE THAT IS ENJOINED. "Hear the word of the Lord."

1. The subject of attention: "The word of the Lord." In other words, the subject of that attention is the revealed will of God, the Holy Scriptures, the preached Gospel. It must be listened to, not as to "a tale that is well told," not as to "the voice of one that playeth well upon an instrument," but listened to with self-application, and with a believing heart. 2. This exercise of hearing "the word of the Lord" may be enforced by many considerations, especially when you take into account the Being who addresses you. It is God who speaks. It is He whose Word is life or death, which exalts to heaven or sinks to hell. Think of the Word itself, of the subject of which it treats. It is no indifferent theme on which it discourses. It is the Word of knowledge, it is the proclamation of mercy, it is the glad tidings of salvation. It is, too, a Word of judgment and of death, but only to those who condemn and refuse to hear it. And then, think of the universal adaptation of its truths. They are fitted for all, for saint and for sinner alike; for the most learned and the most illiterate; for the king upon the throne and the beggar by the wayside. Think, too, of your dying condition, as yet another consideration enforcing attention to "the word of the Lord." Soon you may be beyond the reach of its tidings of mercy. (*H. Hyslop.*) *Jehovah's call to the earth*:—We know of persons who rise up early and sit up late, in order that they may accumulate riches, in order that they may follow their trade, or in order that they may enjoy the pleasures of sin; but how few there are who can say they "prevent the night watches" that they may "meditate upon God's Word"! I. In meditating upon God's blessed Word, notice THE AUTHORITY WITH WHICH IT COMES. 1. It has no title, save that which distinguishes it from all common communications, from all uninspired books. It is the Bible, which means emphatically THE BOOK, in distinction from every other book. 2. If you inquire as to its topics, its index, it is impossible to make a catalogue of these. Who can describe the truths, the doctrines, the promises, the precepts, the predictions that it contains? 3. Then you have to inquire respecting its Author. It is God—He that made us, He that sustains us, He that governs us, He alone that can bless us. The Bible is not anonymous, any more than the sun, the moon, the stars, or the sea, for it bears the impressive signature of the Divine name. It is not a fable. "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables" when we testify to you the great things of God's Word. Oh, the riches, oh, the profundity of this inexhaustible Word! Christians have been drawing upon the resources of its wisdom; mighty preachers have been expounding its contents, scholars have been penetrating into its mysteries, the press has been pouring out dissertations and commentaries upon its mighty theme, and it is still unexhausted and inexhaustible; for it is like its infinite Author. II. HOW WE ARE TO RECEIVE THIS COMMUNICATION, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." 1. If we are to hear the Word of the Lord that our souls may live, our ears must be opened. Closed by prejudice, ignorance, and sin, closed by the imperfection and deceitfulness of our nature, the Holy Spirit must open our ears to hear: then we shall hearken diligently, we shall hear believingly, so that this Word will be the life of our souls. 2. As this Word comes to you there must be spiritual participation. Indeed, the reception of the Word of God is described as "eating" that Word; and the Word of God is described as bread which we are to eat, and the manna that came down from heaven and fell around the camps of the children of Israel was understood to be the type of that living bread upon which we are to feed. It is receiving Christ by faith, it is believing on

Him, that is eating the Word. Oh, for this spiritual participation of God's blessed Word! May God give you a spiritual taste, and spiritual desires. 3. The Word of God is to be received or heard with spiritual joy. Come and take of the most precious things God has given in His Word—let your souls delight themselves in fatness. There are precious promises and precious doctrines, precious prophecies and precious precepts; yea, everything is precious; but the nearer you get to the Cross of Christ and the discovery of God's love in the gift of His Son, the more precious, the more nourishing, the more comforting, and the more consoling will Divine truth be to your minds. III. THIS WORD COMES TO DIFFERENT CHARACTERS AND IN VARIOUS WAYS. 1. In the first place, let me address the sceptic—the doubter. There is no discovery in science which does not tend to confirm the inspiration and credibility of God's truth; and there is not an evolution of Providence which does not serve to illustrate some portion of God's prophetic Word. Keep your eyes upon the movements of Providence, and you will find that God is continually unfurling His truth. Recollect eternity, with its weal and its woe, stands upon the decision, whether you receive with reverence, or whether you despise or neglect the great salvation which the Word of God brings. 2. This Word comes a warning to the man absorbed in the anxious cares of time; and, says it, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" This world cannot make you happy. Why spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? 3. Then the Word of God speaks to the man who assents to God's Word with his understanding, but denies it with his heart's affection—having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. God cannot be deceived by pretences, God cannot be mocked by external service. 4. The Word of God speaks to the sorrowful. It speaks generally to the mourning, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." It speaks to the widow in her desolateness, and says, "Thy Maker is thy husband." It speaks to the orphan and the fatherless, and gives them the assurance of protection. It speaks to the soul half-despairing under a consciousness of its sin, and saying, "I am a great sinner, I do not know whether Christ will have compassion upon me and save me." You are a great sinner? Well, then, Christ is a great Saviour. It speaks to the timid believer, who is ready to say, I fear I shall some day fall by the temptations and allurements of the world. Fall! you cannot fall; you walk upon firm ground, and the arms of Almighty grace sustain you whilst you are unreservedly trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. (*H. Dowson.*) *God's loud call to a sleeping world.*—On our rugged and water-worn shores you may often see a black wall of stone, as regular as if it had been built by human hands, running across the tide-mark from the terrestrial vegetation down to the lip of the water at its lowest. It is a trap dyke, forced up when its matter was molten, through a fissure in the overlying strata, and appearing now a narrow band of rock, totally distinct both in colour and in kind from the surrounding surface. These protruding portions show that the material of which they consist lies in vast masses underneath. So the thin line of our text seems to protrude above a broad field of mingled prophecy and fact. I. The MANNER of this cry. You may measure the danger which a monitor apprehends by the sharpness of the alarm which he gives. The earth itself, and all the creatures on it under man, have a quick ear for their Maker's voice, and, never needing, never get a call so urgent. The alacrity of the creatures that lie either above or beneath him in the scale of creation brings out in higher relief the disobedience of man. Physically, earth is wide awake and watchful. It courses through the heavens without halting for rest, and threads its way among other stars without collision. The tide keeps its time and place. The rivers roll toward the sea, and the clouds fly on wings like eagles, hastening to pour their burdens into the rivers' springheads, that though ever flowing they may be ever full. The earth is a diligent worker; it is not the sluggard who needs a threefold call to awake and begin. Equally alert are the various orders of life that crowd the world's surface. Above our own place, too, angel spirits are like flames of fire in the quickness, and like stormy winds in the power, with which they serve their Maker. The cry of this text is meant for man; he needs it, and he only. When the polar winter threatens to freeze the navigator's blood, rendering constant and violent exercise necessary to keep the currents moving, then it is that the man feels the greatest drowsiness. It is only by the vigilance of experienced chiefs that they are prevented from sinking into a sleep from which there is no awakening. This fact, and the law which rules it, constitute in the moral region the saddest

feature in the condition of the world. They sleep most soundly who have most need to be wakeful. The guilt which brings upon a man God's displeasure, so stupifies the senses of the man that he is not aware of danger, and does not try to escape. II. The MATTER of this cry. 1. The speaker is the only living and true God. It is essential that our belief in the first principle of religion should be well defined and real. Religion may be faint and feckless, for want of a foundation in an actual belief that God is. That Christian education is a tally defective which does not leave upon the mind and conscience a practical sense of God's being and presence, as the first principle of all truth and all duty. 2. The thing spoken is the Word of the Lord. It is not enough for us that God is near. He was not far from the men of Athens in the days of Paul, and yet He was to them "the unknown God." He has broken the silence; He has revealed His will. The Word of the Lord lies in the Scriptures. (1) The Word of the Lord in the Scriptures is Mercy. If the message brought only vengeance, we could at least understand the voluntary deafness of the world. But it is strange that men will not listen to their best Friend; strange that the lost should shut their ears against a voice which publishes salvation. (2) Still further, and more particularly, "the Word of the Lord" is Christ. The use of the Scriptures is to reveal Christ; if we reject Him, they cannot give us life. 3. The injunction to regard that Word "O earth, earth," &c. (1) The earth so summoned, has already, in a sense most interesting and important, heard the Word of the Lord. Christ's kingdom is even now more powerful on the earth than any other kingdom. The power that lives in the conscience and links itself to God is, in point of fact, the most persistent and effective of all the powers which mould the character and history of the human race. It is great, is growing greater, and will yet be supreme. (2) The earth through all its bounds will one day hear and obey the Word of the Lord. Saving truth lying in the hearts of saved men has a self-propagating power. (3) When the earth hears its Lord's word, forthwith it calls upon the Lord. Those who sail in air-ships among the clouds, as others sail on the sea, tell us that every cry which they utter on high is answered by an echo from the earth beneath. When the earth, spiritually susceptible, receives from heaven the sound, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord," another cry forthwith arises, "O heaven, heaven, heaven, hear the petition of sinful men upon the earth." God delights in that cry. (4) Earth—that is, men in the body—should hear the Word of the Lord, for to them it brings a message of mercy. Now is the accepted time; this is the place of hope. Beware lest the sound that first awakens you be the crash of the gate when it shuts! (5) Earth—the dust of the dead in Christ—shall hear the Word of the Lord, and shall come forth. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The Divine appeal*:—I. THE DEEP AND AWFUL CONCERN OF JEHOVAH FOR THE SOUL OF THE SINNER. 1. There is surely something peculiarly affecting and awful in this. Mark the concern of your Creator, deeply anxious about the noblest work of His skill and power. It is the concern of your Preserver, who hath watched you with His eye, led you by His hand, &c. It is the concern of a Saviour God, who spared not His own son, &c. 2. This concern of Jehovah assumes a more amazing character when you think of the persons for whom it is manifested. These are not only creatures of a day, but creatures laden with iniquity, filled with corruption, at enmity with Himself, in rebellion against His law, and hastening unto perdition, without one plea for mercy, or one claim on His pity. II. THE STRANGE STUPIDITY AND UNCONCERN OF THE SINNERS TO WHOM THIS APPEAL IS MADE. We are blind and see not God; deaf, and hear Him not; dumb, and speak not to Him. We are, as Paul says, "past feeling." Try this truth by a double experience. Try it first by the experience of those who never felt it. How else can you account for the fact that such appeals as this addressed to sinners by the living God, are often as unheeded as if the voice of the Eternal resounded through the charnel-house of the tomb, or were lost amid the echoes of the desert? But try it by the opposite experience. Give me the sinner who has been startled by the voice of God, and aroused from the slumber of his carnality; give me the man with a broken spirit, who fears, hates, and mourns his manifold iniquities, and looks back upon his former state with shame and sorrow; and that is the man whose language will be, "Oh! what a blinded being I was not to see my guilt and my Saviour sooner! what a stupid creature to go on as I have done neglecting my soul! what a hardened wretch to stand out so long against my God and Saviour!" III. AN APPEAL TO FRAIL AND DYING CREATURES. This is always a melancholy and solemnising

reflection ;—we are earth. We spring from the dust and we hasten back to it. Old men, we appeal to you, and ask you how few have been the days since you were children ? But how speedily now shall you be borne away from your frailties to the tomb ! Young men, how rapidly are you and I hastening on to become the old men of our time ! As to the children, do you not see how fast they are climbing the hill of life ? But who will venture to say that things will take that natural course with us ? Who can count upon a day, an hour, a moment ? The thread of life is frail as the spider's web, and may be snapt by the feeblest breath. It may be now or never.

IV. GOD MAY BE SUPPOSED TO CALL THE EARTH TO WITNESS THAT HE HAS OFFERED YOU SALVATION, and to be ready to testify that He has spoken to you, warned you, besought you to hear His word, and flee from the wrath to come, so that if you refuse the offered mercy, the very earth will lift up its voice against you to silence every excuse, and you shall stand speechless at the bar of the judgment. Will not heaven, and earth, and seas, and skies thus conspire to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, on that great and dreadful day ? Will not the simple fact that He shall summon up our spirits to His bar from every hiding-place, turn these places into witnesses ? Will not the fact that He shall gather our dust from the four winds, from the bottom of the sea, or from the silence of the grave, turn these elements into witnesses ? Will not thus the Omniscient God turn the air we breathe, the light we behold, the dust on which we tread, every object we touch, every scene we visit, into a witness for or against us ?

V. APPLY THE TEXT TO THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED THIS WORD OF THE LORD. Having felt concern for your own souls, you will feel for the souls of others. You know the preciousness of Christ, and the value of souls. You perceive the danger you have escaped, but to which multitudes are still exposed. You can see yonder long, deep, gloomy phalanx of immortal souls rushing on and rolling over the brink of time into the abyss of eternity. You have entered in some small measure into God's own views of their state. Having these views, you will, you must feel deep and distressing concern for them. You will plead for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost to raise up labourers, to qualify and send them, and give them success in winning souls. You will do more. You will put your own hand to the work as God Himself does. Is He to give all, and we nothing ? Is He to do all, and we not to be fellow-workers with Him ? Shall He give the word, and we not publish it abroad ? (*John Walker.*)

The earth and God's Word.—I. EARTH'S ATTENTION TO THE DIVINE WORD IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE. 1. The earth is under condemnation ; His Word can alone gain its acquittal. 2. The earth is in moral darkness ; His Word can alone enlighten it. 3. The earth is in bondage ; His Word alone can liberate it. 4. The earth is in misery ; His Word alone can relieve it. II. EARTH'S INDIFFERENCE TO THE DIVINE WORD IS VERY STOLID. 1. This indifference has always been awfully prevalent. 2. This indifference is monstrously irrational. 3. This indifference cannot always continue. (*Homilist.*)

An exclamation.—I. THE SOLEMN ADDRESS TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN. 1. The expression is a metonymy, in which the container is put for the contained ; but as man is "of the earth earthy," it is also descriptive of his mortality. The expression, "O earth, earth, earth !" when properly heard, is well calculated to bring down the lofty looks of man, and to produce humility in the place of pride. 2. The repetition of the word "earth," is used to command greater attention. This way of arresting the attention was very common amongst the Roman and Grecian orators. 3. When preceded by the interjection O or Oh ! the repetition generally expresses uncommon emotion or grief (2 Sam. xviii. 33). II. THE IMPORTANT OBJECT TO WHICH THEIR ATTENTION IS CALLED. 1. The Word of the Lord demands our attention, because it is the most interesting Book. 2. The "Word of the Lord" demands our attention, because it contains the most and best information of any book of the size. 3. But "O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord !" for there are the words of eternal life. (*B. Bailey.*)

God's voice to man.—I. SPECIFY SOME RESPECTS IN WHICH WE SHOULD HEAR GOD'S VOICE. 1. In the still small voice of heavenly mercy. 2. In the loud thunder of God's providential dispensation. 3. In your personal and relative afflictions. 4. In the ample promises and encouragements addressed to returning penitents. II. ENUMERATE SOME REASONS WHY THE WHOLE EARTH IS INTERESTED IN THESE COMMUNICATIONS. 1. Because the Gospel shows the only plan of salvation. 2. Because the progressive improvement and advancement of the race is connected

with this message. 3. Because the success of missionary work shows the practicability of diffusing it. 4. Because the signs of the times are in direct accord with the promises of God. (*S. Thodey.*) *A call to hear the Word of the Lord :—*
I. THE SUBJECT OF THE ADDRESS. 1. The Word of the Lord is unwritten as well as written; 2. It is threatening as well as promising. **II. THE DUTY INCULCATED IN THE ADDRESS.** 1. To hear and understand. 2. To hear and obey. 3. To hear and make known to others. **III. THE STYLE OF THE ADDRESS ; apostrophe.** 1. The universality of its range. 2. The earnestness and affection of its spirit. (*G. Brooks.*)

END OF VOL. I.